

Clashing Sub-Cultures: The Rivalry between  
the Fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham  
City Football Clubs

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Dedicated to

Professor James Riordan

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Following my enrolment, I was encouraged to conceptualise the completion of a PhD as climbing a mountain – perhaps not the most imaginative metaphor, but one that does seem to have remained with me. Despite being made fully aware of the challenges that lay ahead prior to ‘the climb’, this understanding made the reality no less arduous. Although it is scarcely adequate recompense for all the help I have received, I would like to offer some wholehearted appreciation by way of the following acknowledgements.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the football fan rivalry between the fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City. Football fan rivalries are unique and complex, with each one being underpinned by various social, historical and/or cultural factors. Therefore, each rivalry should be studied in-depth in order to understand the underlying factors that shape oppositions and social identities. This rivalry has previously received no academic attention, despite these two being the main clubs in Birmingham, England's second largest city, with a long history of intra-city rivalry since the first fixture between the two in 1879. The constructivist approach adopted perceived people's knowledge, opinions, interpretations and experiences as meaningful properties of social reality and, thus, this study aimed to gather data from those who actually experience the rivalry – the fans. An ethnographic study was undertaken in order to elicit rich, qualitative data and to gain a deep and reality congruent insight into the complex factors that underpin the rivalry. Participant observation was conducted at matches involving Aston Villa and Birmingham City. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fans of the two clubs, with data being subjected to coding and a thematic analysis.

Informed by a cultural studies framework that focused on the centrality of power, the analysis identified three central themes underpinning the rivalry. The first theme was the constant struggle between the fan groups over territory. Fans placed great value on being perceived to control certain areas, or even the whole city, in order to gain power (territorial capital) and become the dominant identity. This is particularly significant as a detailed exploration of territory has previously been absent from football rivalry literature. Secondly, tensions were based on the historical footballing success of Aston Villa, and on Birmingham City's relative lack of success. Villa fans were perceived as the dominant group as the success of the team afforded them high levels of (sub)cultural capital. Thirdly, the contestation over power was informed by the perceived socio-economic status of each fan group, with Villa fans being perceived as more middle-class and Blues fans more working-class. These complex factors are continually contested and under negotiation, with the passion and intensity of the rivalry enduring as both fan groups battle for dominance. In addition to exploring this particular rivalry for the first time, this study has contributed to the limited but growing literature on rivalries, providing a clear methodological and theoretical framework for future research in this area, which was previously lacking.

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## **1. Introduction**

Academic literature on fandom, in particular football fandom, has shifted focus in recent decades from ‘exceptional’ fans to exploring the ‘ordinary and everyday’ fans and their experiences. This is partly due to the influence of cultural studies, in particular the work of Hoggart, Williams and Hall and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, whose work focused particularly on the more ordinary and everyday aspects of people’s lives. Especially, the rivalry-related aspect of football fandom has been given growing attention. Gradually increasing literature has demonstrated that rivalries are unique and complex (Giulianotti 1999; Thompson 2001), underpinned by social, historical and/or cultural factors (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). This suggests that each rivalry must be studied in-depth in order to understand the underlying factors which shape oppositions and social identities.

One such football fan rivalry that has previously received no academic attention is that of Aston Villa and Birmingham City, despite these two being the main clubs in Birmingham, England’s second largest city, with a long history of intra-city rivalry. Since the first fixture between the two in 1879, a strong and distinct rivalry has developed between the two clubs, based on its own unique and idiosyncratic social, historical and cultural factors. However, in addition to a lack of academic focus on the rivalry within Birmingham, there is also a conspicuous lack of literature exploring the history and development of football in the city generally. The notion that “soccer, and indeed sports fandom more widely in Europe in the past 30 years, is undergoing a series of important transformations that are still in process” (Williams 2007: p.144) provides justification for the in-depth examination of each subculture and the ‘everyday’ lived experiences of the fans, in a fluid and reflexive manner, in order to elucidate and continually advance the understanding of football fandom.

In addition to the existing gap in the academic literature regarding this rivalry, there is also a personal rationale for writing this thesis. Having grown up in and around the city of Birmingham, personal experience and casual participant observation has made me aware of the passionate and intense rivalry between the two imagined communities of Aston Villa and Birmingham City, but I did not fully understand its inner mechanics. Therefore, I

aim to provide, to borrow from Klein (1993), a ‘partial interpretation’<sup>1</sup> of the football fan subculture in Birmingham, focusing specifically on the rivalry between the two sets of fans and the social, historical and cultural factors that underpin this fan rivalry. This study traces the emergence of the clubs and their rivalry; examines the fan discourses underpinning the rivalry and the key themes within these. The ‘partial interpretation’ produced will incorporate the views and experiences of both the participants as well as the researcher (Cresswell 2007).

Previous literature demonstrated that one of the most effective ways to explore and interpret football fan (sub)cultures has been through ethnography (e.g., Giulianotti 1995; Armstrong 1998; Clark 2006; Weed 2006), a methodology that aligns well with my philosophical assumptions (see Chapter three). Participant observation was conducted at football matches involving Aston Villa and involving Birmingham City, including matches when the two played each other, as the aim was to be a participant observer where the imagined communities (Anderson 2006) of fans come together and interact (Emerson et al. 2001). In addition to participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fans of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City. These interviews were interwoven with participant observation, as one of the strengths of ethnography is that the flexibility of the research process enables interviews to provide further insight and clarification on themes and lived experiences that may have been identified during participant observation (Bryman 2008). The ontological and epistemological approach (constructivist) adopted in this study perceives people’s knowledge, opinions, interpretations and experiences as meaningful properties of their social reality and, thus, this study aimed to gather data from those whom actually experience the rivalry – the fans. This data collection process was selected in order to gain a deep and reality congruent insight into the unique and complex social, cultural and historical factors that underpin the football fan rivalry.

Following this introduction, chapter two offers a review of literature with the aim to provide a context and justification for the current study, whilst critically analysing existing literature in this area. Chapter three focuses on methodology, providing an in-depth discussion of the study’s research paradigm and introducing the precise methods chosen to

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<sup>1</sup> This term shall be explained in depth in section 3.2.2.



explore and interpret the lived experiences of the fans and, specifically, the unique socio-cultural factors that underpin the football fan rivalry under investigation. Chapter four is a socio-historical overview of the development of football in Birmingham, situating the current study within the specific social context, tracing the emergence of the clubs and their rivalry and informing the subsequent discussion chapters. The discussion and analysis of the primary data is divided in to two chapters. Chapters five and six discuss the fan discourses underpinning the rivalry and within these the themes that were found to be central in invigorating and reinforcing this football fan rivalry. The final chapter draws together the key findings of this research, whilst also outlining the original contribution of this study within the context of the existing literature, outlining some of the limitations of the study and making recommendations for further research in this area.

## **2. Review of Literature**

This chapter aims to provide a review of the literature relating to football fan rivalries and is divided into three sections, each with a brief introduction and summary to elucidate the key concepts and central issues. The first section shall briefly review the vast fandom genre, in order to provide context for the overall study and highlight some of the key characteristics of this area of research. One such aspect that forms the majority of the section is the influence of cultural studies upon fandom literature, and the sociology of sport in general. Specifically, attention is paid to the importance and significance of power and the inequalities of power relations within society which have considerable influence on the everyday lives of individuals and groups. In doing so, an introduction to cultural studies is provided, with a focus on the concept, use and manifestation of power. The importance of power and power relations within society for cultural studies theorists (and for this study) is discussed, exploring the use of power by relevant key theorists such as Antonio Gramsci (whose influential understanding of hegemony and power was subsequently used by scholars in the development of cultural studies), Michel Foucault (on the explanation of the relational and productive nature of power) and Pierre Bourdieu (on the complexities of power relations in different social settings). The broader discussion then develops focus towards the impact of these theorists and their approaches to power upon sport and the study of ‘everyday’ sporting subcultures in particular.

Section two focuses on a particular area of academic study that has received growing attention over recent decades – football fandom. To begin, the impact of football hooliganism is critically discussed, to demonstrate how the study of football fandom emerged and expanded. Again, influenced by cultural studies, a shift in focus is identified, from studying exceptional fans towards the ‘everyday’ and ‘ordinary’ fans and their experiences and feelings. This section critically discusses some of the more relevant issues and areas that have received academic attention, whilst narrowing the focus of the study further towards a particular aspect of football fandom – football fan rivalries. The focus of the third section is the limited but growing area of rivalry, beginning with a discussion of two models currently employed in the identification of rivalries at political and state level. Focus then moves towards football fan rivalries, in particular a discussion of a theoretical framework that aids a multi-causal approach and a thematic analysis of football fan

rivalries, based on the dynamic interplay between collective fan identities based on power relations underpinned by social, historical and cultural factors. Through a review of existing case studies some of the unique and idiosyncratic social factors that underpin individual football fan rivalries are identified. This helps demonstrate the need for in-depth research on particular rivalries in order to gain a reality-congruent understanding.

## **2.1. Football Fandom within the Context of the Fandom Genre and the Influence of Cultural Studies**

The following section begins with a brief overview of the fandom genre that shall help place the current study within the broader context of the study of fandom. From this overview, some significant aspects which characterise the broad and diverse study of fans have been identified, most notably the influence cultural studies has had upon the study of fans, and upon sociology more generally. An introduction to cultural studies is provided in order to demonstrate how this influence has developed over recent decades and, subsequently, the effect cultural studies has had on the sociological study of sport.

### **2.1.1. Fandom**

A fan is an individual who has an intense interest in a team, band, celebrity, show or film and is most often associated with popular culture (Crawford 2004), as opposed to an individual with a special interest in something deemed ‘high culture’, such as those with an interest in the art of Picasso or Renoir, or the classical music of Wagner or Debussy (Jenson 1992). The complex nature of fandom makes providing a rigorous or all-encompassing definition a difficult task, due to a combination of factors, such as: social context or time (Crawford 2004), differing levels of fandom (Giulianotti 2002), individual levels of ‘capital’<sup>2</sup> (Bourdieu 1984; Thornton 1995), or the position of the fan-scholar attempting to provide any such definition (Hills 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> Capital is understood as a resource that affords each individual status/power/authority, though it is dependent upon the social setting (Bourdieu 1984). There are different forms of capital that a person can possess; the central forms being: economic (material and financial assets); cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles); social (resources accrued from membership within a specific group); and symbolic capital (honours, prestige and valorised accreditation) (see Giulianotti 2005a; Wacquant 2008).

Bourdieu's (1984) model of cultural capital has proven popular amongst academics of fandom. For instance, Hills (2002) summarised how Bourdieu<sup>3</sup> explained fandom through the four primary categories of cultural groups: *The Dominating Fraction of the Bourgeoisie* (who depend on economic, and to a lesser extent cultural, capital in its pursuits such as expensive works of art); *The Dominated Fraction of the Bourgeoisie* (who rely on and look to increase their highly developed cultural capital, such as artists and intellectuals who appreciate things that are different, or an acquired taste); *The Petit Bourgeoisie* (who are able to recognise legitimate culture but cannot acquire sufficient knowledge of it or exposure to it); and the, *Working Class* (whose tastes actually merit the debasement of the term 'fan', it is claimed the fandom of this group makes up for low levels of cultural and social power). Hills (2002) outlined a major failing of this view, that it assumes cultural capital is static and equally valued across society, as cultural capital may not be valued equally by another member of the same class grouping, for example a hairdresser and an author. However, Hills' criticism is arguably based on an incomplete use of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, as Bourdieu in fact went to great lengths in *Distinction* (1984) to highlight how capital was certainly not equally valued across society, through his explanation of variations across different 'cultural fields'<sup>4</sup>. Fiske (1992) has added to Hills' criticism by claiming Bourdieu's assessment of fandom focuses excessively on the privileged and insufficiently on the lower/working classes. Though, again, a complete exploration of *Distinction* would suggest that Bourdieu in fact gave attention to a wide range of cultural tastes and behaviours incorporating groups from all class backgrounds. Instead, Bourdieu has been criticised for focusing too much on class at the expense of other social factors (Giulianotti 2005a), such as gender, ethnicity or disability.

In her study of dance music subcultures and media, Thornton (1995) adapted Bourdieu's schema by using the concept of *subcultural* capital. Thornton has provided ample justification for, and explanation of, this term in relation to cultural and economic capital and claims subcultural capital is 'hipness' and "embodied in the form of being 'in the know'" (1995: p.11). This concept is used further by Giulianotti (2002: p.34) who has applied it to football supporters, stating some supporters "seek to display greater volumes

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<sup>3</sup> The influence of Pierre Bourdieu upon the sociology of sport is discussed in depth in section 2.1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Cultural field discussed further in section 2.1.3.

of subcultural capital to authenticate their support to the extent of claiming greater status over their fellow supporters”. High levels of subcultural capital are reserved for those who demonstrate continued attendance and support through unsuccessful periods for the club, and supporters who did not emerge during the post-1990 financial ‘boom’ (though this is age dependent), as these fans are not perceived to be as authentic and dedicated as the long-standing, traditional fans, which UK football fans appear to value (Giulianotti 2002). Status may be increased through: dedication to the club (possibly travelling to away games or contributing to club fanzines); vocal support; vocal appreciation of the team’s ‘footballing’ ability or style; and an enhanced knowledge of the club or football in general in relation to the club. There does not appear to be obvious inherent divisions or fractions within the concept of subcultural capital when applied to football fans in general, such as class or economic capital as stated by Bourdieu, however, partly due to the commodification of football (Giulianotti 1999), it is increasingly difficult to attend and support a team in all of the above ways, which may have an effect on a fan’s subcultural capital. The numerous contentious points discussed here highlight the complexity of fandom research, therefore, the following section aims to provide an overview of the key aspects of the literature in this wide-ranging area.

### Significant Aspects of Fandom Literature

Generally speaking, the literature on fandom appears to have been characterised by two significant aspects. Firstly, by the defence of fans against the stigma of being ‘crazed’ and ‘deranged’ fanatics (Jenson 1992), or ‘comic’ and ‘psychotic’ (Jenkins 1992), whilst also rejecting claims that fandom is an attempt to compensate for a perceived personal lack of autonomy, absence of community, incomplete identity or lack of power and recognition (for further discussion see Jenson 1992). Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) claimed that the negative perception of fans could be due to early studies which tended to focus on ‘exceptional’ fans who exhibited obsessive and/or hysterical behaviour, but also asserted journalistic writing regarding fans often suggested that “there is something wrong with being a fan” (1998: p.122). Increasingly, literature has highlighted the significance and value of fans to the object of their fandom; for example, the importance of fans to football in terms of support (Charleston 2008) and finance (Barajas 2007). In *Science Fiction*

*Audiences* (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), influential fandom scholar, Henry Jenkins, demonstrated his position as a fan of *Star Trek*, not merely a follower, an unashamed admission that attempted to help reject the view that fans' opinions were trivial and worthless (Tulloch 2000). The placing of fans at the centre of sociological pop culture and fandom research, as opposed to treating them objectively (or pathologically) as the 'other', has highlighted the importance and significance of the knowledge and lived experience of the fan, and is perhaps the reason why the work of Jenkins is seen as so influential by contemporary scholars (for instance, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; and Hills 2002). Following various ethnographic fan studies which indeed placed fans at the centre of the project (for example: Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Thornton 1995), the literature of the 1990s provided a substantial platform and reputation on which future sociological fan studies could build upon.

In addition, fandom literature has also been characterised by a break with elitist assumptions regarding culture, leading to a positive conception of popular culture in fandom literature, which critiques elitist perceptions of high-low culture and follows the tenet that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are important, valued and as such should be critically analysed<sup>5</sup>. This outlook derived from the influence of cultural studies, in particular the work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, which shall form the basis of the following section.

### **2.1.2. An Introduction to Cultural Studies**

Cultural studies can be described as cross-disciplinary, including a range of approaches (Ingham and Loy 1993), such as sociology, philosophy, history and media communications studies (Malcolm 2008). The cultural studies perspective does not represent a single, dominant theoretical or methodological position, but does offer "an antireductionist, materialist, nonessentialist strategy for analysing relationships between culture and power" (Ingham and Loy 1993: p.vii).

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<sup>5</sup> Overview of this perception provided by: Hills (2002); and Barker (2008).

Cultural studies breaks with the literary tradition's elitist assumptions regarding culture, in order to examine "the everyday and the ordinary aspects of our lives that exert powerful and unquestioned influence over our existence which we take for granted" (Turner 2003: p.2). The cultural studies approach is therefore concerned with the meanings behind the ordinary 'lived experiences' of people (Van Loon 2001), such as: what we wear, hear, watch and eat; how we see ourselves in relation to others; the function of everyday activities such as cooking and shopping, to name but a few. The ordinary, lived reality is thought to have been overlooked or taken for granted, and must be examined. Turner (2003: p.2) stated:

The processes that make us - as individuals, as citizens, as members of a particular class, race or gender - are cultural processes that work precisely because they seem so natural, so unexceptional, so irresistible.

Cultural studies appeared as a field of study in Britain in the 1950s, emerging via a clear departure from the literary critical tradition associated with F. R. Leavis, which highlighted the importance of both literature and critical thought for the development and enhancement of society (During 2007). Whilst these aims were generally viewed as commendable, some academics viewed the literary critical tradition to be elitist and out of touch with the working and lower classes in Britain, and sought a different approach (Turner 2003). The origins of cultural studies are commonly associated with the work of Hoggart (1958) and Williams (1958; 1965), both of whom wrote in the interests of the working-class aiming to legitimise their 'everyday' experiences and lived reality (During 2007). The emergence from within the literary critical tradition and the focus on the working-class is perhaps partly explained through the personal experiences of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, both were from working-class backgrounds and their respective early careers were in post-compulsory adult education in the literary field (Turner 2003). During (2007) has claimed that Hoggart and Williams were ambivalent in regard to Leavisism. They accepted the Leavisite view that literary texts were richer than 'mass culture' and that an examination of culture should be based on its capacity to broaden and deepen experiences. However, they equally recognised that Leavisism "at worst erased, and at the very least did not fully come into contact with, the communal forms of life into which they had been born" (During 2007: p.3).

Richard Hoggart founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964 at the University of Birmingham, a post-graduate and research institute which began in the social context of a developing youth culture and the ascent of the working classes into positions of cultural and social leadership (Lewis 2008). Within this context, the CCCS became the key institution examining cultural forms and practices and their relation to society and social change (During 2007). The centre, and in particular the early work of Hoggart, Williams and Stuart Hall, established the consideration of popular culture (from the mass media to sport to dance crazes) “on an academic and intellectual agenda from which it had been excluded” (Turner 2003: p.2) due to the preceding elitist perspective on and attitude towards culture.

Resistance to the elite or to dominant values was thought to be rooted in the conditions of the working class culture, which stood in opposition to the dominant class culture (Barker 2008), and this dichotomy of the construction of the field of power was evident in a number of influential studies from members of Birmingham’s CCCS. *Learning to Labour* (Willis 1977) suggested that the resistant culture adopted by a group of school boys, in opposition to either the school or the dominant culture of their experience, actually prepared them for and coerced them into a life of manual labour, and this was said to underpin Willis’ controversial and widely quoted declaration “the difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves’ (1977: p.1). Longhurst et al. (2008) claimed that Hebdige (1979) also employed the concepts introduced by Clarke et al. (1976) in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Hebdige claimed various subcultures used certain styles such as dress and music (Lewis 2008) as a response to their social conditions and experiences, and similar to previous studies, these styles often encoded an opposition to dominant forms of culture associated with dominant groups (Longhurst et al. 2008).

Cohen (1980) discussed the frustration and sub-cultural conflicts that emerged not just in Birmingham but all over the country in working class communities during the post-war decades, as communities and cities were re-developed using a middle-class ideology – based on the concept of property and private ownership – rather than recognising the structure of the working-class environment that is based on the concept of community,



collective identity and a common lack of ownership and wealth. This heightened sense of community amongst the working class was said to occasionally lead to social conflict based on territoriality, which Cohen viewed as being “the process through which environmental boundaries (and foci) are used to signify group boundaries (and foci) and become invested with a subcultural value” (1980: p.85). For Cohen, territoriality is a ‘magical’ way of expressing ownership, and divisions and conflict based on locations/territory can further mirror many of the traditional divisions of sub-communities. With regard to the current study, territoriality could help to further explain the rivalry between the two groups of football fans in Birmingham, as tensions could be exaggerated based on the conflict of the two neighbouring areas of Birmingham where the clubs are located – Aston and Bordesley Green – or possibly tensions and conflict could exist between the two imagined communities of fans based on a territorial claim of the city of Birmingham itself.

Though the range of topics and concerns studied by cultural studies scholars were numerous and diverse within the 1960s and 1970s, it was evident that Marxism significantly influenced the development of cultural studies (Lewis 2008), despite many in the area, especially Raymond Williams, previously resisting any traditional Marxist influence (Longhurst et al. 2008). Turner (2003: p.18) outlined how traditional Marxism had been less interested in culture:

As culture was part of the superstructure of society, and thus a product of the economic and industrial base. .... [however] cultural studies employed critical Marxist theory to launch attacks on the ‘economism’ in previous explanations of how existing power relations have been instituted and legitimised.

The influence of Marxism also led to cultural studies theorists further highlighting the complexity of culture and its position within society, whilst still acknowledging the active relationship between culture and economy, in that:

[Culture] is not simply dependent on economic relationships and cannot, accordingly, be reduced to or viewed as a mere reflection of these... it actively influences and has

consequences for economic and political relationships rather than simply being passively influenced by them.

(Bennett 1981: p.7)

Given the recognition of cultural complexity, the cultural studies tradition resisted the establishment of an accepted monocausal and over-arching theoretical approach (Lewis 2008). Turner (2003) asserted that this resistance is due to its two defining characteristics: the complexity and comprehensiveness of the theoretical issues it has confronted in order to deal with the problem(s) of culture and commitment to critical, political objectives and analyses. Though this resistance is often criticised, the commitment to actual political and social change, rather than theoretical construction for academic purposes, may perhaps be viewed positively. In terms of political and social change, the exploration of culture's own political function and social-democratic power can be traced to the work of Antonio Gramsci (During 2007), whose work will receive attention in the following section.

### **2.1.3. The Influence of Gramsci and the Concept of Hegemony**

The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1971) has been influential in both the development of cultural studies and the sociology of sport (Jarvie and Maguire 1994). In comparison to traditional Marxism, Gramsci took a more flexible approach to the operation of ideology and power (Lewis 2008), although it is acknowledged that Bairner (2007) warned against over-emphasising the detachment between Gramsci and Marx. Gramsci's Marxism was based on a rejection of economic reductionism, and is said to have overwhelmingly discarded the model of an economic base giving rise to a political and ideological superstructure, as he viewed the influences on politics and ideology to be far more complex (Jarvie and Maguire 1994).

Central to the Gramscian perspective was the concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971), which is a term used to describe the relations of domination which are not visible and involve not direct coercion but consent on the part of the dominated (During 2007). Hegemony provides a Marxist framework for elucidating power relationships, but without the reductionist focus on economy and the mode of production. Lewis (2008: p.78) has

claimed that hegemony “provides that important space, missing in Marx’s original thesis, in which control by powerful groups and institutions remains incomplete”. Culture thus provides the means of oppression but also the means of liberation. As Rowe (2004: p.102) correctly stated, the Gramscian perspective “does not see the ruling class as being in total control of the working class, but instead as having to make important compromises with it”. There is not a simple relationship consisting of winners and losers, as Hargreaves (1986: p.5) outlined:

Power relations, especially in modern democracies, can be expansive, so that all sides, dominant and subordinate groups, gain something in the course of struggle and out of the process of accommodation that tends to take place between them.

The cultural studies perspective has focused its attention on the ways in which meanings are negotiated through these complex relationships of power and resistance (Lewis 2008).

Gramsci’s writings provided an impetus for an emerging and developing cultural studies perspective (Jarvie and Maguire 1994). Gramsci’s (1971) assertion that consent was required and manufactured implies that a cultural field is composed through a vigorous and dynamic struggle (Turner 2003). Raymond Williams in particular, who had previously been identified more with culturalism due to the stronger sense of agency (compared to structuralism), benefited from the utilisation of the concept of hegemony (Jarvie and Maguire 1994). Williams expanded his idea of culture by critically adapting Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, in order to retain the power of human agency within history and ideology, thus “stitching history, experience, politics and ideology into the study of everyday life” (Turner 2003: p.54). A pertinent example of this is Williams’ (1977) much cited value system of cultural forms that are (currently) *dominant*, *residual* (previously dominant) or *emergent* (have the potential to be dominant) (Rowe 2004). Within the sociology of sport, Bairner (2007) credited Williams with being central to the increased use of Gramscian thinking, which in turn neatly encapsulates the interconnectedness of cultural studies, Gramsci and the sociology of sport<sup>6</sup>. Following on from the influence of Gramsci, the latter decades of the twentieth century saw further social theorists placing

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<sup>6</sup> This relationship between cultural studies and sport shall be discussed further in section 2.1.4.

power at the centre of their explanations of social phenomenon – in particular, the work of both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu has been prominent.

### Michel Foucault on Power

French theorist Michel Foucault was instrumental in highlighting the need to understand the nature of power in society, but more importantly to understand how it worked (Barth 2008). Following the departure from traditional Marxism by Gramsci and others that was viewed as economically reductionist, a Foucauldian interpretation of power specifies how power operates at all levels of social interaction and involves all people (Barker 2008). As Foucault (1978: p.93) himself stated, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society”. Central to Foucault’s analysis was that power and knowledge were not mutually exclusive, but were interdependently linked (Giulianotti 2005a). Foucault (1984) outlined how those who control and influence the ‘knowledge’ in society gave those individuals and groups the power to manipulate or control what others thought and how they behaved. Foucault’s own analyses in this regard focused on institutions such as hospitals, prisons and asylums, particularly where medical ‘knowledge’ provided by ‘experts’ was used to control and discipline others (Foucault 1980) – however the theory can be applied throughout society, as struggles over power/knowledge occur everywhere. For example, within the sociology of sport, Foucault’s thinking has been significant in outlining how the body is disciplined through the power/knowledge dynamic (Rail 1995; Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010), in addition to providing a substantial contribution to various areas, such as exploring disability sport issues (Corrigan et al. 2010; Peers 2012) and feminist approaches to sport (Duncan 1994; Svender et al. 2012).

In terms of influencing the ‘knowledge’, Foucault emphasised the importance of discourse, as it is “in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault 1978: p.100). Discourse is regulated ways of speaking about a subject through which practices, objects and phenomenon acquire meaning. Foucault focused on the historical conditions under which statements are combined and regulated to form a distinct field of

knowledge (Markula and Pringle 2006). Discourses create meaning, but are not neutral, as power relations will influence who can speak, when and where (Barker 2008). Within a power struggle different groups employ strategies, attempting to control or influence the discourse – in order to influence the ‘knowledge’ and therefore gain/maintain power and dominance (Foucault 1978). It is the analysis of these discourses and the strategies employed over the historical course of a specific power struggle that Foucault viewed as being vital in order to gain an understanding of social phenomenon.

### Pierre Bourdieu on Power

Pierre Bourdieu was another Marx-inspired theorist, who aimed to explore and explicate the complexities of power relations in different social settings, whilst still positioning economic class at the centre of his thinking (Wacquant 2008). Unlike Foucault, Bourdieu actually wrote many papers on sport (for instance, see Bourdieu 1978; 1998) and Giulianotti (2005a) stated that sport and physical culture were significant parts of his overarching analysis of culture in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu (1984) argued that how individuals and groups present themselves forms the classification of their social status (and therefore power) in relation to others, especially in relation to others who they perceive to belong to lower class groups. Bourdieu was against adopting an approach that is overly structural and therefore negates individual agency. Instead, his approach sought to combine structuralist and subjectivist thinking by using the related concepts of field, habitus and capital, and by highlighting the relational nature of everything in society (Bourdieu 1993).

A cultural field is a social setting where individuals and their power relationships are located, the field is hierarchical and the location of struggles for power based on various forms and levels of capital (Bourdieu 1984). Individuals have varying levels of capital, which can be valuable to an individual – depending on the cultural field that they occupy. Capital can come in several different forms and in differing amounts: Wacquant (2008) described three main ‘species’ of Bourdieu’s capital - *economic* (material and financial assets); *cultural* (scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles); and *social* (resources accrued from membership within a specific group). Giulianotti (2005a) added a further form of

capital, that of *symbolic* capital (honours, prestige and valorised accreditation). The habitus is the partly unconscious ‘taking in’ of social rules, values and attitudinal and bodily dispositions which develop networks and systems of organisation, or as Bourdieu called them ‘schemes of perception’ (Bourdieu 1993). As the habitus is a partly *unconscious* ‘taking in’ of schemes of perception, it is “beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will” because it functions “below the level of consciousness and language” (Bourdieu 1984: p.466). Through their habitus, individuals can discern how to behave in certain cultural fields and what types/amounts of capital are valued within that field. Therefore, within a cultural field, individuals and groups attempt to increase and shape their social status and their levels of capital in order to create or gain ‘distinction’ between themselves and those ‘below’ them.

According to Giulianotti (2005a), Bourdieu viewed the power relations within a field as a kind of ‘game’, where social agents take up positions according to their habitus and capital endowment. Similarly, Foucault also saw the complex power relations between the dominant and the dominated as a strategic game, as power is about trying to influence or *act upon the actions* of others, rather than trying to directly force them to do something by inflicting or threatening harm, as this becomes no longer a ‘game’ of power relations but purely a relation of violence (Smith-Maguire 2002). This emphasis and understanding of the subtlety and complexity of power relations could arguably be traced back to traditional Marxism; via the work of the likes of Gramsci (1971) and Williams (1977) as discussed previously. The focus on power by Gramsci, Williams, Foucault, Bourdieu and others has strongly influenced and shaped not only cultural studies but also the sociological study of sport.

#### **2.1.4. The Influence of Cultural Studies on Sport**

Cultural studies analyses aim at understanding the ways in which power relations are regulated, distributed and deployed within societies and have developed and adapted over previous decades (Ingham and Loy 1993). Focus was initially concentrated on the experiences of the working classes (Hoggart 1958; Williams 1958; Thompson 1978), before the spotlight began to shift towards examining the relations between media and

ideology through analysis of signifying systems in texts (see Williams 1974; Morley 1980), due in no small part to the CCCS leadership of Stuart Hall (Turner 2003). From the 1970s onwards, the development of the feminist perspective heavily influenced cultural studies, and the intervention of feminism was specific and decisive for cultural studies (Hall 2007). In particular, it opened up the personal as the political and centralised questions of gender and sexuality to the understanding of power itself. In the last two decades, the influence and the scope of cultural studies analysis has continued to expand, with studies in areas as diverse as rap music (Gilroy 1998; Bennett 1999, 2000), female muscularity (Halberstam 1998; Heywood 1998; Choi 2000) and terrorism (Lewis 2005; Williams 2006). There is also a significant and growing body of literature within the academic field of sport which utilises a cultural studies perspective, which shall be the focus of the subsequent section.

### Sport through the Lens of Cultural Studies

Sport is frequently viewed (often from a functionalist perspective) as an instrument of social harmony, a means of self-expression or a vehicle for satisfying the needs of those who participate. However, this ignores the many divisions and conflicts within sporting cultures, and the inequalities of power within societies (Hargreaves 1896). Increasingly, the influence of cultural studies within the sociology of sport has led to research critically exploring these inequalities of power<sup>7</sup>, providing an alternative to functionalist and conflict (Marxist) theories and explanations of sport (Rowe 2004).

Jennifer Hargreaves's (1982) edited collection *Sport, Culture and Ideology* has been described as marking a watershed in the development of the sociology of sport (Hargreaves and McDonald 2000), due to the influence of critical cultural studies.

Hargreaves's (1982) collection was seeking a more open and less biased social analysis of sport, and advocated the adoption of cultural studies, as it engaged with different

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<sup>7</sup> In reference to the term power, Hargreaves stated "we are referring not to an entity, the mere possession of which enables an individual or collective agent to dominate another, but to a relationship between agents, the outcome of which is determined by agents' access to relevant resources and their use of appropriate strategies in specific conditions of struggle with other agents" (1986: p.3).

theoretical traditions whilst integrating empirical investigation in order to expose (hidden or unequal) power relations. However, understanding power within sport is complex, as John Hargreaves (1986: pp.3-4) stated, power is not:

The exclusive possession of any single agent (the capitalist class, the political elite, men, etc.); nor is it situated in, or generated at, any single location or level of the social formation (the economy, patriarchy, or whatever).

As discussed previously, the influence of Gramsci's hegemony has helped demonstrate that these unequal power relations do not simply result in winners and losers, but instead there is negotiation and coercion (Rowe 2004), and research in sport in recent decades has demonstrated that cracks have appeared in the apparently apolitical face of sport, through which "subordinate groups are able to challenge bourgeois hegemony to a greater extent than previously" (Hargreaves 1986: p.221).

The turn towards cultural studies in sport was also influenced by Tomlinson's (1992) article *Whose game is it anyway?*, which attempted to provide a framework for the cultural analysis of sport, via a critical cultural studies perspective in order to interpret shifting patterns of power. Tomlinson's aim was to highlight how British cultural studies could be used to develop a framework which recognised the complexity of culture, and the relations of domination, subordination and change within sport. Though Tomlinson's analysis of English football and media consumption may now be considered out-dated, the proposals and comments regarding the cultural studies perspective remain pertinent.

More recently, the influence of Bourdieu and Foucault – and as Bairner (2007) suggested, therefore also the influence of Marx, Gramsci and Williams – is evident in a wide range of contemporary studies. Bourdieu's approach of elucidating the power relations within specific sporting fields has, evidently, stretched around the world (for instance, see Wilson 2002; Brown 2009; Kahma 2012). Likewise, Foucault's influence is very much apparent in contemporary sociology of sport (for instance, see Keimbou 2005; Kelly and Hickey 2008; Piggan et al. 2009), despite Foucault not directly addressing sport in the same way as Bourdieu (see Bourdieu 1978; 1998). In addition to the theoretical influence of cultural



studies, there has also been a development of emphasis and focus when studying sporting cultures.

### Studying Sporting Cultures

In line with the influence cultural studies has had in other sociological disciplines, sociology of sport research began to focus more on the ordinary and everyday aspects of sporting cultures (discussed further in section 2.2) and the importance of power relations, as power relations are systematically concealed in the routine operations within society, with sport being an important, if neglected, constituent of these power structures (Hargreaves 1986). Though this area has been considered neglected, power relations and social differentiation within sport are not always subtle or hidden. For example, on an international scale in elite sport, Lewis (2008) highlighted the infamous murder of Israeli athletes in Munich by Palestinian militia and also the Cold War tensions between USA and USSR during several Olympic Games. In football, the informative examples of racism (Back et al. 2001) and sectarian division (Bairner and Shirlow 2001) also demonstrate conspicuous power relations and conflict.

Sporting cultures<sup>8</sup> are profound sources of power that reproduce, challenge and rebel against social divisions, whilst in many ways accommodating subordinate groups to the social order, and it is “precisely because sport plays different roles in relation to different cultures that it is able to reproduce power relations” (Hargreaves 1986: p.9). Research has been undertaken that focuses on a variety of sporting (sub)cultures. One such example is boxing, a sport that is associated with particular ideologies of race and gender, and with the lowest socio-economic groups (Lewis 2008). Sugden’s (1996) ethnographic study of boxing elicited a rich, detailed understanding of the complex power relations and interplay between masculinity, poverty, sport and politics within boxing subcultures in Northern Ireland, Cuba and the United States, concluding that the “boxing subculture grows where

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<sup>8</sup> Culture “refers to the way different threads of similarly placed individuals’ lives – work, leisure, family, religion, community, etc., are woven into a fabric or tradition, consisting of customs, ways of seeing, beliefs, attitudes, values, standards, styles, ritual practices etc., giving them a definite character and identity” (Hargreaves 1986: p.9).

poverty stands in the shadow of affluence” (1996: p.195). In addition to providing invaluable insight into the subculture and addressing the moral and ethical debates over whether the sport should exist at all, Sugden has also provided a candid account of the ‘perils of ethnography’, which is of benefit to researchers seeking to embark on a study employing this methodology (this shall be discussed further in the Methodology Chapter).

Another sporting subculture that has received attention is bodybuilding (for example see Halberstam 1998; Heywood 1998). Through his ethnographic study, Klein (1993) demonstrated the discrepancy between the *ideal* and *real* cultural patterns within male bodybuilding. One example is in terms of the body, the *ideal* being a body that is defined in terms of excellence in action and a capacity to function at extreme levels of performance (Lewis 2008). However, Klein (1993) identified the ‘crisis and contradiction’ of bodybuilding, in that the *real* entails bodybuilders pushing their bodies to extreme limits, drug overdoses, psychological disorders and a wide range of physiological problems, which is all far from the healthy, fit ‘ideal’ that is often connected to the bodybuilding subculture. Ideal and real, or frontstage and backstage behaviour (as Klein also employed Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model<sup>9</sup> to analyse bodybuilding), can be used to contribute to the analysis of a number of sporting subcultures, for example, football fans may behave in a certain *ideal* way when in a *frontstage* position within a stadium or when in the presence of rival fans, but in-depth research may explore different, *real* feelings and behaviour when fans are *backstage*.

Jarvie and Maguire (1994) claimed cultural studies work focusing on sport and leisure has been carried out for all or some of the following reasons: to consider the relationship between power and culture; to demonstrate how a particular form of sport or leisure has been consolidated, contested, maintained or reproduced, within the context of society as a whole; and to highlight the role of sport and leisure as a site of popular struggle. For instance, the edited collection by Sugden and Bairner (1999) provided a comparative perspective on the role sport plays in a number of ‘divided societies’ around the world,

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<sup>9</sup> A variant of symbolic interactionism, Goffman’s dramaturgical theory was based on an analogy between social interaction and the stage/theatrical performance (Ritzer 2008). This theatrical metaphor was used by Goffman as an idiosyncratic map to the social world, the way people ‘act’ in life in the ‘front region’ is significant and often different to how they behave ‘backstage’ (Manning 1992). Goffman’s theory was criticised however, as it was unclear how literal the metaphor should be taken when applied to people’s experiences, and also what motivation people actually had for ‘acting’ differently in the ‘front region’ (Manning 1992).

analysing the impact and contribution of sport along fractured political, regional and community lines.

McDonald and Birrell (1999: p.286) suggested that cultural studies scholars seek to “move beyond the confines of particular disciplinary boundaries”, as the broad inter-disciplinary approach of cultural studies is often viewed as particularly beneficial. However, although the broad and multi-faceted nature of cultural studies is often viewed as a positive, Andrews (2002) contradicted this by warning that without recognized boundaries cultural studies could possibly lose its momentum and force, “resulting in a slide into the morass of intellectual incomprehensibility and disregard” (p.111). More recently Andrews (2008) drew cautionary attention to the assertion that this phase of hyper-fragmentation and hyper-specialisation that we are in, if continued, may not bode well for the future of cultural studies within sport. Although it may be pertinent to consider this warning, recent literature suggested that a coherent and strong cultural studies influence is very much in evidence (for instance, Buysse and Borchering 2010; Girginov 2010; Friedman and Van Ingen 2011; and Hughson 2011).

### **2.1.5 Summary of Fandom and Cultural Studies**

This section has attempted to provide an explanation and understanding of some of the major influences upon the study of fandom, in order to place the current study in a wider context. Notable contributions have been highlighted, both in terms of areas of fandom research and in particular the adaptation of Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of capital as used in relation to dance and football subcultures. Two significant aspects of fandom research have been highlighted: defence against the stigma of fans being crazy or deranged; and the break from elitist assumptions regarding culture, which has been shown to have been influenced by the cultural studies perspective.

An overview of cultural studies has been provided in order to demonstrate the importance of the influence of this perspective on the fandom genre, but also to form a strong theoretical basis for the present study. Value has been placed on the importance of the complex power relations within society, and within sport specifically, especially in order

to explore and understand sporting subcultures, such as the boxing and bodybuilding subcultures which have been briefly discussed here. Another sporting subculture that has received increasing attention since the 1960s is the sociological study of football fandom, which shall be the focus of the subsequent section.

## **2.2. The Development of Football Fandom**

This section shall provide an overview of the development of football fandom literature, demonstrating how, over recent decades, the area has shifted focus away from studying ‘exceptional’ fans towards the more ‘ordinary’ fans and their experiences, beginning with the initial impact of research that concentrated on, and attempted to explain, football hooliganism.

### **2.2.1. Football Hooliganism**

The sociological study of football hooliganism as exceptional fans has had a significant impact upon the overall field of football fandom, from the early 1960s onwards. Despite many attempts, football hooliganism is without a legal definition or precise differentiation of membership, and is often used to describe a wide range of various acts which may be related to football (Spaaij 2006). Many volumes examine the development of hooliganism, in England and abroad (for example, Dunning et al. 1988; 2002, Spaaij 2006). Armstrong (1998) outlined and grouped together four of the main attempts to ‘explain’ football hooliganism: structural Marxism and the working-class; ritualised aggression; figurational theory; and the combined actions, declarations and assertions of the police. These shall be scrutinised below.

#### **Marxist Explanation of Hooliganism**

One of the ‘frontrunners’ of the study of hooliganism was Ian Taylor (1970; 1982), who maintained hooliganism must be explained by examining wider economic and social

changes. Football was viewed as a working class sport, and according to Taylor (1982), clubs began to shift their emphasis more towards attracting the wealthier middle classes through 'Bourgeoisification', involving changes to the match-day experience, increased financial influence and 'professionalisation', and improved stadium facilities (Taylor 1970; 1982). These elements combined to cause the alienation of the 'traditional' working-class fans, which in turn developed into violence, gang fighting and vandalism occurring more frequently in and around football grounds in Britain. Armstrong (1998: p.15) suggested that Taylor and his fellow Marx-inspired theorists were attempting to "reclaim the 'magical' camaraderie and intimacy of a lost working-class system of traditional communities" but ultimately fell short due to insufficient evidence. The theory also failed to account for those engaging in hooliganism that were middle class (Dunning et al. 1988). Despite the economically reductive nature of Taylor's explanations, Giulianotti (1999) claimed they provided a useful critique of the commodification of football during the 1970s and early 1980s.

### Ritualised Aggression and Hooliganism

Spaaij (2006) claimed that, as a reaction to the speculative and distant theorising of academics such as Taylor (1970), Peter Marsh and colleagues adopted an ethnographic approach to examining hooliganism. Football hooliganism was thus explained as ritualised aggression acted out by male youths within the structure of 'rules of disorder' (Marsh 1978). These rules dictate that exchanges between rival fans are typically limited to exaggerated threats, ritualised insults and denial of the opponent's masculinity (Giulianotti 1999). The concept of ritualised aggression emphasised that this 'aggro' was merely an illusory threat to society, however researchers have since queried the notion that football violence was simply just ritualised and harmless (Armstrong 1998), as some of the innocent individuals caught up in football violence may certainly claim otherwise. Another major problem was that the idea of ritualised 'aggro' was based on the innate form of aggression which is in us all, not just 'the hooligan', and also overlooked the complex historical, social and cultural factors which are present in all rivalries between two sets of supporters (Giulianotti 1999). However, the participant observation and interviewing approach taken by these scholars provided a useful qualitative insight into

hooligans and football supporters, which has perhaps played an important role within the field of fan research.

### Figurational Theory and Hooliganism

From the early 1980s onwards, Eric Dunning and his colleagues (Dunning 1994, Dunning et al. 1982; 1986; 1988) at the 'Leicester School' apparently maintained hegemonic control (Astrinakis 2002) over the research on football hooliganism. Their figurational approach towards football hooliganism was based on the work of another Leicester colleague, Norbert Elias's 'civilising process' (see Elias 2000), which assumed that throughout recent history values of civilised behaviour have been penetrating the social classes in Europe, but had not fully penetrated the lower echelons of the working classes (Spaaij 2006). This was said to result in the behavioural norms of the lower classes manifesting themselves in the love of, and involvement in, violence. Where there have been broad anomalies contradicting this process, such as World War One, further explanations of de-civilising phases or 'fluctuating spurts' in the civilising process were offered (Elias 2000) which halted or even reversed the civilising process for a period of time.

Applied to football hooliganism, this meant that football violence was attributed to those members of society who were unaffected by civilising processes, and further, football violence has always been prevalent at football (Dunning et al. 1988), which incidentally did help to dispel the previous misconception that football violence and hooliganism only appeared in the 1960s. Later, Alan Bairner (2006a) provided an assessment of the contribution of the Leicester School to the study of football hooliganism, giving credit where it is deserved whilst simultaneously outlining the many criticisms aimed at Dunning and associates, such as: over-reliance on one theoretical perspective; possible historical inaccuracies; substandard understanding of 'other' football cultures outside of England; and methodological weaknesses. As Armstrong (1998: p.17) claimed, they were never seen "at or near a football match", though this particular claim appears unsubstantiated. Bairner (2006a) also commented on concerns that the Leicester School were attempting to use football hooliganism to validate the civilising process, leading to an inaccurate

analysis of hooliganism, using as an example the claims that the majority of hooligans are ‘rough’ working class males which fits into Elias’ process, however “does not necessarily offer an accurate portrayal of the people who engage in football hooliganism” (2006a: p.587). In his conclusion, Bairner (2006a) conceded that critics could argue that all the impressive things Dunning and his colleagues revealed about hooliganism could have been said without the strict devotion to figurational sociology, however, the contribution made by the Leicester School to the social significance of sport is indisputable.

### The Police Response to Hooliganism

Attention is also given to the police, and the collective actions and reactions to hooliganism, and how conflicts, court cases and initiatives play out and are presented by the media. Armstrong (1998) critically claimed that the police receive far more credibility and media promotion than academics when it comes to the examination and explanation of football hooliganism:

Since 1986 the police have conducted ‘Dawn Raids’ coloured with exaggeration and institutional self-interest on suspected hooligans, and sold a script via stage-managed court cases and press releases. Imposing a suppositious quasi-military hierarchical structure on hooligan groups, the police have gained the audience of elected politicians, and have never had their orthodoxy challenged by academics.

(1998: p.18)

Due to the wide variety of tactics and initiatives employed by a vast number of police forces over the past decades, this is a very broad generalisation which may well be hard to substantiate. However, it does compare well with some of the none-academic and anecdotal ‘hit and tell’ hooligan books (Gall 2005; Brown and Brittle 2006), who, unsurprisingly, had some very disparaging things to say about the police and their behaviour, attitude and tactics. Although some may suggest it is inappropriate to consider such ‘thug genre’ books in academic research, Redhead (2004) has highlighted the importance and usefulness of such memoirs to academia, as they have proven to be valuable sources of information for studies of football subcultures.

In the vast body of research that focuses on football hooliganism, it appears there are many contradictory theories and explanations that may be combined to be complementary, as (what seemed to be) the search for an ‘all-encompassing’ theory does not seem to have been successful. The explanations outlined above have been elaborated on, adapted and debated many times, to the point that some have questioned whether hooliganism has been over researched, or if the current theories are just inadequate (Stott and Pearson 2007). It has also been highlighted that the ‘classic’ theories of football hooliganism outlined above merely focus on English football, and are therefore, due to a lack of application elsewhere globally, limited in terms of their explanatory scope on an international scale (Spaaij 2006).

Armstrong stated that football hooliganism cannot really be explained, it may only be described and evaluated, and analysis must “describe the nature of this complex contestation and its construction within specific male milieus” (1998: p.21). This more qualitative ethnographic approach to studying football fans (notable examples Armstrong 1993; Giulianotti 1995) appears to provide deep and rich descriptions of social subcultures, which avoids criticism regarding actual contact with the subjects of the research. It is pertinent for the current study to highlight at this point that football rivalries can exist without the presence of football hooliganism, and equally, football hooliganism or violence at football can manifest itself without the situation involving any sort of established rivalry.

#### Diminished Focus on Hooliganism

Relatively drastic transformations and improvements were made throughout the 1990s as English football made steps towards becoming the commodified and commercial giant it currently is (Crawford 2004). Part of this was the perceived notion that it was safe, as grounds had improved and many thought hooliganism was a problem of a past era. However, what happened in England during the 1990s was not so much that football hooliganism itself declined, as that, “in conjunction largely with the depoliticisation of the problem, the reporting of football hooliganism became less fashionable” (Dunning et al.



2002: pp. 6-7). Garland and Rowe (2000) concur, and have stated that there is considerable statistical and anecdotal evidence to suggest that football violence has not disappeared, despite the police's methods and tactical initiatives. This is supported by events that still occur, such as trouble between supporters inside and outside the ground at games between West Ham United and Millwall (BBC News 2009) and Birmingham City and Aston Villa:

Last Sunday saw some of the worst scenes for years outside St Andrew's... how can they justify their barbaric, moronic behaviour... tell me why you threw coins, bottles and bricks at police, the very people we expect to protect us? Tell me why you did not care that frightened men, women and children, who were standing by the police for protection, also came under fire from your missiles.

(Ross 2007: p.55)

Anecdotal evidence and personal experience suggest that the reporting of trouble of this nature varies, with some often going completely unreported. Cynics may argue that the media make far too much money from football to continually report the uglier side of the sport. A study of the nature and extent of football hooliganism in England and Wales (Frosdick and Newton 2006) claimed hooliganism is associated with one in twenty matches, with over half of these incidents taking place outside the ground. However, these findings are based on official statistics and reports, but not all 'hooligan-related' incidents are recorded or occur anywhere near the football ground, so the claims made by Frosdick and Newton's (2006) to be able to assess the full extent of this phenomenon appear naïve.

### **2.2.2. A Shift in Focus**

Following the tragic and high-profile football disasters of the late 1980s<sup>10</sup>, and the impact of the Popplewell Inquiry (1986) and the Taylor Report (1990), the public's attention and the focus of research began to increasingly analyse the response of the authorities to football violence, including police tactics (Stott and Pearson 2007), segregation and crowd safety (Frosdick 2005). This expansion of research focus was significant, as it

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<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of these, see Bradford City fire (Giulianotti 1999), Heysel disaster (Spaaij 2006) and, Hillsborough disaster (Armstrong 1998).

demonstrated the beginning of a move away from trying to explain football hooliganism, towards gaining a more informed perspective on football fans and their behaviour in general. It is argued that the general shift outlined here, towards researching and understanding the experiences of everyday fans, is at least partly due to the influence of cultural studies, specifically within the context of the broader fandom studies, focussing less on elitist cultural perspectives and more on the experiences and practices of ordinary people, as outlined and discussed in the preceding section. Consequently, subsequent research has demonstrated this shift in academic focus towards understanding the broader and more subtle expressions of identity<sup>11</sup>, and how football is experienced by less conspicuous groups, i.e., the ‘everyday’ fans (which has been called for previously, see Stone 2007). Therefore, the remainder of this section shall provide an overview of some of the recent research which has addressed the more everyday and ordinary aspects of football fandom.

### **2.2.3. The Expansion of Football Fandom**

Stone (2007) provided an explanation of a fundamental aspect of football fandom: the role of football in everyday life, with focus on how football is consumed beyond the match day experience in the UK. Stone (2007) described how an individual’s daily activity space is divided up and segregated between their domicile and their place of work, the pathways, transport and venues which connect those two, and their leisure pursuits, and claims football experiences and identities transcend these segregations. Although Stone has not attempted to distinguish varying levels amongst fans, it is important to recognise the impact football has on fans outside of the physical manifestation of match day. It may also be beneficial to link Stone’s findings with some of the psychological fan studies, which demonstrated the psychological and sociological benefits of following a sports team (Branscombe and Wann 1991; Wann and Weaver 2009), to further exhibit the magnitude

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<sup>11</sup> Identity is viewed here as being a cultural construction. It is not fixed and there is not an ever-present or overarching identity, rather it is viewed as being plastic and changeable, and often dependent on a specific social location or cultural field (Barker 2008). Individuals (and also groups) are engaged with on-going attempts to construct an identity or representation of themselves through the articulation of various symbols and rituals, and as Bourdieu (1984) suggested through tastes, habits, attitudes and cultural patterns of behaviour – in order to create some resemblance and distinction. This study focuses more on collective identities – of the two rival fans groups – and interprets the social solidarity of a group that is evident as being based on the representations and ‘imagined’ identification with others who share commonality, or what Anderson (2006) called ‘imagined communities’ (discussed further in section 2.2.4).

and significance of football to so many supporters. However, it is acknowledged that focussing exclusively on the positive aspects and benefits of football to individuals could be regarded as functionalist, which ignores inequality and exploitation within the sport.

In addition to assessing the importance of football to fans, research has also demonstrated how important fans are to football. Giulianotti (2002: p.25) referred to football spectators as 'grassroots custodians' of the game, and Barajas has described fans as 'guardians' of their club (2007: p.273). Brown and Walsh (2000) and Nash (2001) outlined how the development and organisation of official fan groups has meant fans have more power and far more influence over football and over their clubs than ever before, especially following the formation of the Football Supporters Association (FSA) in 1985 and a number of Independent Supporter Associations (ISAs) throughout the 1980s. Charleston (2008) reminded us about how important fans remain for a club, as fan dissatisfaction and lower attendance leads to diminished support on match day and lack of revenue from ticket sales, merchandise, food and beverage receipts and difficulty attracting corporate sponsors, which will all have a detrimental impact on a club, both short and long term. Barajas (2007) further supported this view by arguing that, from an economic perspective, fans are the main asset of a football club, also, that the concept of support is worthwhile to study because of the revenue fans bring to the game. However, these accounts assume football fans to be one homogenous mass, with no distinction between one fan and another. In order to address this unilateral representation of football fans, attention has been given to try and differentiate between and classify different types of fans.

### Taxonomy of Football Fans

Giulianotti (2002) provided a taxonomy of football spectator identities, which is based upon four ideal-type<sup>12</sup> categories into which spectators may be placed. Giulianotti's categorisation model is underpinned by two basic binary oppositions: traditional-consumer and hot-cool. Spectators may be classified into one of four groups: traditional/hot;

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<sup>12</sup> Ideal type is a heuristic device associated with Max Weber. It is not an average type, and not a description of the most common features of a social phenomenon, it is a conceptual type that can be used as a category or concept to guide research (Williams and May 1996). Ideal type is discussed further below in the section 'Critique of Giulianotti's model'.

traditional/cool; consumer/hot; and consumer/cool, which depends on the spectators identification with specific clubs and relates to historical developments and cultural differences experienced by spectator communities. These categories shall be explained in-depth below.

Traditional/Hot spectators are referred to by Giulianotti as 'Supporters' and have a long standing identification with a club, its locality and the local culture. Supporters possess 'hot' forms of loyalty, which exemplifies the high levels of identification and the thick solidarity with the club and fellow supporters. Supporters are motivated to continue to give their support because they are obligated to do so, as the club not only provides them with an element of their personal identity but also represents a substantial part of the supporter's public identity. Supporters are often able to attend matches regularly due to locality, which is different from almost all fans of pop stars or TV shows. This helps develop a "topophilic relationship" (2002: p.33) with their club and the ground itself, a relationship which is often demonstrated and reinforced through chanting (Clark 2006). An attachment to the socio-geographic environment of the club is also reinforced by biographical and emotional ties, as the club acts as "a key cultural emblem of the surrounding community" (Giulianotti 2002: p.41), which appears to be a particularly important aspect for football 'supporters'.

Traditional/Cool spectators are 'Followers'. The follower is characterised by an assortment of interests in football, not just one club, but several teams, managers or players, at both club and national level, so although they possess a high level of knowledge it may roughly be described as broad football knowledge and interest rather than the deeper knowledge of a supporter. The follower may display thin or thick levels of solidarity towards a particular club which, as Giulianotti (2002) describes, depends upon non-economic, symbolic exchange relationships. The club gets the support of the follower, in exchange for something which appeals to the interest or identity of the follower, for example: preferred ideology or political leaning, religious or ethnic roots, the signing of a favourite player or manager. As the follower is a traditional spectator (as opposed to a consumer), support or allegiance will not be given on the basis of the success of a team, rather, it will be due to the value gained as part of the follower's complex network of football knowledge and experience. There may be only subtle differences between the

follower and the supporter in some respects, which is to be expected with any typology, however, this could be highlighted as a criticism of this classification model.

Spectators categorised as Hot/Consumer are 'Fans'. The fan is hot in terms of identification with a club or particular player, with a strong feeling of intimacy towards the club. However, there is a distance between the fan and their club, a distance which does not exist for the 'supporter'. Giulianotti explains this is due to the hyper-commodification of football which has dislocated players and club officials from supporters. For instance, Brown and Walsh (2000) claimed that by 1999 ticket prices for English Premier League games had increased by 350-400% since 1992, which may provide a financial barrier or alienate certain football fans. As distance is created between fans and the clubs/players, fans strengthen their identification with the club through consumption of related products. This distance is due to a number of factors, not only increased admission prices, there are other factors, such as the perceived ideology or bourgeoisification of football that may alienate fans (see Taylor 1982). A good example of hot/consumer fans are the groups set up abroad, such as the North American Supporters Clubs, for fans of Scottish football teams (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004), they have a strong identification towards a team but there is a vast distance between the fan and their club, so they must consume in other ways.

The Cool/Consumer spectator is a football flâneur, acquiring a postmodern spectator identity through "a depersonalised set of market-dominated virtual relationships particularly interactions with the cool media of television and the Internet" (Giulianotti 2002: p.38). The cool consumer strolls from stadium to stadium, even country to country, taking in and consuming football experiences. The concept of the football flâneur is adapted from the flâneur as an idle wanderer, who strolls and reads a city as an outside observer or researcher (Bairner 2006b). The flâneur is more likely to be bourgeois and owing to the higher levels of economic, cultural and educational capital is inspired to pursue a cosmopolitan assortment of footballing experiences (Giulianotti 2002). Referring to the distinctions of Bourdieu (1984), the bourgeois flâneur is seeking to experience the same thing as the working classes, in this case football, but differently. The cool-consuming flâneur consumes the signifiers of a football team, such as a team's shirt or team colours, as a sort of disposable appendage, rather than identifying with the signified

concepts which accompany such items like the symbolic local identity of the team or the community.

### Critique of Giulianotti's Model

Giulianotti's model is based on the concept of the ideal-type, developed by Max Weber, which aims to describe the comparative features of different societies by outlining their distinct social characteristics (Morrison 2006). An ideal type does not serve as a concrete description of reality, rather as a construction derived from reality and is constantly examined against reality, using the knowledge and the imagination of the researcher which enables continual reconstruction and development (Kasler 1988). Ideal-types can be useful in research and in social description. Indistinct traits can be arranged into consistent constructs; judgements can be made as to whether society referred to in concrete reality exists and to what extent characteristics (for example, the various behaviours and actions of football fans) can be made clear(er) and understandable (Morrison 2006). However, it has been suggested that ideal type concepts are only useful as preliminary devices in terms of developing understanding (Pepper 1963).

Crawford (2004) remained critical of such binary views of fans which demarcate them as either 'traditional' and 'authentic' sports fans or 'inauthentic' sport consumers, claiming that being a sports fan is primarily a consumer act so all fans must be viewed as consumers. However, Williams (2007) criticised Crawford's claims by stating he has exaggerated the decline of traditional ties which still strongly link place, community and sport in contemporary Britain and Europe. Barajas (2007: p. 274) also declared that football fan support is more complex than Giulianotti's "simple division". However, Barajas (2007) wrote from an economically reductivist marketing viewpoint, which desires intricate classifications so corporations can target specific groups in order to extract more money from fans, rather than attempting to provide a suitable typology to help explain and understand football fans.

Giulianotti's (2002) model assumes fan behaviour is invariably ritualistic and recurring, which thus enables classifications to be made. It is not clear what amount of time must

elapse following a change in an individual's pattern of behaviour for them to be classed as, for example, a follower after previously being a flâneur, however, this is an issue related to the classification of fans and it is not envisaged to be an issue the actual fans would be concerned with. However, changes in fans' behaviour or fluctuating levels of support or loyalty are inevitable, both short term and long term, which therefore renders any sort of classification system imperfect. So it would appear that defining an essentialist notion of what it is to be a football fan is unrealistic. As a basic categorisation model Giulianotti's taxonomy appears adequate, it contains enough flexibility and information for fan classifications to be made on an individual basis without difficulty.

The current study shall concentrate more towards the hot/traditional quadrant of Giulianotti's model in order to gain a rich, thick description (Geertz 1973) from the experience of fans who have a "longer, more local and popular cultural identification with the club" (Giulianotti 2002: p. 31) as it is envisaged supporters of this type will have a greater understanding and lived experience of the rivalry when compared to the cool-consumerist flâneur. Although, it is recognised that future research may focus on whether supporters, fans, followers and flâneurs experience rivalry differently.

Throughout academic literature the terms outlined above, such as fans and supporters, are often used interchangeably as generic terms. In order to align with the terminology used in other publications and avoid confusion, individuals shall be referred to as fans in this study, incorporating all distinctions of fans that have been made above, unless explicitly stated – otherwise the inconsistent use of terms could be confusing. Although attention has been given here to the classification of individuals in order to develop an understanding of football fans as part of the literature review, the current study focuses on rival groups of fans, which will be briefly discussed below.

#### **2.2.4. 'Imagined Communities' of Fans**

When considering football fan rivalries, fan groups who support a different football club share a different collective identity, which bears relevance to the operation of modern societies. Anderson (2006), Hobsbawm (1990) and Smith (1991) have discussed at length

how modern nation states have lost the collective belonging of *real* human communities and networks, and how these have been replaced with ‘imagined communities’. As Anderson (2006) described, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined, and even the largest imagined community has finite, if elastic, boundaries. This concept of imagined communities can be utilised in reference to the supporters of a football club, as Giulianotti (1999: p.70) stated “football supporters of the modern age belong to an ‘imaginary community’ of those that follow the same club”. Giulianotti further borrowed from Anderson<sup>13</sup> (2006) to describe how, although fans may never encounter all their fellow fans, nor even attend home fixtures, the sense of communitarianism and collective identity remains undiminished. Hobsbawm (1990: p.142) further claimed that sport, and in particular football, reinforces this imagined sense of belonging and unity, for example with the establishment of international football fixtures in order to integrate multi-national states and provide a safety-valve for group tensions within a ‘friendly rivalry’. The focus of the current study is interpreting and exploring the complex social, historical and cultural factors which influence and reinforce the rivalry between the imagined communities of fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs.

### **2.2.5. Summary of Football Fandom**

The literature discussed here is by no means a comprehensive account of the academic study of football fans. It does, however, explore some of the significant factors that have influenced the development of football fandom, notably the initial impact of the study of hooliganism, the influence of cultural studies and the academic shift towards the more ordinary and everyday aspects of football fandom.

The above studies have demonstrated how diverse and complex football fandom can be. However, the notion that “soccer, and indeed sports fandom more widely in Europe in the past 30 years, is undergoing a series of important transformations that are still in process” (Williams 2007: p.144) justifies the in-depth examination of each subculture and the

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<sup>13</sup> In reference to nations, Anderson wrote: ‘It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (2006: p.6).



‘everyday’ lived experiences of the fans, in a fluid and reflexive manner, to elucidate and continually advance the understanding of football fandom. One such area that is receiving growing academic attention is football fan rivalries, which shall be the focus of the next section.

### **2.3. Interpreting and Exploring Football Fan Rivalries**

Focussing on the everyday experiences of ordinary fans has helped further develop the overall understanding of previously neglected aspects of everyday fans’ experience, for example, football fan rivalries. Despite this shift in focus, it often appears that the issue/phenomenon of rivalry is only referenced in a casual manner, for example, only stating that a rivalry exists, without any attempt to identify or examine it in depth. Since it is argued that rivalries are part and parcel of most football subcultures, the subsequent section shall focus on rivalry and, in particular, the current literature on football fan rivalries.

#### **2.3.1. Rivalry**

Literature focusing on international and state rivalries has assessed previous attempts to conceptualise the identifying of rivals and rivalries (Thompson 2001), and has identified two contrasting models. The first model is based on empirical emphasis on satisfying a minimal number of disputes (dispute-density), also referred to as the concept of enduring rivalry (Geller 1993). An enduring rivalry must have: a level of severity; a beginning and an end; and a minimum amount of time to constitute ‘enduring’ (for instance, two states involved in two conflicts within ten years) (Goertz and Diehl 1993: p.158). Thompson (2001) highlighted a potential issue with this conceptualisation, in that it assumes there must be actual disputes or conflicts for a rivalry to exist, which might not always be the case. The dispute-density model would also appear to pay scant attention to the complexities of a rivalry, as Thompson (2001) asserted, complicated disagreements regarding territory, influence, status and ideology are at the core of every conflict. Whilst similarities could be highlighted using this concept as an analogy to football rivalry, it may

prove difficult to draw comparisons between conflicts at state and football level, and also how often these conflicts occur. For example, many football teams play each other several times each year, yet not all pairings could be considered as a rivalry. Nonetheless, this model emphasises the employment of history in understanding the roots of existing state rivalries by exploring their socio-cultural origins and, thus, the reasons why they became and endured. Regardless of the specificity of the research area (state rivalries or football rivalries), by acquiring an historical insight and adopting historical sensibility it is acknowledged that “history is the shank of social study” and “no social science can be assumed to transcend history” (Mills 2000: p.143 & 146).

The second conceptual model outlined by Thompson (2001) for identifying rivalries is based on placing interpretive emphasis on perceptions of threatening competitors, which are often based on historical analyses and the subjective view of those involved. This approach is more time consuming, in comparison to a dispute-density analysis, but does allow the inclusion of rivalries which do not involve militarised conflicts. Focusing on the actors actually involved enables a deeper insight to be gained into any potential rivalry through fans’ perceptions of the intensity and underlying factors, which would then inform interpretations. This approach facilitates the inclusion and analysis of complex issues and underlying factors which are present in all rivalries<sup>14</sup>.

Though the focus of the above models is on the identification of rivalries, they can also contribute to the analysis of existing rivalries, particularly through identifying and examining original, historical tensions and factors pertaining to the emergence of rivalries and therefore forming the foundations of further studies. The concept of interpreting perceptions is useful in demonstrating the need for focus on the nuances, complexities and unique factors which influence rivalries. Goertz and Diehl (1993) also outlined the value of placing a conflict, or potential conflict, between two states in a historical context as previous incidents may influence a rivalry or help predict a possible outcome. This conceptual model, focusing on interpretations of perceptions, could be applied to football fan rivalries, utilising a qualitative interpretation of the fans’ perceptions and historical contexts in order to form the basis for an in-depth study of the complexities and underlying factors of a rivalry.

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<sup>14</sup> Complexity and underlying factors of any rivalry must be analysed, as advocated by, amongst others: Giulianotti (1999); and Thompson (2001).

### 2.3.2. Football Fan Rivalries

Rivalry is often described using terms such as “binary opposition” and competition with “opposing numbers” (Giulianotti 1999: p.10), which when considering football fan rivalries, is with fan groups who support a different football club, and therefore share a different collective identity (collective identity and imagined communities discussed in section 2.2.4). It has previously been highlighted that sporting rivalries can perform social functions, benefiting society in various ways. Though rivalries may reinforce competition, bias and prejudice (Lee 1985), they also provide an arena for social interaction where people with different backgrounds, experiences, and allegiances may come together, as team-mates or opposing fans, in a competitive rivalry that can “help break down barriers” (1985: p.47). Football rivalries also provide entertainment and excitement for huge numbers of individuals, as “the non-violent expression of hot rivalry and opposition enlivens the football spectacle” (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001a: p.2), and could arguably be referred to as a powerful opiate for the masses (Smith 1989). This interest and fascination with sporting rivalries is also exploited by the media in order to generate further consumption by fans<sup>15</sup>, which includes boosting television ratings and sales of newspapers and non-academic books<sup>16</sup>.

However, as is often the case, the above functionalist assessment of rivalry is arguably overly-positive, and it is important to consider rivalries may often foster socially divisive attitudes which increase the possibility of social conflict and can lead to hostility and even violence (Lee 1985). On a broad level, the word rivalry brings with it thoughts and ideologies of conflict, domination, power and struggle, which are arguably traditional signifiers of masculinity and could be viewed in opposition to the functionalist ideals of what is often associated with modern sports (Jarvie and Maguire 1994). Therefore, in addition to the positive aspects of sporting rivalries, it may be disputed rivalries within sport can have many negative features. A particular feature of football fan rivalry which has received a small but significant amount of academic interest is how a rivalry manifests

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<sup>15</sup> Sport fans and consumption critically discussed by Crawford (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Interest in football rivalries has spawned journalistic-style books on the subject, for example, Beattie (2008) and Mitten (2008).

itself within the football (sub)culture, or put simply, how rivalry is actually demonstrated by the fans.

### Cultural Manifestation of Rivalries

One of the most explicit manifestations and expressions of fan rivalry is through chanting. An ethnographic study of football fans (Clark 2006) demonstrated: the importance of chanting in football; the significance of certain chants during games; and how fans use chanting to establish and reinforce the internal-external dialectic between 'them' and 'us'. When at a local derby, this differentiation is taken a step further as not only is chanting used by an imagined community of fans to identify who they *are*, but also who they are *not*, through the vocal denigration of their rivals. On a superficial level, all these songs and chants express the fans' affiliation and commitment to a specific team. However, on a deeper level, there are underlying themes of these verbal expressions, as Merkel (2007: p.232) discussed, chants convey:

Dominance, superiority, courage and invincibility. They demonstrate not only an (imaginary) symbiotic relationship between supporters and team but also show an omnipotent self-perception. Since opponents are a potential threat to this identity and fragile illusion of closeness, their marginal status as well as inferiority are recurring themes.

The view that chanting is important in football is supported by Charleston (2008) who identified singing, in addition to there being a 'full house', as a key determinant to creating a 'home atmosphere' in English football. Chanting can be regarded as a signifying practice, which is a meaning-producing activity which involves the production and exchange of signs which generate meaning (Barthes 2007). The language used in chants by football fans may be explained by two systems of signification: *denotation* which is a descriptive and literal level of meaning shared by practically all elements of a culture; and *connotation* which involves meanings that are generated by connecting various signifiers to wider cultural concerns (Barker 2008). It is argued that chanting may therefore be analysed to uncover meanings which offer information or explanation of, for example, a

rivalry between two teams. Therefore the denigrating chants of fans regarding other teams may act as an indicator of who a certain fan group actually perceives to be their rivals, which could be utilised as part of the ‘interpretation of perceptions’ conceptual model for identifying rivalries (see Thompson 2001), as discussed previously.

Carefully choreographed displays of colourful flags and banners are also utilised by fans inside the stadium, in order to intimidate rival fans and demonstrate they are the superior fans, taking “audio-visual passion to new heights” (Giulianotti 1999: p.54). Often associated more with fan groups referred to as *ultras*<sup>17</sup> in southern Europe, the battle of the rivals is often limited to a symbolic duel because its purpose is to show to the ‘enemies’, spectators and even the TV audience which are the strongest groups. As Del Lago and De Biasi (1994: pp.85-86) described:

The fight is mainly symbolic from two points of view. First, during a football match every group fights to impose its symbolic strength in terms of the beauty and impressiveness of the choreography (flags, choruses and songs) and in terms of displaying courage (to steal in front of all other fans the enemy’s flags, scarves, or even hats is considered by the youngest ultras the noblest of group activities). Second, every group, before or after the match, regards the end, the stadium and the open spaces surrounding the stadium (including underground stations, railway stations and so on) as its exclusive territory to be defended against the enemy’s raids.

Referring back to Giulianotti’s (2002) typology, the fans that would identify themselves as ultras would most likely be classified as traditional/hot ‘supporters’, as they demonstrate high levels of team identification and retain and express a topophilic relationship with the ground and their club. The above examples of fan behaviour are generalisations based on research available, and it is acknowledged that fans from different regions/countries may demonstrate rivalry and team identification in further diverse and unique ways. One thing which can be discerned from preceding research is that a macro-level approach is unsuitable when studying football rivalries, as this would overlook the idiosyncrasies and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ultras*, originating from southern Europe, are more militant and organised fan groups than are traditionally found in northern Europe. *Ultras* are often misrepresented as hooligan groups and not interested in football, but as Giulianotti (1999) outlined they are the most committed fans who express extremely complex social and political identities. For further discussion see Hazard and Gould (2001) and Spaaij (2006).

nuances of each imagined community of fans involved, and therefore would lack a rich and deep understanding of the complex cultural tapestry of a rivalry.

### **2.3.3. The Idiosyncratic Nature of Football Rivalries**

Rivalries are often based on very conspicuous and complex social or cultural differences between sets of supporters. For example, Bairner (2002) explained how the Linfield-Glentoran rivalry in Northern Ireland is reinforced not only by ethno-sectarian conflict involving nationalist and loyalist supporters but also intra-community territorial disputes, in addition to the on the pitch rivalry as the 'Big Two' in Northern Ireland. However, it is equally important to note rivalries do not necessarily have to be based on major differences between two groups, a rivalry can exist between extremely similar groups of fans, referred to as the "narcissism of minor differences" (Hills 2002: p.61). These rivalries are triggered by legitimating one's own cultural practices against imagined others whose very cultural and geographical proximity threatens the attempts of imagined communities to achieve distinction.

In regard to the subtle differences that establish and reinforce a fan rivalry, differing perceptions of fans can also lead to intense rivalry. A central feature of the rivalry between the fans of the Kaizer Chiefs and the Orlando Pirates, in South Africa, is that despite both sets of fans having comparable socio-economic positions, the Chiefs fans perceive themselves to be socially superior, which leads the Pirates fans to resent them and view them as snobs, which has so often escalated into violence and tragedy (Burnett 2002). Similarities could be drawn with the football rivalry in Sheffield, as Wednesday fans have traditionally been regarded as the city's premier club, giving the United fans a chip on their shoulders and an inferiority complex in respect of their more famous neighbours (Armstrong 1998). Though these fan groups may actually be on a relatively equal socio-economic standing, the opposition and rivalry may be underpinned by the subtle hegemonic control and consensus gained by the more dominant groups within society (Ingham and Hardy 1993), who in these examples appear to be the Chiefs fans and the Wednesday fans. Classical Marxists would argue this is due to the economic lenses worn in societies where work and productive activity is of paramount importance, and those

outsiders (from a different imagined community) who are perceived to be from a lower socio-economic class are believed to have less value, when in reality all human beings have equal value (Morrison 2006). Conflict is therefore created due to the imbalance in perceived power relations, between clubs imagined to be at the opposite ends of the economic status scale.

Previous research on the Mohun Bagan and East Bengal rivalry in India has demonstrated how complex football rivalries can be, and how difficult it can be to understand the fans and the factors which underpin these rivalries. An initial study by Dimeo (2001) concluded this intense and often violent Calcutta football rivalry was based on the ethnic conflict involving West Bengal's Hindu settlers and East Bengal's Hindu immigrants. However, Majumdar described this as a 'rigid ethnic polarisation' due to "the writer's lack of awareness about the fluidity of cultural identities of the two groups of people" (2008: p.286-287). Majumdar instead stated that although the origins of the rivalry lay in the social and sub-regional tensions and differences of the fans, it is actually intense club loyalty and aggressive fan culture which has underpinned and reinforced this rivalry for the past 25 years. This demonstrates how complex football fan rivalries can be, highlighting the need for in-depth studies of fan groups in order to adequately understand each individual rivalry. Utilising the themes and concepts which have emerged from the available research into football fan rivalries, it may be possible to begin to develop a conceptual framework, in order to aid further research of these individual rivalries.

#### **2.3.4. Towards a Conceptual Framework**

Previous research has provided a classificatory framework for football rivalries based on geographical location and linked identities (Alabarces 2002). However, this approach only provides a basic analysis, paying heed to location rather than to equally relevant social or cultural factors. Whilst not dismissing territoriality, conflict and rivalry should be viewed as cultural manifestations of power struggles and imbalances pervading every level of social relationships (Barker 2008), which may or may not be connected to geographic identity (territorial marking). In other words, when analysing rivalries in general, and

football rivalries in particular, a monocausal explanation should be avoided and, instead, a multicausal account should be developed to capture the complexity of such social reality<sup>18</sup>.

Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b) have identified a thematic framework which relates to the production and reproduction of ‘football-centred oppositions’, which has the capacity to enable a multicausal account to be developed. Each football rivalry is said to be underpinned by the *Construction of Conflicting Identities*. It is claimed that football rivalries are influenced by various forms and degrees of power, which is in line with the influence of cultural studies upon sociological research (see section 2.1). These various forms and degrees of power shape the interplay of social identities in three ways: ‘Legitimising Identity’- constructed through the dominant institutions of society, and the reproduction of such domination, which may potentially be challenged; ‘Resistance Identity’- constructed by those outside of mainstream values – establishing new emergent values and identities; and, ‘Project Identity’- constructed by social collectives that are committed to the creation of a different life through replacing dominant practices with residual or emergent ones<sup>19</sup>.

Comparisons can be drawn between the legitimising, resistant and project identities, and Raymond Williams’s interpretation of dominant-residual-emergent. The legitimising identity can be analysed as the dominant, both in the sense of the dominating powerful identity and also in the Gramscian hegemonic sense which places emphasis on cultural coercion rather than just economic and brute physical power (Ingham and Hardy 1993). Similarly, the project identity could be regarded as the emergent, linking the present and the future through the transition to a new phase which is alternative or oppositional to the previous cultural formation.

The dynamic interplay between the three identities or value systems can lead to opposition and rivalry, which can be categorised as follows: the drama of power inequalities; submerged nationhood; minority identity and local difference; the symbolic violence of exclusion; aesthetic codes, tradition and modernity; and, disorganised capitalism and the

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<sup>18</sup> For an account of multicausal interpretation of actions of human agency, see Molnar and Maguire (2008).

<sup>19</sup> The example of Dynamo Zagreb changing their name to Croatia Zagreb, in order to help symbolise a break with the Yugoslav, communist past, is offered here as an example of the ‘project’ identity, (see Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b: p.271). Also, footballers in post-communist Hungary could be another example of an emergent imagined community’s project identity, for further discussion see Molnar (2007).



transformation of rivalry (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). Each imagined community of fans is said to hold (at least) one of the collective identities outlined above, in relation to the themes which underpin and organise rivalry. For example, utilising the drama of power inequalities theme, fans from a rich and powerful football club assume the legitimising identity, which is in opposition to rival fans from a poor and less powerful club who have the collective resistance identity<sup>20</sup>.

It has been suggested that any study exploring football rivalries across the world must engage with a 'middle-range' structuralist approach (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b), but only to a certain degree. It is recognised that adopting a 'full' structuralist approach is unsuitable as research would be forced to overlook or dismiss the thoughts, opinions and experiences of the social actors involved (the fans). Also, as Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b) claimed, a structuralist approach as, for instance, advocated by Claude Levi-Strauss may encourage the researcher to pass over the complexity of data, in favour of evidence which confirms and fits within an objective and underlying model. It may emerge that a rivalry is influenced by unique cultural practices, and any pre-determined assumptions based on findings from previous research on other football rivalries may be misleading or counter-productive, as Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b: p.269) further explained:

We do require to be highly cognizant of the classificatory practices and binary oppositions that shape football rivalries; but we need to allow for the possibilities that these oppositions contain relatively unique cultural properties, and are understood in complex terms by the social actors themselves. Moreover, we need to consider the underlying power inequalities that also shape the structure of oppositions and social identities.

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<sup>20</sup> The example of Manchester United during the late 1990s (legitimising identity) and their less successful/powerful/affluent rivals Manchester City (resistance identity) is provided by Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b: p.272-3). However, following the takeover of Manchester City by Abu Dhabi United Group, the ambitious investment has suggested Manchester City have collectively adopted the 'project identity' of becoming the biggest and most successful club in England, which demonstrates the complexities and ever-evolving dynamics of football rivalries.

Consequently, further development of this framework, whilst ensuring a continued emphasis on the social actors themselves (through both *Emic* and *Etic* accounts<sup>21</sup>), would greatly benefit the study of football fan rivalries focusing on the wider social, cultural and historical context. However, from reviewing the related literature it is evident that not only theoretical, but also methodological approaches must be discussed, as those appear to be scarce in the literature.

### 2.3.5. Methodological Concerns

Although the limited number of case studies on football fan rivalries elicited useful information, there appears to be a lack of transparency in terms of the methodologies employed when gathering data for these studies. From the literature available, it is unclear whether long-term, micro-level qualitative research has been undertaken, or if the known macro-level historical socio-cultural factors of communities, cities or countries have been applied to a football fan rivalry without data actually being collected from the social actors involved in these rivalries, the fans. It is necessary to highlight how the lack of transparency may hinder future research and any development of a consistent and rigorous methodological framework which may be employed in order to gain further insight into the complex layers of fan rivalries. For example, in the introduction to their collection of case studies on football rivalries, Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b: p.3) stated briefly that the articles included “draw upon anthropological, sociological and historical perspectives that are rooted in a qualitative methodological approach”, but provided no further elaboration. Then throughout the subsequent chapters, there was little, or in the majority of cases, no mention of the actual methodologies utilised by the various authors.

From the case studies examined, with a few exceptions, there also appears to be an over-reliance on historical records of football teams and newspaper reports, without providing a voice for the fans of these clubs who actually experience these rivalries in their everyday lives. It is argued that it is vital that data relating to football fan rivalries is gathered from those whom actually experience the rivalry (first and foremost the fans), as this offers “the

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<sup>21</sup> *Emic* accounts – narratives that individuals themselves use to organise and situate their (hi)stories; *Etic* accounts – attempts at interpretation and representation by the social researcher. For further discussion, see Butt and Molnar (2008: p.246).

most accessible means of getting to the heart of the questions about why and how groups of people do what they do in particular social contexts and settings” (Hallinan and Hughson 2001: p.3; also cited in Hallinan et al. 2007: p.290). The ethnographic methodological approach has been utilised to achieve this in a number of qualitative studies of football fandom (For example: Giulianotti 1995; Armstrong 1998; Hallinan et al. 2007; Weed 2006; and, Clark 2006), and this thesis proposes this approach is used for future research on football fan rivalries in order to gather rich data and allow opportunities to develop the research and elaborate on certain themes within a flexible, extended time period. (Methodological concerns and approaches shall be discussed further in the Methodology chapter.)

### **2.3.6. Summary of Football Fan Rivalries**

This section has reviewed the limited but growing literature on football fan rivalries, beginning with a discussion of existing models used to identify rivals, before analysing the literature that focuses specifically on football fan rivalries. A theoretical framework has been identified and discussed that aids the multi-causal, thematic analysis of football fan rivalries, based on the dynamic interplay between collective identities based on power relations and inequalities.

It is acknowledged that each rivalry is complex and unique, and, by identifying and analysing the significant social, historical and cultural factors pertaining to a rivalry, it is possible to gain an understanding of that rivalry, whilst acquiring further knowledge of the fluid and complex phenomenon of football fandom. Therefore, this adds to the rationale that it is necessary to collect primary data in order to explore this rivalry further. Therefore, the following chapter shall discuss and outline the methodological approach for conducting data collection during this study.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section attempts to clarify the philosophical paradigm of the current study. This shall be achieved through a discussion of ontological and epistemological assumptions, before providing a rationale for the constructivist position adopted. The second section focuses on the methodological approach of the study, ethnography. Specifically, this section shall justify its use by discussing the approach of ethnography before concentrating on specific aspects that require attention, namely representation, going native and reflexivity. The section concludes with some considerations for this particular ethnographic study.

The final section of this chapter focuses on the current study's research design. This section shall outline the specific methods employed – participant observation and semi-structured interviews – before considering the ethical issues associated with the study. The research strategy shall be made explicit, before outlining how data was analysed. The chapter concludes with a note on how the theoretical and methodological approaches of this study (cultural studies and ethnography) have been used in combination previously, followed by a rationale for the subsequent chapter on the socio-historical development of football and a brief note on coding and referencing of primary data.

#### **3.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

Research is guided by paradigmatic assumptions, values and beliefs (Silk et al. 2005), which, although often viewed as clear and distinct classifications, can be found along a continuum of method, perception of reality and theory that extends from positivism to constructivism (Sands 2002). Kuhn (1970) used the term paradigm to describe a collective cluster of beliefs which provide a context for a researcher and, within particular scientific disciplines, guide how research should be done and how data should be interpreted. At different periods, certain paradigms prevail but are challenged by various perceived anomalies, which lead to the creation and evolution of new competing paradigms within a given discipline (Kuhn 1970). Sands (2002) outlined how debates and differences between these views of presenting the world revolve around a number of arguments,

including: axes of science and objectivity versus a non-science and subjectivity; a hegemonic casting of science as a dominant voice; and, the process of generating knowledge. Grix (2002) further highlighted the importance of recognising and understanding that individuals have different views of what constitutes social reality (different ontological assumptions) and different ways of gathering knowledge (different epistemological assumptions). These are underpinned and reinforced by “certain cultural and social norms and parameters, for example those established by disciplines in academia” (Grix 2002: p.178).

The cultural studies perspective, which provides the theoretical underpinning of this thesis, does not have a clearly defined set of methodological principles and has not devoted itself to questions of research methods and methodology (Barker 2008), as the technicalities of method are considered not as important as the philosophical approaches underpinning them. With this in mind, it is deemed appropriate to clearly state the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the current study, whilst also making clear the intended methods of data collection and analysis, in order to avoid any uncertainty.

The following section aims to provide a concise outline of the philosophical paradigm of the current study. Methodologies correspond to particular paradigmatic positions, therefore, before addressing particular methodologies, it is required that an understanding is gained of such positions (Silk et al. 2005). This shall be achieved through a discussion of what are commonly (though perhaps not exclusively) accepted to be the two main approaches to the nature of knowledge – positivism and constructivism – by outlining the respective ontological and epistemological assumptions of these approaches and of the current study, as ontology and epistemology are central to all social research (Grix 2002). It is acknowledged that terminology varies amongst authors and sometimes disciplines, therefore for consistency this study shall follow the terms outlined in Guba’s (1990) edited collection.

### **3.1.1 Ontology**

Ontology is the study of the philosophy of knowledge (Barbour 2008) and is concerned with what is perceived as the very nature and essence of reality in the social world (Mason 1996), as what we believe constitutes social reality is the basis of our ontological assumptions (Grix 2002). Generally speaking, within qualitative research the two ends of the ontological spectrum are realist and relativist.

A realist ontological position is located within the positivist paradigm (Sands 2002), and views social reality as being made up of observable facts existing independently of the observer, they are external and independent from social actors and driven by binding natural laws and mechanisms (Guba 1990). The only 'true' or valid form of knowledge is 'scientific', that is where the principles and methods of the natural sciences are used to study human behaviour (Barbour 2008). The current study subscribed to a relativist position, which states reality is a social, and therefore, multiple, construction (Lincoln 1990) and social reality is the product of social actors with interpretations, cultural and social meanings, and subjectivities having a bearing on the construction of reality. There are multiple realities and the researcher presents a specific version of that reality (Sands 2002).

### **3.1.2 Epistemology**

Mason (1996) described epistemology as "literally your theory of knowledge", also that it concerns "the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated" (1996: p.13). Epistemological questions ask "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)" (Guba 1990: p.18). Epistemology focuses on the knowledge-gathering process and can be concerned with the development of new models and theories which are an improvement on competing models and theories (Grix 2002). Similar to ontological assumptions, there are broadly speaking two main contrasting epistemological positions – objectivist and subjectivist.

An objectivist epistemological approach indicates that the world exists independent of our knowledge of it, with theories tested through direct observation of that world. The world is

not socially constructed, only phenomena confirmed by the senses can be certified as knowledge (Bryman 2008). This approach advocates the employment of the methods of the 'natural sciences' when studying social reality (Grix 2002). The aim of positivist science is to expose and articulate immutable natural laws, usually expressed as generalisations (Lincoln 1990). An objectivist epistemology centres on "controlled data collection, objective distance between the researcher and the subject, quantitative measurement, hypothesis testing and statistical analysis to prove causality" (Silk et al. 2005: p.6). The current study adopted a subjectivist epistemological position. This requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman 2008). A subjectivist approach holds that social phenomena are dependent upon the interpretations of the social actors involved (Grix 2002). Researchers within the constructivist paradigm aim to create idiographic knowledge often based on pattern theories or webs of mutual and plausible influence which are expressed as time and place bound knowledge (Lincoln 1990).

### **3.1.3 Towards a Constructivist Position (via a Critique of Positivist Assumptions)**

Williams and May (1996: p.47) stated that positivists, notably Emile Durkheim, traditionally based their claim for the scientific nature of social science on:

The assertion that the methods used to study the social world did not differ in any important way from the methods used to study the physical world. The crisis of method was yet to come. As such, it was with some confidence that the positivists could make this assumption.

This is a key argument for those who reject a positivist approach, as social phenomena, including sport, and the individuals involved are subject to external social forces, and also have the agency to respond to these forces in an active, individual way (Gratton and Jones 2004). As Williams and May (1996) outlined, human beings have the capacity for autonomous reflection, they cannot be studied in the same way as inanimate objects. Positivism does not account for these intangible concepts related to autonomy of human agency, such as feelings, emotions and the meanings individuals give to social behaviour

(Blaikie 2010). These concepts form the basis of the constructivist approach, which developed through the criticisms and eventual rejection of positivism by many within social research (May 2001).

A further, detailed critique of positivism was provided by Guba (1990) who argued that the positivist paradigms are badly flawed and must be entirely replaced. Guba (1990) outlined four significant aspects or 'basic beliefs' of constructivism, which are essentially born out of the rejection of positivist assumptions. These basic beliefs are summarised as follows:

1) *The theory ladenness of facts* - reality only exists in the context of a mental framework (construct) for thinking about it. Positivism is built on the assumption that observations are theory-neutral (Guba 1990), therefore assuming that one person's observation and interpretation shall be the same as the next person's (i.e., an objective truth). However, as Phillips (1990) highlighted, there is no such thing as objective truth, as what observers take to be true depends on the framework of knowledge and assumptions they bring with them.

2) *The underdetermination of theory* - no theory can ever be fully tested because of induction. Guba (1990) stated that no unequivocal explanation is ever possible, as there are many different social constructions and there is no foundational way to choose between them.

3) *The value ladenness of facts* – Positivists assume inquiry can be value free and objective, but if 'reality' can be seen only through a theory window, it can equally only be seen through a value window – many constructions are possible, and again, it may not always be possible to choose between them (Guba 1990).

4) *The interactive nature of the relationship of the researcher and the researched-into* – the positivist assumption of complete objectivity is not possible, the results of an inquiry are always shaped by the interaction of inquirer and inquired-into. Constructivism depicts knowledge as an outcome or consequence of human activity, "knowledge is a human construction, never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing"



(Guba 1990: p.26). Further, Lincoln stated that “knower and known not only could *not* remain distanced and separated in the process of evaluation but probably *should not*” (1990: p.68, original emphasis). The constructivist approach rejects the objectivism of the positivist paradigm, instead the interactivity between researcher and researched should be recognised, utilised and be explored as part of the initial and final research processes and products (Lincoln 1990). Consequently, the next section will focus on the philosophical assumptions that underpin the methodology adopted for this study.

### **3.1.4 Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning Methodology**

Methodology is concerned with “the logic, potentialities and limitations of research methods” (Grix 2002: p.179), and is basically inquiring “how should the researcher go about finding knowledge?” (Guba 1990: p.18). Methodological decisions are implicitly ontological and epistemological, as a researcher’s methodological approach is underpinned by and reflects specific ontological and epistemological assumptions, whether the researcher likes or realises it (Williams and May 1996). The chosen methodology logically *follows* a researcher’s philosophical assumptions, not the other way around (Grix 2002).

As a starting point, Lincoln suggested constructivists employ “qualitative rather than quantitative methods as the preferred (though not exclusive) techniques for data collection and analysis” (1990: p.69). Also, methodologically, constructivism demands that “inquiry be moved out of the laboratory and into natural contexts” in order to discern meaning implicit in human activity (Lincoln 1990: p.78). These fundamental points provide the foundation for a qualitative, naturalistic study. Further, as discussed above, the constructivist paradigm holds that social phenomena are dependent upon constructions and the interpretations of the social actors involved (Grix 2002), and the researcher is required to grasp the subjective meaning of this social action (Bryman 2008) that can be achieved through sensory experience, which in turn calls for an empirical study.

## **3.2 Ethnography**

The preceding section made clear the constructivist philosophical assumptions that underpin this research project. The aim of this section is to provide a discussion of the central features of ethnography in order to demonstrate that ethnography is an appropriate methodology both in terms of the underpinning philosophical paradigm and the study itself.

Ethnography is an approach to data collection that is now employed in a broad spectrum of work, ranging from anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, through to organisational studies and management theory (Neyland 2008). Sands (2002: p.xix) defined ethnography simply as “a tool for describing a culture in a qualitative sense”. Ethnography essentially refers to the writing (*graphie*) of others (*ethne*), it is a description of a people, population or culture (Van Loon 2001).

It has been argued previously (section 2.3.5) that it is vital that data relating to football fan rivalries is gathered from those whom actually experience the rivalry (the fans), as this offers “the most accessible means of getting to the heart of the questions about why and how groups of people do what they do in particular social contexts and settings” (Hallinan and Hughson 2001: p.3; also cited in Hallinan et al. 2007: p.290). The ethnographic methodological approach has been utilised to achieve this in a number of qualitative studies of football fandom (e.g., Giulianotti 1995; Armstrong 1998; Hallinan et al. 2007; Weed 2006; and, Clark 2006), and in this thesis this approach was used in order to gather rich data and allow opportunities to develop the research and elaborate on certain themes within a flexible, extended time period. In addition to its successful previous use to study football fans, ethnography is also considered suitable for the current project due to the preceding philosophical assumptions that underpin the research.

In order to provide further justification for employing an ethnographic approach for this study, the subsequent discussion aims to elucidate some of the central characteristics of ethnography, as outlined by Schwandt (1990), and shall be structured by Schwandt's<sup>22</sup> six prominent features of constructivist ethnographic methodologies in order to help distinguish between these characteristics: understanding lived experiences; providing

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<sup>22</sup> Schwandt (1990) outlined his six features of ethnography as summarised here, which were based upon the previous work of Guba and Lincoln (1988) and Sherman and Webb (1988).

contexts; naturalistic inquiry; employing researcher-as-instrument; following procedures that consider contexts; and inductive research.

1) *Understanding Lived Experiences* - Ethnographic methodologies are directly concerned with understanding human experience as it is lived and felt by the participants in that experience (Schwandt 1990). Ethnographic research looks to explore and appreciate the complex nature of social life, and focus on both what people say and what people might do, which is often overlooked within positivistic paradigms that use artificial settings (Emerson et al 2001). In order to focus research on participants' cultural practices and experiences embedded within them, the researcher:

Participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: p.2)

These features of ethnography lend themselves well to an in-depth, qualitative study of individuals and groups within a specific (sub)culture, for example, as mentioned previously, the study of football fans (see Giulianotti 1995; Weed 2006; Clark 2006). The current study focused on the Aston Villa and Birmingham City fans involved in football fan rivalry, and employed an ethnographic methodology to enable long-term, direct contact and rich data collection. Not only did this enable 'thick description'<sup>23</sup>, but the long term flexible nature facilitated numerous opportunities for the researcher to gain clarification on significant or contentious issues that related to the rivalry (Sugden 1996) or 'dig-deeper' in relation to certain aspects of participants' lived experiences when required (Sands 2002).

2) *Providing Contexts* - In order to capture the qualities of an experience, ethnographic methodologies encompass various procedures for bounding an inquiry within a particular

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<sup>23</sup> Bryman (2008) described thick description as a concept used by Geertz (1973) which refers to detailed accounts of social settings that can form the basis for the creation of general statements regarding a culture and its significance in people's lives. Further, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) viewed it as the ability to see and describe events in their value-laden contexts, and interpret appropriately.

context, as it is only within a context that an experience has meaning (Schwandt 1990). As Gluckman (2007) outlined, there are so many factors, contexts and considerations for any research project, that in order to realistically provide even a basic understanding of a social world or phenomenon the researcher must provide some boundaries or limits to the study. These boundaries are not only set by broad (and subjective) research questions and methodical procedures, but also subjectively by the researcher through their theoretical approach and their values, or as Guba (1990) stated, reality is seen through both a theory window and a value window. For example, the current study is underpinned by a cultural studies theoretical approach, which provided a certain framework for the study; generally speaking, a focus on power relations between the two groups of fans (Barker 2008). However, the flexibility of ethnography enables a study to extend the boundaries and limitations where necessary, as opposed to a positivist study that may have much tighter boundaries and a more rigid framework that remains focused on the testing of hypotheses (Cresswell 2007).

3) *Naturalistic Inquiry* - The third significant feature is that the contexts within which the research takes place must be naturally occurring, as opposed to being contrived or fabricated, in order to explore the actual lived experiences of the participants (Schwandt 1990). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) stated that the naturalistic approach proposed by ethnographers requires that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural state', undisturbed by the researcher. Due to the nature of the current study, i.e., there being thousands of fans at a football match or hundreds of fans in a city centre bar or restaurant, there was considered to be very little impact made upon the 'natural' environment by my presence. Although it was not the aim of the study to be *covertly* amongst fans, it was not practical to inform all the fans at each football match that they were being observed. Therefore, the vast majority of people were completely unaware that any research was being conducted, so the natural setting was not influenced by one extra person being in the stadium or the busy city centre bar amongst the masses of people. However, whilst bearing in mind the above requirements of a naturalistic study, the researcher must still acknowledge their position as "research instrument *par excellence*" (1983: p.18), as they are part of the process not an objective bystander, as outlined in the subsequent feature of ethnography.

4) *Employing Researcher-as-Instrument* - The ethnographic study should be conducted using the researcher-as-instrument who employs ordinary fieldwork methods (Schwandt 1990). This is a central feature of the subjectivist epistemology (see Guba 1990). Due to the reflexive nature of social research, researchers must recognise that they are part of the social world under investigation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). As Lincoln (1990) outlined, the interactivity between researcher and researched should be recognised, utilised and be explored as a valued part of the study, not ignored or avoided. Therefore, it may be argued that whilst in ‘the field’ the researcher must be aware of, and follow, clear procedural and ethical guidelines in order to strike a balance between valuing reflexivity and impacting the social world being studied. However, whilst this focus on procedures and ethical guidelines was reassuring in the lead up to data collection beginning, it became evident at specific points during the data collection that it is not possible to consider *every* possible eventuality or ethical consideration. There were some incidents that occurred that were unpredictable and became potentially very dangerous (discussed at length in the conclusion, section 7.5), as is to be expected within the ‘natural’ research environment (Sugden 1996).

5) *Procedures that Consider Context* - The researcher follows procedures for considering the context and experience under investigation as a complex historical, socio-cultural and geographical whole. This involves considering and exploring these factors, as they become apparent during the research process, and perhaps where required gaining further clarification or understanding through either additional participant observation or through clarifying information directly with participants. Once again, this suits the current study, as discussed (in section 2.3), rivalries are underpinned and reinforced by complex and idiosyncratic socio-cultural, historical and political factors (Giulianotti 1999; Thompson 2001). Therefore, it is both a requirement for good ethnographic research and a specific aim of the current study to follow procedures during data collection and analysis in order to consider these multifarious factors, whilst still remaining open to emerging issues and possibilities as and when they arise.

6) *Inductive Research* - The researcher rejects a hypothesis-based deductive paradigm in favour of a more inductive analysis, and as a result of that analysis, produces not a technical report in search of laws, but a type of narrative, text or case report that aims to

elucidate meaning (Schwandt 1990). A set of problems may be identified before research begins, and a general framework may be followed, but it is important for the researcher and the project to remain flexible and it be recognised that the process is mostly inductive rather than deductive (Silk, 2005).

With the above features of ethnography in mind, it is important to remember that:

At best, for the constructivist, the property of truth and the reference “is true” refers to the degree of correspondence between the inquirer’s account of participants’ lived experience and the participants’ own views on the matter.

(Schwandt 1990: p.273)

Underpinning the interaction between researcher and researched, and the whole ethnographic research process, is the role or approach of the researcher, the discussion of which shall form the basis of the following section.

### **3.2.1 Considering the Ethnographer’s Approach**

On a basic level, Bryman (2008) discussed two classification models of the participant observer’s role. Firstly, Gold’s (1958) approach made the distinction between: the *complete participant*, who is a fully functioning member of the social setting, but in a covert manner; the *participant-as-observer*, who is also fully functioning member of the social setting, but overtly, so participants are aware the researcher is actually a researcher; the *observer-as-participant*, a role that mainly includes interviews, there is some observation but no genuine participation; and finally, the *complete observer* who does not interact with participants and is completely unobtrusive. This rigid classification appears to suggest that the role of the researcher depends largely on the practicalities of the social setting, as, for example, it may not be possible for the researcher to actually participate due to physical or legal limitations, so is restricted to just observation. However, critics may question whether the complete observer role is genuine ethnography, as Hargreaves and Tomlinson (1992) warned against the mistake of assuming that ‘just being there’

actually gives one the opportunity to understand and analyse cultures, institutions and structures.

The second model considered is that of Gans (1968), which is far more fluid, as during the research process the role of the researcher is said to move between: *total participant*, where the researcher is completely involved in a certain situation, and must revert back to researcher and make notes once the situation has unfolded; *researcher-participant*, when a researcher is only semi-involved in a situation, and can fully function as a researcher; and, *total researcher*, which involves observation but not participation, an example being watching participants interact in a bar. As stated, these two models of classification are based more on practicalities of a given research situation. Gans' model allows the researcher to adopt a fluid and flexible approach that adapts to the situation, presumably to acquire the best possible data from the numerous and unpredictable situations that an ethnographer is presented with whilst in the field. This approach was adopted for the current study, as during the data collection it was possible to 'participate' as a fan in the *total participant* role during matches or around the city centre on match days – then writing notes up later in the day. There were, however, times when the *total researcher* role had to be adopted, so it was beneficial to be able to adapt to the situation and adopt the appropriate role. For instance, there were numerous occasions during the data collection when groups of fans began to argue with rival fans, and often aggressive and even violent confrontations took place. It was deemed no longer appropriate and/or safe to 'participate', so the *total researcher* role was adopted so that data collection could continue.

Sands (2002) advocated an approach which called for 'intensive participation and passive observation', and placed emphasis on partaking in particular activities with the sporting group. This involves the researcher participating as one of the population in *every* aspect of their interaction, and observation becomes integrated within the intensive participation, which provides a cognitive map to reach deeper levels of experience and understanding (Sands 2002). Although it may prove difficult or impossible for the researcher to participate in every aspect of the subject's lives (away from the beach or the athletics track, as Sands discussed), if the researcher can demonstrate competence in their cultural performance it will add credibility to their position as a cultural participant (increase levels

of sub-cultural capital, see Giulianotti 2002), and unlock doors to deeper levels of cultural experience. Due to the nature of the research, previous researchers have found it challenging to 'perform' as a deviant (Hobbs 1990; 1993), a Balinese villager (Geertz 1973) and as a football hooligan (Armstrong 1993; 1998). However, during this study it was, relatively speaking, an easier task to 'perform' as a football fan within Birmingham during participant observation. Owing to existing knowledge and familiarity with Birmingham, it was less stressful than it might have been to negotiate the football-related settings on match day, to participate amongst fans and join in with conversations within the stadium as well as in bars or train stations in the city centre.

Due to the practicalities of field research, it is argued that Gans' model is most suitable as it contains scope for the researcher to be flexible and also enables the opportunity for the researcher to make notes or spend time writing detailed accounts. This is important as participant observation involves not only gaining access to (often via 'gatekeepers'), and immersion into, new social worlds, but also it is equally as important to produce written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these 'mysterious' worlds to others (Emerson et al. 2001).

### **3.2.2 Representation**

The objective of the ethnographer, to generate an adequate written account of the socially constructed reality under investigation (Guba 1990), has been frequently discussed and referred to as representation (Van Maanen 1995). From a cultural studies perspective, representation refers to both a social and a symbolic relationship. Social in the sense of 'speaking for' those without a voice, as the researcher is speaking for participants, in a similar way to political representation where a politician speaks for his/her constituency. Also, in a symbolic sense, where the researcher is 'standing in for' or 'taking the place of' signs and signifiers within the social setting which have socially constructed meanings, which is done through description, interpretation and explanation, as these signs and signifiers cannot speak for themselves so must be interpreted (Van Loon 2001).



Barker (2008) suggested that as representations are not innocent reflections of the real but are cultural constructions, there could be a significant dis-connect between the lived experiences of the participants and the researcher's account. Therefore, in relation to the two above forms of representation, questions are often asked such as "does the ethnographer adequately represent his/her [participants] in writing?" and "does his/her writing adequately represent that which is really happening?" (Van Loon 2001: p.280). Though it is to be acknowledged that what is considered adequate may be subjective and open to further interpretation. Further, Barker (2008) outlined how representation is underpinned by questions of power, as in the process of re-presenting there are inevitably decisions made on selection and organisation of data, meaning and signifying practices – what is included and what is excluded. This is referred to frequently as the 'politics of representation' or the 'crisis of representation' (see Barker 2008; Etherington 2004; Lewis 2008; Van Maanen 1995). Rather than simply repeating these discussions, the following section aims to analyse how previous researchers have dealt with such issues through adopting specific approaches to their research, in order to help to elucidate the approach of this study.

### Relative Insider

In regard to representation, there have been numerous considerations in terms of the overall role of the ethnographer and the text or narrative that is eventually produced. Giulianotti (1995) described his own position amongst Scottish football casuals as 'relative insider' and claimed he retained sufficient personal, professional and ethical distance to avoid identification as a native. However, this position may prove hard to achieve and difficult to set guidelines for, as becoming an insider suggests the researcher is accepted as one of the group, which may be difficult as this could be dependent upon so many variable factors such as: nature of a subculture (e.g., involved in or witnessing criminal activity, see Venkatesh 2008); background, appearance or gender of researcher (e.g., a female researcher may not be accepted amongst a group of males, see Jones 2008); required ability level or competency of researcher (e.g., being able to surf, see Sands 2002), levels of social or cultural capital (see Thornton 1995), and so on. It may also be especially difficult for a relatively inexperienced researcher to be competent or confident

enough to attempt to become an insider, as Giulianotti himself highlighted the difficulties of entrée into this presumably privileged position of ‘insider’.

### Social Impressionists

Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) adopted a position that makes slightly more of a distinction between researcher and participants than Giulianotti’s relative insider. Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) described themselves as ‘social impressionists’, comparing their methodological approach to an artist capturing a version of social reality over a long period of time, as opposed to a photographer who captures a split-second freeze-frame of reality. They explained:

The camera can lie. The impressionist painting on the other hand, is constructed over time and incorporates the various dimensions of the artist’s gaze and what is known about the places and people that are painted. Thus, what is produced is not reality per se, but an informed impression of that reality. The artist then offers the painting for public appraisal, acclaim or ridicule, implicitly challenging other artists to depict the chosen scene differently. In this way we regard ourselves as rigorous social scientists and as social impressionists.

(Sugden and Tomlinson 2002: p.18)

It should be acknowledged that paintings can also lie. Though Sugden and Tomlinson placed emphasis on the notion that artists highlight what they deem to be relevant, although again, it could be argued that this is also possible with a photograph, so the analogy may break down here. Sugden and Tomlinson further made a distinction between absolute and sociological truth, claiming that there are multiple vantage points and multiple truths. They argued that it is possible to construct an overall interpretation that may not be true to any single vantage point, but “by taking account of them all, including that of the researcher, the most honest representation of a given milieu’s shared truth about itself at a given point in history” can be gained (2002: p.18). Similarly, Cresswell (2007) stated the final product of the ethnography is a ‘cultural portrait’ that incorporates the views of the participants (emic) as well as the views of the researcher (etic). Though

Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) make reference to multiple social constructions, the view that there is one 'shared truth' that can be understood by a researcher is perhaps further towards the realist end of the paradigm continuum (Sands 2002) than the current study's relativist assumptions. Therefore, an approach is required that is focused less on achieving a complete truth and more on developing an understanding of the multiple social constructions and interpretations of the Birmingham football rivalry.

### Partial Interpreter

Klein (1993) highlighted a general development or move away from ethnography being considered a 'complete' account of a culture or being regarded as the 'truth':

Rather, the ethnographer is increasingly acknowledged as a partial interpreter, specifically situated in any given culture, not omnipresent, as previously treated. There is, in addition, a quality to ethnography that is "fictional", compiled as an earnest and individually experienced activity.

(1993: p.285)

Klein's account as a partial interpreter seems to align well with a constructivist paradigm, firstly, as the 'partial' implies ethnography does not attempt to provide a 'complete' account of a culture or phenomenon, an aim which would be associated more with a realist ontological approach. Secondly, Klein stated an ethnographic text is compiled as an earnest and individually experienced activity, which highlights the subjective nature of ethnography (a point also highlighted by Van Loon 2001), which again is closely associated with a constructivist paradigm (as outlined by Guba 1990). Like the social impressionist approach, the partial interpreter combines the view of the participants (emic) with the view of the researcher (etic) (Cresswell 2007). However, this specific ethnographic approach appeared more appropriate for the current study due to its compatibility with the philosophical assumptions that underpin it, specifically with regard to the relativist approach of providing a 'partial' account and the subjectivist notion of the individual experience of the researcher being incorporated. Nevertheless, employing the partial interpreter approach does not mean the researcher must not continue to monitor

their own position and behaviour during the research process, as the issue of going native may arise.

### **3.2.3 Going Native**

As stated above, ethnographers must guard against the mistake of assuming that ‘just being there’ actually gives one the opportunity to understand and analyse cultures (Hargreaves and Tomlinson 1992), as immersion into the field requires us to relinquish our comfortable position on the verandah (Malinowski 1922) and get close enough to the social actors involved for long periods of time (Emerson et al. 2001) in order to gain a rich, thick description (Geertz 1973). However, critics of ethnography have argued that researchers may get too close, too immersed in the field and cease to think as an academic (Rock 2001). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) described this as developing ‘over-rapport’ with participants, though it is perhaps more commonly known as ‘going native’ (Armstrong 1993).

Prolonged immersion in the lives of those being studied, coupled with the commitment of providing adequate representation and seeing through the eyes of social actors, can lead the researcher to go native (Bryman 2008). The researcher is said to lose sight of their position as a researcher and “therefore find it difficult to develop a social scientific angle on the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2008: p.412). It is therefore the ethnographer’s task to get close enough to the action without ever being totally incorporated within it and losing sight of their own position (Sugden and Tomlinson 2002). During the current study, ‘going native’ was avoided through a number of means. Firstly, due to living in Worcester and having to travel 40 minutes to Birmingham for each ‘period’ of participant observation, it was possible (and necessary due to living arrangements) to withdraw from the field – which then enabled the writing up of field notes and the on-going interplay between data and theory. Secondly, not living within the ‘field’, and therefore not being totally immersed, there was very little chance of ‘over-rapport’ with any specific participants – especially when compared to the type and degree of immersion of studies like those of Bourgois (2002) or Venkatesh (2008) who lived amongst participants for several years. The third mechanism to avoid going native was

through constantly engaging in reflexive thinking and consideration whenever possible, which forms the basis of the next section.

### **3.2.4 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has become an increasingly important theme in contemporary social research (Etherington 2004). Reflexivity is a reflectiveness among social researchers regarding the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate (Bryman 2008), and can be understood as a process of continuous self-monitoring throughout the research process (Barker 2008). Etherington (2004) provided a more specific explanation, describing researcher reflexivity as:

The capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research.

(2004: pp.31-32)

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) highlighted how throughout literature and research the terms reflection and reflexivity are often used interchangeably, and also how the term reflexivity is frequently used and interpreted differently, but typically draws attention to the complex relationship between the process of knowledge production and the involvement of the knowledge producer. Though reflexivity is now considered essential to the research process, the meaning given to it by the researcher and the extent to which it is carried out remains variable (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

With this slight ambiguity in mind, it is useful to draw upon some of the practical suggestions provided that focus on how to actually 'be reflexive'. Crang and Cook (2007) proposed a series of questions and considerations for a prospective ethnographer, including a focus on reflection (asking questions such as: What were your first

impressions and how have they changed? What problems did you have and how did you deal with them? Did your research change people's behaviour?), and taking it a step further to self-reflection or reflexivity (which prompted thoughts regarding: How various aspects of the research made you feel? Whether people questioned your motives or behaviour in the field and how did you respond? How did you manage your 'self' in the field and how hard was this? If you felt like giving up what kept you going?). Questions of this nature can be considered not only whilst in the field but also when writing, in order to continually 'be reflexive'. Cresswell (2007) offered similar suggestions regarding reflexivity for the researcher, which focused more on how to write in a reflexive manner. According to Cresswell, when writing all qualitative researchers should consider aspects including: "Has my writing connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated?"; "How far should I go in theorising the words of participants?"; and, "To what extent has my analysis offered an alternative to common sense or the dominant discourse?" (2007: p.180). The significance of writing in a reflexive manner has been further highlighted by Klein (1993), who reflected on his own writing:

The reflexive style performs a decentering function by drawing the reader away from the ethnographer-cum-authority... an autobiographical voice [may be used] which pulls both ethnographer and reader outside the objective perimeter of the study by encouraging self-reflection by both parties. In this way interpretation becomes a three-way interaction between ethnographer, reader and the subject(s) of the study.  
(1993: p.289)

It is acknowledged that being reflexive is not about strictly following prescriptive sets of questions and ticking them off one-by-one, rather it is a fluid process and a way of thinking (Etherington 2004), though for the prospective ethnographer the above examples and considerations by Crang and Cook (2007) and Cresswell (2007) may form a useful starting point.

Through being reflexive, any factor, emotion or aspect of behaviour from the (subjective) researcher that may in some way influence or be relevant to the research is made clear to the reader. Reflexivity places the ethnographic researcher more towards the centre of the

research as a ‘partial interpreter’ (Klein 1993), providing a voice and further perspective using the researcher as an important research instrument (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), which represents a departure from the traditional, non-reflexive approach of the researcher writing as an objective and disembodied omniscient narrator (Cresswell 2007). Further, it is acknowledged that:

How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is “positioned” and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings

(Cresswell 2007: p.179)

Openness and transparency in ethnographic writing has previously been questioned (Van Maanen 1995). The use of reflexivity exposes and makes explicit many of the moral dilemmas that are there but go unnoticed in non-reflexive research (Etherington 2004). Concerns regarding ethnographic research have been reflected on and addressed in open and candid accounts by Sugden (1996) and by Klein (1993), which discussed not only the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography, but also the formal and informal practical aspects of actual self-immersion in a subculture, following ethnographic studies on boxing and bodybuilding respectively. Sugden (1996) reflected on the ethical dilemmas and physical risks involved in ethnography, whilst Klein (1993) wrote frankly and in a reflexive manner on the danger of preconceptions and the naivety of taking what participants say at face value. These aspects are central to the ethnographic methodology, however they are often omitted from current literature, therefore it is argued here that the sort of transparency shown by Sugden and Klein is vital not only for individual projects but also for future growth and progress in this area. Venkatesh (2008) is a good example of how this can be done, as he wrote very openly about the research process, his relationship with various participants and his own feelings and ethics regarding a number of illegal activities that he was either witness to or actually complicit in. This openness and reflexivity does not only provide the reader with a more in-depth account, but also benefits future researchers embarking on field work and provoke discussion surrounding a number of ethical concerns or scenarios.

It has been previously highlighted that critics of reflexive texts feel they are too messy, subjective and open ended (see Coffey 1999) or that they are too verbose when focusing on *our* field experiences, which diverts ethnographies away from their prime purpose of making sense of *other people's* realities (see Crang and Cook 2007). The response to this by advocates of reflexivity has been to explain fully and justify their own philosophical approach (Coffey 1999), especially in terms of subjectivist research and actually valuing the subjectivities of the researcher (Lincoln 1990). Simultaneously, and possibly ironically, researchers are also reflexive to ensure there is not too much of 'themselves' in the research (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000), asking questions like 'Am I focusing too much on *my* experiences?'. Mindful of these challenges, the following section discusses some of the considerations for this study.

### **3.2.5 Considerations for the Current Ethnographic Study**

This study adopted a reflexive approach throughout the research process. To enable reflexive thinking, there were frequent periods of withdrawal from the field (which were enforced due to living arrangements) that provided time to reflect on the data collection process. Previous researchers have advocated periods of withdrawal as an observer, "withdrawal perhaps to the study, the library and the university so one can clear one's head and regain perspective before returning as a participant" (Rock 2001: p.32). Due to the nature of the group under investigation, and through the practicality of location, immersion into the football fan subculture lasted for relatively short periods, before withdrawing 'back home' to draw together notes, ideas and continue the reflexive interplay between theory and evidence. As Klein (1993) stated above, the ethnographer is no longer necessarily omnipresent, taking part in *every* aspect of the participants' lives. This enables critical, reflexive thinking whilst *both* in the field and when separated from it, which is very much in line with the flexible approach discussed previously by Gans (1968). It is also envisaged that these periods of withdrawal shall help prevent over-report (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) or going native (Bryman 2008). 'Traditional' anthropologists would often travel to foreign destinations and research completely unknown cultures and lived experiences, spending literally all their time amongst 'the



natives'. The nature of studying football fans means they cannot be researched through constant immersion in their lives (nor is it the aim of this study to do so), as fans are scattered across the Birmingham area and there would be restrictions and challenges regarding access to their home, workplace, and so on. Fans do not spend all of their lives together, instead they usually (but not always) come together at specific times, e.g., on match days or other organised social occasions (Giulianotti 1999). Whilst there are exceptions, like supporters from the same family or work colleagues, this generalisation influences the actual practicalities of research and the researcher's self-immersion in the field.

I aim to provide, to borrow from Klein (1993), a 'partial interpretation' of the football fan subculture in Birmingham, which focuses specifically on the rivalry between the two sets of fans and the social, historical and cultural factors that underpin this fan rivalry. The partial interpretation produced shall incorporate the views and experiences of both the participants (emic) as well as the researcher (etic) (Cresswell 2007). Though it is acknowledged that football transcends everyday life (Stone 2007), it is not the aim of this study to provide a representational text for a whole way of life for the fans. However, due to the self-immersion in the field, a broad insight into various fans' lived experiences shall be gained. During the early stages of the research process, it was vital to remain open to *any* social action, behaviour or meaning making, as it was envisaged that until certain themes began to emerge and develop during the research process (interplay between theory and evidence), that anything could have conceivably been related to the rivalry between the two groups of fans. For instance, before the start of the data collection it had not been envisaged that the chants at matches would be of any particular significance. Yet, they were certainly not omitted from field notes and consideration, and the open approach to data collection meant that it became apparent very quickly just how significant the meanings and topics of chants actually were.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The current research project aimed to explore and interpret the social, historical and political factors that underpin this particular football fan rivalry. The constructivist

approach adopted in this study perceived people's knowledge, opinions, interpretations and experiences as meaningful properties of social reality, and this study aimed to gather data from those whom actually experience the rivalry – the fans. As outlined in the preceding section, one of the most effective ways to explore and interpret this football fan rivalry is through ethnography – specifically, using participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The following discussion shall highlight the strengths and limitations of these methods, whilst providing a rationale for their use in this study.

Firstly, participant observation shall be discussed, focusing on the research setting and the writing of field notes. Secondly, there shall be an overview of semi-structured interviews, before outlining a rationale for the sample and acknowledging the ethical considerations for this study. The research strategy will then be outlined, followed by the method of data analysis and a note on the use of ethnography within cultural studies.

### **3.3.1 Participant Observation**

Participant observation has its origins in British anthropology and the Chicago School of Sociology, and is based on generating data through observing and listening to people in their natural setting (Gray 2009). This method is used to explore and understand people's social meanings and interpretations of their own experiences (Cresswell 2007). It involves “gaining access to and immersing oneself” in specific (sub)cultures, in addition to “producing written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these worlds to others” (Emerson et al. 2001: p.352). As the approach of the researcher, including going native, representation and reflexivity, were all discussed in the previous section (ethnography section 3.2), the subsequent sections shall focus on the research setting and field notes used in this study.

#### **Research Settings for Football Fan Research**

Participant observation involves “establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life

and social processes that occur in that setting” (Emerson et al. 2001: p.352). Therefore, it is important that the ‘place’ or research setting is appropriate for the research question. For instance, for the current study the presence of football fans was essential. Though there can be exceptions, generally the research setting, or field, is not demarcated by a distinct geographical boundary (Bryman 2008), it is more likely that locations can be identified where social actors (in this case, the fans) come together and interact as members of an imagined community (Anderson 2006). Emerson et al. (2001) discussed the conceptual construction of the field, and stated that although classic ethnographic naturalism views the field as a geographic place (for this study, the city of Birmingham and specific venues within the city), those concerned with examining the emotions and interpretations focus on inner lived experience in ways that blur the distinction between the field and its representational venue. Nevertheless, there are certain spaces and specific places that emerged from the data as being meaningful and symbolic (see discussion chapter five on territory) for the fans, most notably the stadiums of each club. Therefore, to clarify, this study viewed the two sets of fans as imagined communities who are not permanently located in a specific place, but large groups of these members can be found interacting together at various times and venues.

First and foremost, football fans come together at the football ground on match days. The ground, as a physical manifestation of the football club, is a symbolic emblem of the surrounding community, from whence it usually draws its core fans, and when researching football fandom, a considerable amount of time is often spent at the ground or stadium as a participant observer (Giulianotti 2002). This is not only where matches are played, but it is also where fans come together to enjoy a communal experience, (re)produce and partake in the football subculture, and quite possibly demonstrate feelings and emotions towards rival opposition (Clark 2006). All of which involve the ground itself to a certain degree, as it is said that the “ground enhances [the fans’] thick solidarity with their fellow supporters, crowds of whom generate an atmosphere on match days that is considered to be special or unique” (Giulianotti 2002: p.33).

As the ground on a match day is so central to the fans’ experiences and imagined communities, participant observation was conducted on match days, including designated league games and also cup games involving Aston Villa and Birmingham City. Attending

these matches as a participant observer enabled rich data to be gathered through observation in and around the ground on match day. A benefit of ethnography is that it is flexible enough to incorporate changes to the research design (Gray 2009). For example, originally a number of matches had been identified as opportunities for participant observation. However, due to other commitments and (more significantly) the price and availability of tickets the initial plan had to be adjusted and matches were attended as and when it was practical and possible. Also, due to the two Birmingham teams being drawn to play each other in the quarter-final of the League Cup, there was an unexpected match between the two – which resulted in an ‘extra’ data collection opportunity involving both clubs and also a completely different atmosphere, as this game was played at night (rather than the 12-noon Sunday kick-off times for league games between the two teams, which is a police tactic aiming to deter drinking and therefore ‘trouble’). It was a very different environment and atmosphere from the other matches observed – far more animosity, tension and very overt hatred between the rival fans – which spilled over into fighting between fans and police, numerous casualties and scores of arrests. Without the ‘luck’ of the two teams being drawn together and also the flexibility of the ethnographic approach to incorporate this opportunity, it would not have been possible to collect such valuable, rich data.

Justification is also provided for participant observation of football fans outside and away from the ground by the work of Weed (2006; 2007) who outlined how a social space (in this instance a pub or bar) can be transformed into a sporting space by the addition of football spectators. The pub is described as being a ‘third place’ to watch football (after watching it in the stadium and at home), as it is not quite the same experience as ‘being there’ live at a game, but the shared communal space and experience means that, according to Weed (2006), watching the game in a pub is more enjoyable than watching on television at home. Although it is acknowledged that the pub is an important and relevant ingredient of the experience of football fans, it could be argued that in order to provide justification for his study, Weed (2006) slightly over-emphasised this role and played up to the notion that watching games ‘live’ is not the experience it once was following the ‘sanitisation’ of football grounds following the Taylor Report (Taylor 1990) and the commercialisation and commodification of the 1990s. Attendances at football matches in the Premier League remain substantial, which would suggest that watching

'live' is still attractive to fans (Spaaij 2006). Nonetheless, Weed (2006) suggested that the pub as an additional social space should offer useful data for an ethnographic research project. Though this guidance for research was considered, the majority of participant observation was conducted 'live' at matches within the stadium. It emerged quite quickly that engaging and conversing with fans was much easier within the stadium, as it is very common to be seated next to someone you have not met before – so striking up a conversation is considered – if not quite the norm – then at least not particularly unusual. However, in bars, fans are more likely to arrange to meet friends to watch the game and interact in small groups within the bar – so as a researcher it was more difficult to gain access to groups of fans, compared to having an allocated seat next to a different group of fans at every match that was attended, which facilitated interaction.

There were still a number of unexpected opportunities to gather data and spend time amongst the fans during the research process, in a number of locations away from the ground. For instance, following an interview with one participant, I was invited to watch a game later that day in his home, along with his two sons. It is therefore the task of the ethnographer to remain open and flexible to new developments in order to gather rich data (Sands 2002). Another source of data during participant observation that was not initially envisaged was online fan forums and chat-rooms (fanzines). These 'virtual' environments had not been considered at the outset, but due to recommendations by fans – time was subsequently devoted to numerous fanzines (such as: *Singing the Blues*, *Keep Right On*, *Heroes and Villans*, and *Villatalk*) used by either Aston Villa or Birmingham City fans. The academic study of online sports fan sites and forums is growing, as is the academic status of studies on 'virtual' interactions of fans (see Palmer and Thompson 2007; Waters et al. 2011; and Boellstorff et al. 2012). Through these sites it was possible to view comments and perspectives on a range of topics, including the Birmingham rivalry. It was also useful in helping to identify themes and explore the back-and-forth between fans when discussing their rivals (for instance, when discussing territory, see Chapter five). During the course of the long data collection process, it was also beneficial to engage with some of the forums and chat-rooms to see what particular gossip or hot-topics were present amongst fans, which might act as a 'lead in' or an 'ice-breaker' prior to entering the field and attempting to converse with the fans as a participant observer, before returning home to write up field notes and conversations. During the long process of

participant observation (over twelve months), it was important to record and continually analyse field notes in order to represent what had been observed and provide descriptive accounts of people, scenes and dialogue, as well as personal experiences and reactions relating to the research question (Emerson et al. 2001).

## Field Notes

Van Maanen stated that “there is no unified version of what field notes stand for nor how they are used to build an ethnographic report” (1995: p.24). As texts, “field notes are through and through products of a number of writing conventions, varying not only in content but in style, voice, focus and point of view” (Emerson et al. 2001: p.365). Some view rich, detailed field notes as essential, which require careful analysis and comparison, whereas others regard field notes as “a relatively marginal or preliminary activity” (Emerson et al. 2001: p.355), as it is not taking notes in the field, but the interaction between the researcher and the so-called research participants that is the fieldwork. Nevertheless, Sands (2002) correctly observed that field notes remain the principal method for recording what the fieldworker sees and experiences and translating those representations, images and words into a record that can be accessed and, once refined, understood by others. It can be surmised from these statements that what is important is capturing and representing what has been observed, not necessarily following a prescriptive way of writing.

In practice, making notes of participant observation should involve both trying to describe things in breadth and trying to focus on what seems most important, though it has also been acknowledged how difficult a novice ethnographer may find this, often not knowing what is important, what ought to be written, and so on (Crang and Cook 2007). During the early stages of the field work of this study, the field notes were very descriptive – making observations and setting the scene, seemingly describing everything that happened in painstaking detail (as a novice ethnographer I was indeed unsure of what exactly to take note of). As the research developed, there were certain areas and fan behaviours that became the focus of the study – so more attention was given to these aspects, and the amount of attention given to the basic descriptions of the football match and the stadium

and the general fan behaviour decreased significantly. In relation to this, Emerson et al. (2001) made a distinction between the 'polished', final ethnographic accounts and the 'raw' field notes that precede them, which are perhaps unclear and lacking focus, especially during the early stages of a study but will be 'polished' as the process continues.

'Raw' field notes are written in close proximity to the field, meaning that they are written more or less as events happen and as the participant observer experiences them (Emerson et al. 2001). Sands (2002) outlined how the use of laptops made writing up notes much easier, however they were still impractical in terms of taking notes in the field, and often hand written notes were made on scraps of paper, or anything else available. Gray (2009) also highlighted problems with the practicalities of note taking, as "accurate, detailed and extensive field notes are difficult to write, especially when the researcher is in the field" (2009: p.185). A technological advancement in recent years that may aid the ethnographer is the smart phone. The smart phone enables the ethnographer to write notes on their phone whilst in the field, without attracting any undue attention, as it is now an everyday occurrence to see an individual using their phone in most public settings. Depending on the situation and nature of the participants, this may be especially useful, as trying to vacate the field briefly to write something down may lead participants to become uneasy or mistrustful of the researcher (Giulianotti 1995) or arouse suspicions as to the nature of the researcher's presence (Hobbs 1990). This was certainly used during the participant observation, as whenever there was a spare moment during a game or leaving the ground, notes were made on the smart phone – which aroused no suspicion as it is now an extremely common sight to see someone in and around a football stadium using their phone – to check scores or send text messages, and so on. It was even possible to take photos and make digital sound recordings on the smart phone, which aided the recall of specific situations at a later date and helps demonstrate what the fieldwork entailed (for example, a number of photographs taken on a smart phone during fieldwork were used during academic conferences to bring the data collection and dissemination of analysis to life).

Bryman (2008) discussed a similar classification of field notes to that of Emerson et al. (2001), making a distinction between jotted or scratch notes (raw field notes), and full

field notes. Full field notes are based on a more detailed re-writing of the jotted notes made whilst in the field, and these become what Emerson et al. (2001) referred to as 'polished', final ethnographic accounts, which are tied into specific themes or arguments used to construct and organise the ethnography. For example, jotted notes may describe events as they happen during fieldwork, whereas full field notes discuss events in more detail, involve reflection by the researcher, and can be linked or analysed in comparison with previous events and themes that may have already been identified. This also demonstrates how writing field notes is an important part of the on-going development and analysis of data during a research project (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), as themes are identified and reflected upon in a constant interplay between the data gathered, the emergent themes and the theoretical framework of the study.

In writing field notes, ethnographers face "constant choices not only in what to look at and take note of, but also in how to write down these matters" (Emerson et al. 2001: p.365). Similarly, Crang and Cook (2007) stated it is impossible to make extensive notes of everything observed, and therefore whilst concentrating on the research question, researchers may subjectively focus on some issues in the early stages and miss other issues that may re-emerge and turn out to be important later in the project. As alluded to above, this was a challenge during data collection, and initially there were times when I questioned whether or not I was conducting research correctly, or whether I was really finding anything that would help explore the rivalry. However, through making extensive notes and reading through them repeatedly, themes began to emerge and this gave me far more confidence to continue. This is where it was important to remain reflexive - reflecting and monitoring thoughts and decisions during the research process (Etherington 2004) - in order to identify any areas or themes that are related to the research question that may have been prematurely passed-over or regarded as insignificant. This demonstrates the subjective nature of ethnographic field notes, which is in alignment with the subjectivist epistemological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm (Guba 1990) that underpin the current study, as analysis was on-going throughout the process and it is acknowledged that decisions were constantly made as to what should be recorded, what was significant and what required further exploration.



Ethnographic studies frequently combine participant observation with other methods of gathering data, often to gain a deeper insight and get clarification on certain themes, as Sands (2002: p.63) explained:

Participating and observing produces a wide-angle view of cultural behaviour. Flowing with the currents of cultural reality, the ethnographer learns and assimilates much. At some point, the fieldworker must turn attention to the individual lives of the people, either to have concepts clarified, to have behaviour explained, or to understand the effects of behaviour on individuals.

The most popular methods employed in ethnographic studies are participant observation and interviews (Cresswell 2007). As part of this thesis, and in addition to participant observation, data was gathered from a number of football fans of both clubs through semi-structured interviews, a discussion of which forms the basis for the subsequent section.

### **3.3.2 Interviews**

Interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and can be made explicit through research (Amis 2005). Early pioneers of ethnography such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Margeret Mead only used unstructured interviews, as 'in-depth interviews' and 'focus groups' were not common (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006), though it may be argued that no interview is ever completely unstructured (Gray 2003), as the researcher will always have areas or themes they want to gather information about. Increasingly, researchers reacted to standardised measures that viewed interviews as neutral tools for gathering data, which were thought to neglect the personal and localised knowledge of the research participant, so gradually interviews were seen as sites for persons telling their stories to empathic listeners focusing on meaning and personal experience, rather than objectively gathering data (Knapik 2006).

The purpose of the qualitative interview is "to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees" (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006: p.314). The research interview is a

production site of knowledge, as interview knowledge is socially constructed or ‘produced’ by the interaction of interviewer and interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Knowledge is not merely found, mined, or given, but is “actively created through questions and answers, and the product is co-authored by interviewer and interviewee” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: p.54). As Knapik suggested, the interview process should be viewed as a mutual exploration, as the process is not meant to be based on participants’ reporting their experiences “to a generic receiver” (2006: p.11).

Interviews are probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman 2008), as they are seen as a way of accessing, uncovering and exploring the meanings that underpin people’s lives, behaviours, feelings, etc. (Arksey and Knight 1999). Interviews have been characterised in a variety of ways, based on their method and the objectives of the research. The explanations of these various categories of interview demonstrate how some of these approaches are unsuitable for the current study. For example, the *closed* or *structured* approach is most commonly employed to collect data for quantitative analysis (Amis 2005), and often uses pre-prepared questionnaires where the same questions are rigorously posed to all participants (Gray 2009). Therefore, this does not allow for clarification on complex issues, or a flexible interplay between participant observation and interviews as themes emerge and the research process develops, though there may be a greater level of generalizability from the data. The typologies and terms used in research methods literature for qualitative research interviews often overlap, and the labelling of different interview approaches can be confusing (see Sands 2002; Flick 2009; or Gray 2009). Therefore, for clarity, the following section outlines the rationale for the type of interview employed in the current study and discusses a number of important factors.

### Qualitative Research Interviews

Some practitioners (for example, Sands 2002) consider semi-structured and informal interviews to be essentially the same, however Bryman (2008) and Robson (2002) both claimed informal interviews were classed as unstructured rather than semi-structured. Informal/unstructured interviews usually have a list of topics to be covered, and the

interviewee is often left in control (Robson 2002). One of the interview types outlined by Flick (2009) was the ethnographic interview, where interviews supplement participant observations in ethnographic studies in an informal way. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) drew on Spradley (1979) to state that informal/unstructured interviews can also be considered synonymous with the ethnographic interview, due to the informal and flexible approach taken in both. Therefore, it can be argued that although there may be slight differences between some practitioners' terms, many of these typologies actually share the same characteristics.

With this mind, and for clarification, it appears pertinent to state that the current study employed semi-structured interviews, which have the following important characteristics. Semi-structured interviews have their list of topics and often have pre-determined questions (based on previous literature and/or initial participant observation), however, significantly for the current study, the wording and order can be changed so further prompting and explanation is possible (Robson 2002), and as themes develop over the course of the study the focus and questions can adapt appropriately (Bryman 2008). They are generally organised around “a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee(s)” (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006: p.315). This flexibility, in keeping with the ethnographic approach to research, affords the study the ability to adapt and focus on emerging themes as the process of participant observation and semi-structured interviews develops (Etherington 2004), so the list of questions for the first interview may turn out to be different from the list of questions for the last interview in a study. This avoids rigorous adherence to an interview transcript or schedule which can interfere with or prevent the gathering of rich data. The adaptation and evolution of the interview transcripts did occur during the data collection process, though more in terms of the probing of specific areas in more/less depth, rather than the structure changing dramatically. This may have been due to a large amount of the participant observation already having been conducted before any of the interviews started – so a number of themes (and therefore the broad interview structure) had begun to emerge and take shape. Williamson (2006) stated that if a semi-structured interview schedule is to be used, it should be piloted in order to ensure it is collecting the kinds of data that are required, though it is acknowledged there is flexibility within this methodology that allows for questions to be adjusted in order to encompass new

perspectives or emerging themes. Therefore, if questions can change during the data collection process then extensive piloting may not be required, though one or two pilot interviews may be of benefit in terms of the interviewer practicing their own technique and gaining experience. Two informal pilot interviews were conducted prior to commencing the formal research process. These were valuable, specifically as the participant in the second pilot study provided useful feedback regarding giving the participants time to think and elaborate, rather than quickly moving on to the next question – which hopefully then benefitted the formal interview process.

Critics of qualitative interviews have highlighted how interviews rely heavily upon participants being able and willing to give accurate information (King and Horrocks 2010). Roulston (2010: p.2, original emphasis) made a similar claim, as she stated radical critics of interviewing are sceptical about whether interview accounts can actually “reflect either what is *inside* people’s heads, or what actually happens out there in a *real* world, and posit that interviews are not satisfactory substitutes for direct observation”. Though this may be a difficult issue for advocates of interviewing, the combination of interviews along with participant observation and triangulation of data during the current study means data can be analysed to ensure, for example, that what individuals *say* is generally reality congruent to what they *do*. The combination of participant observation and interviews was certainly beneficial during the research process. For instance, one participant stated during an interview that he was a ‘big’ fan of his team and always had been, but that he didn’t get ‘too worked up’ at matches and did not swear or shout abuse at rival fans. However, a number of weeks later I conducted participant observation at a match and (coincidentally) saw him doing those exact things – swearing and shouting abuse at rival fans (who were seated twenty feet to his right and about thirty feet from where I was seated). I managed to speak to him after the final whistle as everyone filed out of the stadium and he admitted that he had contradicted himself slightly, but he said that it was a ‘one-off’ and it was just because it was a tense match against one of their rivals also battling relegation. This made me reflect on his interview and consider just how much I could take his interview at face value, and ensured I remained reflexive throughout the data collection process.

It was also claimed by Roulston (2010) that critics maintain that there is researcher bias involved in the interview process. The qualitative interview aims to find out what

participants know and feel; therefore researchers should attempt to avoid influencing the interviewee as much as possible, either through their conduct or the questions they ask (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). However, whilst this may be a major concern for researchers from a realist epistemological position, who aim to avoid bias and remain objective and detached (King and Horrocks 2010), studies like the current one from a constructivist (Guba 1990) position openly acknowledge and value the subjective position of the researcher. So although constructivists still look to avoid any obtrusive interaction during interviews, the aim is not complete objectivity, so the influence of the researcher during the ‘production’ of the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) may be perceived to be less of a concern.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) placed emphasis on the crucial role of the interviewer as the skills, sensitivity, cultural/political views and knowledge of the researcher become essential to the quality of knowledge produced. This further highlights the subjective nature of research, which aligns with the constructivist philosophical paradigm of the current study, which values the subjectivity of research and the role of the researcher both during participant observation and interviews. An important aspect of the interview being constructed by interviewee *and* interviewer is the interaction during the actual process. Interviews should be conversations (Stroh 2000), which can often depend on the types of *questions asked* and the *rapport* built up between the interviewer and interviewee during the mutual construction of the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). These two important aspects shall be discussed further here.

### Using Questions

Robson (2002) outlined three main types of question in a semi-structured interview. These are closed, open and scale. Closed questions make the interviewee choose between two or more fixed alternatives (Robson 2002), and are limiting in terms of the meaning and explanation an interviewee may be able to provide (Stroh 2000), therefore may not be of most use during an interview. Open questions have no restrictions on the content or the manner in which they can be answered, and can elicit richer, in-depth information on a participant’s lived experiences, and scale questions ask the interviewee to state a degree of

agreement or disagreement (Robson 2002). Roulston (2010) highlighted the value of open questions for semi-structured interviews, often preceding follow-up questions or ‘probing’ to gain clarification or explore themes further. The current study predominantly used open questions with additional ‘probing’, which reflects the flexibility of ethnography, however, it still remained a challenge with some of the participants who remained reluctant to elaborate or go into depth throughout their interviews. This meant that more probing was required, often asking the same question in a different way. Equally, there were a number of participants who required very little prompting, and it was more a case of guiding the ‘conversation’.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also paid close attention to the importance of active listening, which includes listening to what is said and how it is said, involving body language and intonation, before perhaps asking the next question. A useful analogy is used that not only helps explain active listening but also further demonstrates how an interview is mutually constructed – it is like a game of chess where each move by an opponent changes the structure of the game, and “each player has to consider the multiple implications of the opponent’s move before making the next move” (2009: p.139).

There are also a number of specific recommendations made by practitioners in terms of what to avoid when questioning. Leading questions, which suggest or lead interviewees towards a certain answer, should be avoided as the interviewer must not predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked (Cresswell 2007). The same is said to apply to ‘loaded questions’ or questions that contain assumptions, as even seemingly basic or common-sense assumptions may be incorrect (Arksey and Knight 1999), as the focus is on finding out what the interviewee knows. Questions should be delivered in as neutral a way as is possible, and the interviewer should also avoid jargon, double-barrelled questions or hypothetical questions that may confuse the interviewee, or anything too ambiguous (Gray 2009), as the focus must remain on the research question. The pilot interviews conducted provided good practice and helped to avoid basic mistakes, though it is acknowledged that perfecting the craft of interviewing can only come with experience (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In addition to the questions asked, many research practitioners also highlight the importance of rapport in interviews.

## Rapport

Clarke (2006) stressed the importance of developing rapport, as it has a fundamental bearing on what and how much people are prepared to disclose. Rapport refers to the degree of understanding, trust and respect between interviewer and interviewee (Arksey and Knight 1999). Throughout the interview, the aim is to encourage the interviewee to provide as much information as possible, unself-consciously and in their own words, so it is vital to help foster a safe and comfortable environment and develop rapport (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006). On a basic level, it is important to listen, make eye contact and be sensitive to any signs of emotional reaction (Arksey and Knight 1999). DiCicco and Crabtree (2006) claimed the development of rapport involves four stages: apprehension, exploration, co-operation and participation.

During the first phase of the interview there is regularly apprehension, which is often due to the strangeness of the situational context and the unfamiliarity of those involved, or perhaps the interviewee being unsure of the exact nature of the research (Clarke 2006). It is advised to make the first question very broad, open-ended and non-threatening (Cresswell 2007), though during the current study there were not any questions that could have been deemed threatening or sensitive due to the nature of the research question. In the exploration phase, the interviewee becomes engaged in in-depth description and listening and learning is accompanied by an emerging sense of bonding and sharing (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006). For this opening phase of every interview, participants were asked how long they had followed their team and what or who influenced their team identification – as these were considered to be simple and open-ended questions that participants could elaborate on and start to feel comfortable about answering.

The co-operative phase is characterised by a comfort level, where those involved are not worried about offending one-another and therefore there is the opportunity for the interviewer to gain clarification of certain points, and for the interviewee to correct the interviewer on any matter, as both try and make sense of the interviewee's world (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006). This may also be a good time to ask possibly sensitive or complicated questions that would not have been deemed suitable earlier in the process (DiCicco and

Crabtree 2006). However, it is important at this stage to ensure there is not over-rapport, it is a fine balance between becoming too friendly and producing data (elongating the interview may lead to interviewee's losing patience and leaving before themes have been discussed) (Bryman 2008). Depending on the time constraints, as the interview progresses, a strong rapport may rapidly develop that leads to the participation stage, as the interviewee adopts the role of guiding and teaching the interviewer (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006). I found it useful on a number of occasions to ask questions in a way that emphasised and framed the participant as very much the expert who was teaching me something that I knew nothing about. This enabled an in-depth description of perspectives or events by the participants, in addition to giving them further confidence that they could pass on this knowledge to someone that was genuinely interested in what they had to say – especially on occasions when participants seemed to be nervous or lacking in confidence. However, it was also recognised that not every interview reached the fourth level of rapport, some interviews terminated during stage two or three due to time or the individuals involved, though this is a useful model to help further understand the interview process. In addition to the questions asked and rapport being developed, at a basic level gathering useful, rich data is also dependent on the sample used.

## Sampling

Qualitative research depends on relatively small samples that are purposefully or purposively selected (Cresswell 2007). Purposeful sampling is an iterative process that seeks to maximise the depth and richness of the data in order to address the research question (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006). These interviewees are deemed (by the researcher or perhaps by an informant) to be information-rich (Williamson 2006). Information rich samples are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues that at the time are perceived to be of central importance. With regard to the current study, this meant that interviews were conducted with individuals deemed to have knowledge and experience of the football fan rivalry between Aston Villa and Birmingham City, as opposed to individuals who have little or no knowledge or experience, who would not identify themselves as a fan or a supporter (Giulianotti 2002) of either team. Participants were identified in different ways, though the majority were fans who I began talking to at



matches during participant observation, who then agreed to give me email addresses or phone numbers to be contacted at a later date about taking part in an interview. An exact sample size had not been specified prior to the start of data collection, as that may have inhibited the research process by ending data collection before themes had been sufficiently explored (Cresswell 2007). Instead, once it was felt that data saturation point had been reached (no new themes or information was emerging) then two more interviews were conducted, to further confirm that saturation point had been reached, before ending the data collection. When conducting research with the selected sample, and during the research process as a whole, there were a number of ethical considerations.

### **3.3.3 Ethical Considerations**

There are a number of ethical guidelines and procedures to be aware of and prepared for during data collection. Flick (2009) detailed a number of ‘codes of ethics’ provided by organisations that offer assistance to researchers, examples being the British Sociological Association (BSA) who have formulated a statement of ethical practice, and the Social Research Association (SRA) who provide ethical guidelines for research.

Ethical clearance was gained for the current study by completing checklists and formal processes for research within the university and also within the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science, in addition to the completion of an ‘ethics workshop’ run by the Graduate Research School. Participants selected for semi-structured interviews were fully informed of their right to withdraw and their anonymity (see appendix 3), and were given an informed consent form to sign that provided them with information concerning the nature of the study, information regarding the researcher and an overview of their involvement. During participant observation, it was not practical (or even possible) to inform every individual of the researcher’s presence in the field, as there may be tens of thousands of football fans attending a match. Also, due to the numbers involved, it was not possible for the researcher to identify individual fans, therefore complete anonymity remained for any individual that happened to be present and observed. It was difficult to offer complete confidentiality, as the aim of the research was to use information given by participants. Therefore, with this in mind, King and Horrocks (2010) offered the following

guidance: participants have the right to expect data will be handled with due respect and discretion; they have the right to their information will not be available to the general public; and as the data was generated for a specific purpose, it should not be used for any other means, unless negotiated with participants. In addition, names of participants were changed to ensure anonymity. To further ensure confidentiality, data was stored by the researcher on a password-protected computer, with back-up copies stored on a password-protected data storage device, and information was available only to the researcher and supervisors.

DiCicco and Crabtree (2006) acknowledged how unexpected and unforeseen ethical dilemmas may arise during qualitative research, and further stated that broadly speaking the researcher must aim to reduce the risk of unanticipated harm to anyone involved, protect participant information, and inform individuals about the nature of the study where deemed necessary. Sugden (1996) similarly admitted concern regarding the diverse ‘perils’ of ethnography, and suggested that researchers should be prepared for unexpected and possibly even dangerous situations to arise when in the field, and that ethnographers must rely on their own judgement as they would within everyday life. As Murphy and Dingwall (2001: p.339) stated:

Questions about the right way to treat each other as human beings, within a research relationship, are not wholly distinct from questions about the values which should prevail in a society, and the responsibility of social scientists to make, or refrain from, judgements about these.

Therefore, it is envisaged that the most effective way to deal with potential ethical dilemmas is to become familiar with the various guidelines and codes of ethics available, and reflect in a critical manner following behaviour or judgements made whilst in the field. Further discussion of the specific ethical considerations for the current study is provided in the conclusion chapter.

### **3.3.4 Research Strategy**

Having engaged with the literature from a wide range of research methods practitioners, and with the research question and constructivist paradigm of the current study in mind, the following research strategy has been implemented in order to explore and interpret the factors that underpin the football fan rivalry in question.

The study involved participant observation at football matches involving Aston Villa and football matches involving Birmingham City, including matches when the two played each other, as the aim was to be a participant observer where the imagined communities (Anderson 2006) of fans came together and interacted (Emerson et al. 2001), and this is first and foremost considered to be at football matches. The flexibility of the ethnographic study also allowed for participation at various other secondary locations and spaces when unexpected opportunities arose during the research process, like when invited to bars and on one occasion to the home of a participant to watch a match on television. Though not envisaged at the outset, online fan forums and chat-rooms were also accessed and used to gather data during the research process, as it emerged that there was extensive and vibrant interaction and discussion of rivalry amongst fans online. From the participant observation, extensive field notes were written (and on occasion voice recorded), first in 'raw' form before reflection and early stages of analysis and categorisation resulted in 'polished' or 'full' field notes (Emerson et al. 2001).

In addition to participant observation, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with fans of Aston Villa and with fans of Birmingham City. These interviews were interwoven during the period of participant observation, as one of the strengths of ethnography is that the flexibility of the research process enables interviews to provide further insight and clarification on themes and lived experiences that may have been identified during participant observation (Bryman 2008). Likewise, following interviews, it was possible to return to the field to gain further insight into a theme or issue discussed in an interview, as suggested by Flick (2009). This interplay continued throughout the process in order to gain a deep and reality congruent insight into the unique and complex social, cultural and historical factors that underpin the football fan rivalry.

Interviews were conducted in safe and comfortable locations (chosen by the participants, see Appendix 2) to aid trust and rapport (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006), and they were digitally recorded, to ensure I could concentrate on what was being said and also so that there is a permanent record of the interview (Arksey and Knight 1999). From these recordings, interviews were transcribed by the researcher (for example, see Appendix 4). Though it is acknowledged that this process was time consuming, and also that computer software is available for transcription, it was felt that there was the benefit to the research from transcribing the interviews, as this develops a familiarisation with the text (Gray 2009), and further notes could be made during this process (Flick 2009). During the research process, data was continually collected, transcribed and also analysed.

### **3.3.5 Analysis of Data**

Analysis involved breaking down data into smaller units to reveal their characteristic elements and structure, in order to interpret, to understand and to explain (Gray 2009). It is important to ensure the researcher does not separate analysis from other features of the research process (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), as within ethnography, data analysis occurs throughout the project, not just at the concluding stage (Williamson 2006). If analysis and data collection occur concurrently, the investigator is able to generate an emerging understanding of the research questions and themes, which in turn informs the sampling and the questions being asked (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006).

First, as data was collected it was transcribed, either in the form of field notes or interview transcripts, as it is understood that then the researcher is able to thoroughly read through data, make notes and highlight key points (Williamson 2006). As the process continued, revealing phrases or sections of data were highlighted, coded and assigned meaningful labels, whilst constantly comparing labels and phrases to determine whether they should be classified separately or whether they belong to an existing theme (Goodwin et al. 2009). This meant it was possible to identify the major themes and sub-themes relating to the research question (Bridel and Rail 2007), by thinking about similarities, differences and relationships, before conceptually organising data into themes in preparation for the writing up of research findings (Williamson 2006).

The process of assigning codes and grouping themes and sub-themes together enabled the development of a thematic framework. Bryman (2008) outlined a specific framework, based on the work of Ritchie et al. (2003), that employed an index of central themes and sub-themes that are represented in a matrix as these themes are essentially recurring motifs in the text that are then applied to the data. The identification of themes is the product of reading and re-reading the data transcripts continuously throughout the research process (Bryman 2008). The notion of constructing a matrix may come across as a rigid approach to what is a flexible research methodology, as a result a researcher may sense their framework is too rigid if they are having to condense or deny aspects of the data, so flexibility is key (Gray 2003).

For this study, I had not anticipated just how intuitive the analysis would be; with so many interpretations and decisions to be made with data from numerous observations and interviews. Consequently, though data was coded (see notes in section 3.3.8) and initially placed into different computer files based on initial themes, there was constant reflection and (re)interpretation as the themes emerged and developed. For instance, some thematic files were expanded, others were divided into sub-themes, some coded data was initially copied and pasted into more than one thematic file, and some themes eventually proved to lack relevance to the research question. An example of this last aspect was the factor of issues regarding race and ethnicity, which were initially considered to be relevant to the rivalry (especially when considering the varied ethnic identities within Birmingham), but as the process continued the data did not support this (this aspect is discussed further in the conclusion). The ability to move coded data around electronically and being able to copy, paste and delete when required highlights the flexibility of this approach to analysis, and suits the constant interplay throughout the ethnographic process. Therefore, it is important to remember that this inductive study is underpinned by a subjective philosophical paradigm, so the researcher is central to the decisions and judgement of how data is analysed and how themes are developed. As Ritchie and Spencer (1994: p.180) stated:

Devising and refining a thematic framework is not an automatic or mechanical process, but involves both logical and intuitive thinking. It involves making judgements about meaning, about the relevance and importance of issues, and about

implicit connections between ideas... it also involves making sure that the original research questions are being fully addressed.

Thinking about developing a thematic framework in the above way is a useful tool, as during the early stages of data collection there were a number of diverse themes identified that underpin this football fan rivalry, as all rivalries are unique, complex and have their own idiosyncrasies (Giulianotti 1999; Thompson 2001). In order to ensure appropriate decisions and judgements regarding coding and grouping themes are being made, the researcher must be reflexive throughout (see ethnography section 3.2), continuously self-monitoring (Barker 2008) and reflecting on the complex relationship between the subjective researcher and the knowledge produced (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). When no new themes are emerging during the data collection and analysis, this point is referred to as saturation, and data collection is complete (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006).

### **3.3.6 Cultural Studies and Ethnography**

As stated previously, the cultural studies perspective, which provides the theoretical underpinning of this study, does not have a clearly defined set of methodological principles (Barker 2008), however, there is a tradition of using ethnographic methods (as described above) within cultural studies in order to access people's lived experiences (Longhurst et al. 2008). Gray (2003) outlined four types of projects that might be located within a cultural studies perspective, one of those specifically focused on fan culture through ethnographic studies. Gray provided two examples, the first being Jenkins' (1992) ethnographic account of Star Trek fans, which explores the social organisation and cultural practices of this group of fans. The second example is Hodkinson's (2002) work within a Goth sub-culture that he was a member of, which employed both participant observation and interviews in order to explore and interpret his own community.

It is also significant to note that Gray (2003) described the groups under investigation as 'imagined communities' of people, which is also how the current study conceptualises the groups of football fans (discussed in literature review, section 2.2.4). Gray described how the use of this concept stemmed from studies of working class youths by members of

Birmingham's CCCS, notable examples include Willis (1977) and Hebdige (1979), who also used ethnographic methods to explore these imagined communities.

These examples provide further justification for the current study's methodology, as there are a number of ethnographic studies of fans within the broad cultural studies perspective, and as the above sections demonstrated, the specific methods to be used within this ethnographic study also align well with the constructivist philosophical paradigm of the research project.

### **3.3.7 Summary of Research Design**

The aim of the above discussions was to outline the exact methods employed in this study and provide a rationale for their use. The constructivist/ethnographic approach enabled the meanings and perspectives of participants to be studied in-depth and their particular words to be used to convey their meanings to the reader (Williamson 2006), through the 'partial interpretation' of the researcher (Klein 1993).

An important feature of qualitative design is that it is emergent, methods may alter during the course of the research process, often as a result of the analysis of data providing new directions (Gray 2009). Once again, this offers further justification for employing an ethnographic approach, as one of its main features is its flexibility (Sands 2002).

The research process included participant observation at matches involving Aston Villa and involving Birmingham City, and at secondary venues around the city of Birmingham where fans also come together. Additional data was also gathered from online fan forums and chat-rooms, where increasing numbers of football fans are interacting. Also, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Aston Villa fans and Birmingham City fans, in order to gather data directly from those who experience the football fan rivalry that is being explored. Data was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, in order to interpret which complex factors underpin the rivalry.

It is acknowledged that the methods outlined above have strengths and weaknesses, and like any chosen research method it is not suitable for all investigations – for instance, those seeking statistical data from large samples. The ethnographic methodology is however suited to the exploration of the ‘why’ research questions, those that require in-depth exploration (Williamson 2006), such as the current study. One disadvantage is that due to the time constraints involved, the required interview sample must be relatively small, which may be subject to criticism by some. However, these interviews are combined with extensive, long-term participant observation within the field, which together elicited large amounts of rich data in order to provide a partial interpretation (Klein 1993) of the football fan rivalry.

In order to assist in the overall analysis, the following chapter shall offer a socio-historical overview of the development of football from 1850 to the present day. In addition to developing an understanding of the social and historical context of the social milieu in which the rivalry is located, this chapter will also assist in becoming acquainted with some of the topics that fans discussed and events that they perceived to be meaningful – which is viewed as being part and parcel of being immersed into the subculture (Emerson et al. 2001). The rationale for this chapter is also supported by Mills’ (1959) call for the need to develop and value historical sensibilities, in order to develop our understanding of the connections between past and contemporary (sporting) cultures.

It is felt pertinent here to highlight the relative lack of literature on football in Birmingham, despite it being the ‘second city’ in England and having a long footballing tradition. A great deal of time was spent in local libraries, most notably Birmingham’s Central Library and its archive – however, books and articles on the development of football in the city were rare. The lack of sources and materials relating to the development of football in Birmingham, and also the lack of literature on the development of the rivalry which has been highlighted previously, hindered the attempts of this study to provide more detail on club rivalries and incidents relevant to the explanation of this rivalry. There was found to be a plethora of more contemporary sources that focused on specific local football clubs (often referred to as ‘annuals’), but information on the broader development of football in the city appeared to be in short supply – often only found as a smaller section buried in a larger volume on the history of the city more generally. The



lack of accessible and existing historical resources means that the following chapter is based on a mix of primary and secondary sources, though it does rely more on secondary sources that were available. Whilst this is acknowledged as not ideal, this is justified by the fact that the socio-historical account of football in Birmingham is included only to inform the discussion and provide context, whereas the thesis is primarily sociological and based on primary data collected from participant observation and interviews.

### **3.3.8 A Note on Coding and Referencing Primary Data**

Throughout the two discussion chapters, where primary data from interviews is used there shall be a reference to the interviewee's name (pseudonym), the team they support (Villa or Blues) and the number of the interview transcript (e.g. IT7). For instance, following a quotation from Archie who is a fan of Aston Villa there will be the reference: Archie (Villa IT7).

Primary data collected by participant observation was organised into sections, which was based on each individual football match that was attended amongst both sets of fans. Field notes were coded into games involving either Aston Villa (AV) or Birmingham City (BC). For instance, when participant observation was undertaken on the day when Aston Villa played Liverpool, all the field notes for that day would be coded as AV8, as these field notes were from the eighth Aston Villa game that had been attended. On the occasions where the two teams involved in this rivalry played each other, these same initials would be used with the team playing at home coming first – so the first time that Aston Villa played at home against Birmingham City the coding was AVBC1. Therefore, from this code it could be quickly ascertained that any primary data with this code came from the game when Villa were playing at home against Blues.

As data was collected and transcribed, it was colour coded under thematic headings (for example, 'Territory'). A computer folder for each heading was created, and any data (from interviews and field notes) that related to a theme was copied into the appropriate folder – using the above coding system so the original location of the data was preserved. For instance, in the folder with the heading 'Territory' the following quotation would be

placed: “Because both sets of supporters are constantly using the same bars, nightclubs, the same train stations, the same bus stations, they are constantly in one another’s faces” (Rod Villa IT4).

As data collection continued, further sub-themes were identified. This was done based on the interplay between the data and theory (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), so was relatively organic, whilst still following a basic data analysis procedure. This was done to enable new themes to emerge through an inductive process, as the interpretation of data sought to link accumulated observations to theory (Parry 2005). This approach is also in line with a subjectivist approach to research, as the researcher is at the centre of the research as a ‘partial interpreter’ (Klein 1993), which as discussed, represents a departure from the traditional, non-reflexive approach which attempts to achieve objectivity (Cresswell 2007). Therefore, the (subjective) researcher is required to remain reflexive (see section 4.2.4) throughout the fluid process of the study (Etherington 2004). This was achieved by continually referring back to field notes and transcripts, and repeatedly asking questions such as those proposed previously by Crang and Cook (2007) and Cresswell (2007).

#### **4. Socio-Historical Development of Football in Birmingham, 1850-2012**

Mills (1959) stated that it is vital to develop our historical sensibilities<sup>24</sup> in order to advance our understanding of the connections between past and contemporary (sporting) cultures. This chapter aims to undertake this objective by providing a socio-historical context for the development of football in Birmingham, whilst also attempting to trace the emergence of the clubs and their rivalry – though as previously stated; the literature available on the history of football in Birmingham and specifically on the rivalry in the city is surprisingly scarce. Incorporating this account of football in the city can help in understanding some of the emerging themes that have been identified during the data collection process. This shall be done by explicating the socio-cultural, political and economic conditions and processes that influenced and underpinned the engagement of the fans with football in the city. The chapter will achieve this by providing accounts of three distinct but connected parts.

Part one shall focus on the emergence and development of football in Birmingham, which broadly speaking covers the period between 1850-1914, centring on the diffusion of football across the city, paying particular heed to the involvement of the working classes as fans. Part two covers the ‘War Years’, spanning the two World Wars, with specific attention paid to the importance of football in wartime Birmingham as well as the various social functions of football for the people. The final part discusses the further developments within the game throughout the second half of the twentieth century, analysing the various social processes that changed football and influenced the fans’ engagement with it, whilst providing an overview of contemporary Birmingham and the demographics of the city’s population to develop an understanding of the specific social milieu under investigation.

##### **4.1. Part One: The Emergence and Development of Football in Birmingham, 1850-1914.**

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<sup>24</sup> Historical sensibility is an awareness and perception of the larger cultural scene and social processes over time, enabling the possessor to identify links between, and explanations of, both contemporary personal problems and social issues (Mills 1959).

The involvement and interest in modern sport that is an organic part of contemporary life has its origins in the Victorian era. Whilst the roots of modern organised sport have been recognised as middle-class inspired (see Morford and McIntosh 1993; Lowerson 1995; and the edited collection by Mangan 2006), “the major debate among sports historians has been about the way in which this culture of athleticism and club development spread amongst the working classes” (Huggins 2006: p.12). Tranter (1998) criticised those who have favoured a simplistic and passive downwards social diffusion process. Rather, English sport is said to have “resulted from a class-divided society and tended to accentuate rather than to heal those divisions” (Baker 1979: p.242). However, others have pointed to the limitation of a class-driven unilateral approach to recognise the many other factors which were instrumental in the spread of organised sport (Huggins 2006). Huggins (2006: p.13) specifically argued against adopting a dualistic view that “pervades much recent writing” of “middle-class, amateur sport, and its apparent social exclusiveness... contrasted with supposedly working-class sports such as professional soccer”. In recognising the complexity of social relations and challenging one-way, cause and effect relationships that disregard human agency in social transformations and social continuity (Ingham and Hardy 1993), the opening section of this chapter explores the interdependent, complex socio-cultural factors that led to the emergence and early diffusion of football in the city of Birmingham. In contrast to the majority of the existing literature, particular heed will be paid to the working classes’ involvement in processes of intra- and inter-class socio-cultural exchanges revolving around football.

Despite being England’s second largest city and at the centre of both sport and industrial development during the period considered here, there is an academic lacuna around football development in Birmingham. Therefore, the following socio-historical account is concerned with filling this gap by predominantly employing Raymond Williams’ (1977) value exchange cycle to explain and frame the complex developments and influences during the early spread of football. In doing so, this section incorporates both the complex inter-class dialogue as well as other various socio-cultural factors which interdependently influenced and shaped the emergence of football in Birmingham.

#### **4.1.1. Foundations of Early Sport in Birmingham**

Long before the establishment of the city's two main football clubs<sup>25</sup>, Birmingham's prosperous modernity was based on its economic foundations of manufacturing metal goods as well as the area's physical landscape (Chan 2007), and the city's growth was unparalleled outside London. As Barber and Hall (2008: p.283) outlined:

During the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham and the West Midlands became the pre-eminent manufacturing region of the UK and developed an industrial structure based on small firms with highly-skilled workers. This enabled the region to attract new investment in consumer goods industries.

Matthew Boulton was an early leader and inspiration in Birmingham's Industrial Revolution with his giant workshops which incorporated hundreds of craftsmen under one roof (Dent 1972). Together with James Watt, Boulton made the steam engine commercially viable, which revolutionised manufacturing (Dickinson 1936). Birmingham's innovation led to it being known internationally as both the 'Toyshop of Europe' and the 'Workshop of the World' (Chinn 1994).

Birmingham's population increased dramatically before and during the industrial revolution (Barnsby 1989), with people from all segments of the British Isles gravitating to the 'City of a Thousand Trades' (Chinn 1994) to join the working masses. This created a vortex of continuous and widespread influx of cultures, including pastimes and leisure activities. For instance, as early as the 16th century, businessman John Cooper introduced bull baiting – a bull chained to a stake in the middle of a ring, which was then attacked by dogs with the winner being the dog that withstood the bull's blows the longest – as a form of pastime, creating the excitement of a 'flutter'<sup>26</sup>. Although initially accepted and popular, this practice was banned from the market place in 1773 (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006)<sup>27</sup>. The ban, however, did not immediately cease all blood sports and the last

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<sup>25</sup> Aston Villa Football Club were founded in 1874 (Bishop and Holt 2010), Birmingham City Football Club (originally Small Heath Alliance) were founded in 1875 (Matthews 2000).

<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that the name of the largest shopping centre and landmark in the city centre, the Bull Ring, is a reminder of this historical past-time.

<sup>27</sup> The development of banning some blood sports can be explained using Norbert Elias' *Civilising Process* (2000). Specifically, it can be understood that the threshold of repugnance was advancing – or simply that previously activities and behaviour of this nature was allowed, but then it was not, as it became viewed as

recorded bull baiting in Birmingham was as late as 1838 (Skipp 1983). These activities were indeed some of the first ‘organised’ sports in the city, like cock fighting and bare-knuckle fighting in the mid-to-late 1700s, which were often centred on betting as much as the spectacle itself (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). For this widespread gambling to take place at least some basic rules were required; for instance, agreement as to when a contest had been won or lost. Therefore, it can be suggested that early (mostly blood) ‘sports’ must have had some basic but formalised rules, which, arguably, were instrumental in the increased codification of a range of sporting pastimes to come. Moreover, along with the traditional view on the role of the middle-class with regard to introducing organised sport, the formative function of the working classes in Birmingham in the organisation of early sports, especially violent ‘blood sports’, should be acknowledged as they were influential in their development and were present in large numbers (Huggins 2004).

The continuously growing number of Birmingham’s working population meant that public transportation became increasingly important. In addition to transporting teams and fans to fixtures, railway networks became vital to the spread of the emerging codification of sports. During the Victorian era, the railways promised dramatically new possibilities (Birley 1993) and were instrumental in promoting sporting activities and attracting spectators, as they were increasingly able to travel from further afield due to reduced cost and growing availability (Vamplew 1988). The increasing number of routes and cheap fares for sporting occasions encouraged progressively more fans to travel by rail to support their team. So much so, that a journalist expressed surprise in 1899 that for an away game in Derby “only a thousand [Villa supporters] availed themselves of the cheap Midland Railway excursion” (*Sporting Star* 1899b: p.1). One thousand travelling fans being considered a disappointment highlights the large numbers that were frequenting trains and football matches around the turn of the century. The Grand Junction Railway began to come through central Birmingham in 1837 (Zuckerman and Eley 1979), with stations opened in the areas that now surround the Birmingham City and Aston Villa grounds: in Bordesley (1855), Adderley Park (1860) and Small Heath (1863), and in Aston (1854) and Witton (1876), respectively. Urban development was on the rise, which, along with a

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uncivil, distasteful and/or embarrassing. This view would have been held initially by the courtly, upper classes, before it spread through society.

number of other factors<sup>28</sup>, contributed to a rapid population growth in Aston from 922 in 1831 to 16,337 in 1861 (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). The above stations have continued to serve players and fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City for more than 130 years (though it is likely players have not travelled by rail for some time). Wigglesworth (1996) observed that in the early days certain (leisure) activities would not have taken place without rail travel. For the working classes who were increasingly benefitting from reduced hours and higher wages (Vamplew 1988), cheap excursion trains<sup>29</sup> allowed them to follow their local football and rugby teams throughout the north of England, whose league structure and fixture lists had grown as a direct result of rail extensions (Wigglesworth 1996). Fans often travelled in great numbers on the railways. A significant example being in 1897 when Aston Villa played Everton in the FA Cup final at Crystal Palace. Between seven and eight thousand Villa fans travelled down to London from Birmingham, as the train carriages were said to be “full of excitement and the team’s colours” (Birmingham Daily Post 1897: p.8). The new transport links not only enabled people to travel further and faster, they also meant that sports news and newspapers could travel more rapidly and regularly than ever before<sup>30</sup>, which was integral to the developing popularity of sports and attracting spectators (Birley 1993).

Relatively unique to Birmingham was the extensive canal network. Initiated by engineer James Brindley and completed in 1772, the canals connected Birmingham to the coalfields of South Staffordshire, and more significantly to the ports of Liverpool, Bristol and Hull (Barnsby 1989). Birmingham went from land-locked to being the centre of the nation’s waterways (Leather 2001), including more miles of canal than Venice, Italy. Though not directly influencing football in terms of transporting individuals, the canal system was significant in Birmingham’s industrial growth and in the development of transport links in the region (Leather 2001), which, in turn, contributed to the increase of the population.

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, the increasing reputation of Birmingham as an industrial centre and the opportunities available to skilled and unskilled workers, in addition to the accessibility of Birmingham in the centre of the country (Chinn 1994).

<sup>29</sup> A good example of this is provided in *Sporting Star* (1899a). In 1899, fans of Small Heath made use of the cheap excursion fare and travelled from Birmingham up to Middlesbrough to support their team. A journey of this sort would have been inconceivable without the development of the railways, in terms of both time and cost.

<sup>30</sup> Local newspapers had large sports sections from the 1860s onwards, often focusing on horse racing and the associated betting, for example, the Birmingham Daily Mail (1876). Newspapers devoted solely to sport were popular in Birmingham and the surrounding area as early as the 1890s, the Sports Argus (1897) and the Sporting Star (1899) being significant examples.

In addition to the well documented middle-class impact on Birmingham's society (e.g., the planning and implementation of the transport systems, Dick 2005), there was an undeniable middle-class influence on Birmingham's sport (e.g., the creation and organisation of local football and cricket leagues, Clives 1975) during the Victorian era. With regard to football, Dunning et al. (1988: p.34, original emphasis) suggested that football "may have been developed far more *for* the working class than it was developed *by* them", which, to some extent, could be observed in Birmingham as local businessmen were often key in aiding football clubs in their formative years (Russell 1997). For example, Birmingham City FC's (initially called Small Heath Alliance) first club captain, Billy Edmunds, was a successful local business man. Alfred 'Inky' Jones was a local scales manufacturer and businessman and became the club's first official secretary and accountant. Harry Morris, a player at eighteen in 1884, became a businessman and an influential director for the club, and was also credited with 'finding' St Andrews ground in 1906 (Matthews 2000). George Ramsey, a significant captain and club secretary (Birmingham and District Football Association 1890) in the early days of Aston Villa FC, was a clerk in the brass industry, which at that time would be considered at least lower-middle class. Though it may be argued that most significant at this time was William McGregor, a Scottish draper who relocated to Birmingham and became a director at Aston Villa<sup>31</sup> and is widely celebrated as being the catalyst behind, and founder of, the Football League (Woodhall 2007). However, in addition to specific individuals, there were a number of socio-cultural factors, cricket and religion being two of those, influencing the emergence of football in Birmingham.

#### **4.1.2. The Founding of Clubs: The Influence of Cricket and Religion**

The first recorded cricket match in Birmingham was as early as July 1751 (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006) but the sport experienced an expansion only late in the nineteenth century<sup>32</sup>, which was in line with the city's industrial development. To demonstrate this

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<sup>31</sup> McGregor was also a committee member, and later vice-president, of the Birmingham & District and Counties Football Association (BDCFA) (Campbell Orr 1895).

<sup>32</sup> There was interest not only in playing but also reading about cricket during this period. Local newspapers carried extensive sections from at least the 1870s onwards that focused on local cricket fixtures and results, and even national cricket news and comment – which suggested a high level of popularity and engagement with the sport by many within Birmingham (For example, see 'Mr W G Grace' in *Birmingham Daily Mail* 1876).



spurt: the number of cricket clubs increased from 69 in 1871 to 214 in 1880: 64 were church based, 16 were pub teams, 25 came from firms (Holt 1989). The founding members of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs were members of church-based cricket teams, and in both cases the players were in search of an activity to do outside the cricket season (Gibbons 2001), which was not an uncommon practice during this period<sup>33</sup>. In the case of Aston Villa, the four founding members had watched a small group playing an informal game of football on a wasteland in Aston and decided that was what their cricket team could do to keep fit during the winter (Woodhall 2007). The connections between cricket and football helped football's early development as groups of men had already played sport together during the summer months, so it may have been a natural progression to play a different sport in the winter. However, in Birmingham, due to its swiftly increasing popularity, the less time-consuming and, arguably, faster-paced football became a rival to cricket, rather than complimenting it. Jack Hughes, one of the founders of Aston Villa FC, is purported to have said in 1876 (just two years after founding the football club) that football fever had taken over and they had lost interest in cricket (cited in Lerwill 2009: p.3). Therefore, although it may have been an initial catalyst in forming football clubs, cricket's influence on football was relatively short-lived.

Religion is also frequently credited with influencing football at this time (Russell 1997). The church and many church-ordained school masters used the notion of muscular Christianity in order to identify and develop qualities of good character – manliness, vigour, self-restraint and courage (Ingham and Hardy 1993). Sport was used as a tool, or a means to an end, to produce young men who were 'muscular Christians' (strong in body, pure in heart, faithful to friends, family and country and knew their duty before God) and valued the importance of the Christian sport hero as a way of communicating the Christian message (Morford and McIntosh 1993). In many areas of England, "organised football evolved as a Christian development to divert youths from gang fights and drunkenness as a method to instil finer qualities of character" (Lerwill 2009: p.57). Wolverhampton Wanderers, Everton, Burnley and Bolton are all professional teams that were established through religious groups and Sunday schools around this time. This was also the case in Birmingham, as 84 of the 218 football teams mentioned in the local press between 1876 and 1884 had connections with organised religion (Holt 1989). It has been claimed that

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<sup>33</sup> In addition to many football teams playing cricket in the summer, there were similarly rugby union teams that played cricket outside the rugby season, for example, at Harrow during the 1880s (Collins 2009).

both Aston Villa and Birmingham City had ‘strong links’ to organised religion. Aston Villa were founded by four cricketers from Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel cricket team in 1874 (Woodhall 2007), and Birmingham City were founded by members of the Holy Church cricket team in Bordesley Green a year later (Henry 2003).

The top down view often implies that church authorities set teams up to influence the masses and that the church was actively involved in organising football clubs (Huggins 2004)<sup>34</sup>. Examples, however, demonstrate in Birmingham that this may not have been the case. In fact, Holt (1989) argued that most of the early sports initiatives came from the ordinary church members rather than from the clergy. Though a number of founding members may have attended church, in the case of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City, there appears to be little evidence that the founding of these clubs was directly ‘church inspired’ or part of the muscular Christianity movement in anything other than the loosest sense. For instance, Birley (1993) claimed that Small Heath Alliance quickly outgrew its church links from Holy Trinity cricket and football club. Though the *dominant* cultural value system of the church and the notion of muscular Christianity had links with clubs all over the country, and possibly provided significant initial momentum within Birmingham, the religious connotation was lost (or had a limited affect) as the *emergent* working class football culture grew and the masses engaged with football for their own reasons.

#### **4.1.3. Industrialisation and the Expansion of Mass Spectator Sports**

In an industrial centre like Birmingham, the changes in working hours were significant, as workers gradually had more, and regular, time to engage with leisure and, subsequently, sport. Birley (1993: p.265) stated that “it was obviously games of short duration that chiefly benefited from Saturday half-holidays, and football most of all”, rather than, for example, cricket, which many saw as too time consuming. Across England, the origins of free Saturday afternoons were initially historical rather than innovative, as the wool industry of the southwest finished early due to the traditional medieval observance of the eve of holy days (Brailsford 1991). In February 1846, London engineers secured a 4.00pm finish, and the 1850 Factory Act closed all textile mills at 2.00pm in order to reduce the

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<sup>34</sup> Or as Brailsford (1992: p.96) suggested “Frequently the leadership came from the same source [in the North and the West Midlands], often from clergymen”.

excessive working hours (Brailsford 1991). The free Saturday movement gathered momentum across all industries and commerce, and in Birmingham engineering firms began to close at 1.00pm on Saturdays from around 1853, and eventually this became general practice in the area (Birley 1993). Therefore, in Birmingham, there was an exponential growth in mass spectator sports towards the end of the nineteenth century as workers had more regular free time, which meant that sporting and other leisure events could be scheduled in advance. Crowds of over 30,000 regularly attended ad hoc horse races at venues such as Olton, Moor Hall Park and Hall Green, and athletics at Aston Lower Grounds and the Portland Road Grounds (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). Although most leisure activities experienced an increase in popularity, football emerged as the city's favourite sport, as "in Birmingham the association game took off dramatically in the late 1870s and early 1880s" (Holt 1989: p.150).

As watching games gradually became more attractive (Briggs 1952), football's social significance solidified and continued to grow. The number of football clubs in the city rose exponentially, from one in 1874 to 20 just two years later and to 155 in 1880 (Birley 1993). That is, Birmingham, a major industrial centre with a prosperous working class, could provide "ill-educated workers with entertainment of a rare quality, combining excitement, amusement, and the opportunity to participate by encouraging or jeering the performers" (Sutcliffe and Smith 1974: p.319). Increasingly, working men of Birmingham chose to incorporate football in their weekly routine and spent their leisure time attending football matches after work. For example, workers would have left the old gas works in Aston, behind Villa Park (on the road south-east towards Nechells and Saltley) to watch their team (Rudge and Houghton 2009). Moreover, due to location, it is safe to assume workers from the old HP Sauce factory at Aston Cross would have also made their way to Villa Park, joined by workers in the locality from Norton Motors Ltd, The Hercules Cycle and Motor Company and Dunlop Rubber Ltd (Price 1989). Similarly, as Small Heath and Deritend districts of Birmingham were increasingly industrialised in the latter part of the Victorian era, fans would have travelled a short distance by foot to watch Birmingham City play after finishing work in a wide range of factories and companies operating in the area, including the Birmingham Small Arms Company (Jones 1968), H. G. Turner Ltd (Marsden 1987) and Thornley and Knight Ltd (Marsden 1988). As the two clubs are located just 2.36 miles (3.8 km) from each other, it is evident just how densely

industrialised Small Heath (Jones 1968; Marsden 1987) and Aston (Price 1989), and those areas of the city generally, have remained since the early 1800s – and with increasing numbers of workers supporting the rival teams in the area, the rivalry between the two local sides gathered momentum<sup>35</sup>.

#### **4.1.4. Increased Participation and Rational Recreation**

Previous literature (for example, see Wigglesworth 1996) has frequently suggested that the boom in the working classes' involvement in sport was predominantly centred around spectating, as many either had little energy for physical activity following work or wanted to preserve energy before returning to the factory. However, this may not be a comprehensive view of the working classes as information relating to Birmingham appears to be to the contrary. During the inaugural season of the Birmingham football Senior Cup<sup>36</sup> in 1876, there were a number of works teams involved; several of these were from the heavily industrial areas to the north and west of Birmingham in Wednesbury and the Black Country (Carr 2002). Also nationally, industry and trade unions – or more accurately, the workers – were instrumental in founding clubs such as Manchester United, Arsenal, West Ham United and Stoke City (Baker 1979), which leaves claims that workers were too exhausted or disinterested in playing open to further investigation.

In addition to the commercially supported 'professional' teams, there is also evidence of amateur/works football in Birmingham around the turn of the twentieth century in great numbers. Though Dunning et al. (1988) claimed that data on amateur football was unavailable pre-First World War, there are records (for instance, as detailed by Beauchampe and Inglis 2006) indicating that of the 218 football teams mentioned in the Birmingham local press between 1876 and 1884, 20 were works teams (Holt 1989).

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<sup>35</sup> The history between Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs dates back to before the beginning of the professional game in England, the earliest recorded fixture between the two teams being in 1879, with Birmingham City (known then as Small Heath Alliance) winning 1-0 by 'a disputed goal' (Matthews 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Carr (2002) recorded the teams involved in the inaugural Birmingham Senior Cup in 1876: Calthorpe FC, Aston Unity (also a cricket team), Wednesbury Town, Saltley College, St Georges, Tipton FC, West Bromwich (not WBA), Stafford Road FC, Birmingham (not BCFC), Wednesbury Old Athletic (winners of first cup), Cannock FC, Aston Villa, Walsall Town and Walsall Swifts. Only Cannock (until the 1930s), Villa and Walsall (two Walsall clubs combined in 1888) lasted past these formative years. Small Heath Alliance competed in this cup for the first time in 1878-79. Aston Villa won it 16 times before the war, including three in a row in 1882-83-84, so were allowed to keep the original trophy, which was a tradition.

Moreover, the ‘Birmingham and District Works Amateur Football Association’ was set up in 1905 with an aim to promote:

Wholesome recreation... fostering friendship and promoting goodwill, by healthy rivalry... to assist in the social unity between employers and employed... and to help by recreation to fit men better for their daily task, and make them more contented workmen  
(Beauchampe and Inglis 2006: p.78).

Beauchampe and Inglis compiled a list of all the works teams that participated in the leagues during this time, which demonstrated strong links between working classes and football in Birmingham, as between 1905 and 1955 677 companies, works and organisations belonged to the Birmingham and District Works Amateur Football Association (BDWFA). In 1955 there were still 254 members. That is, “in a very real sense the Birmingham and District Works AFA was one of the great social achievements of Birmingham’s industrial age” (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006: p.79), due to the structure and governance that enabled such a large and unprecedented number of football fixtures within the city.

As in other parts of the country, sport was used for functionalist purposes, to change values and mould behaviour. The BDWFA’s endeavour to provide ‘wholesome recreation’ was in line with the wider ‘rational recreation’ movement, which, broadly speaking, aimed to develop a healthy, moral and orderly workforce under middle/upper class control in order to “shape the values and behaviour of the next generation of men” (Holt 1989: p.138). The working class boys were begun to be seen as a social issue<sup>37</sup> towards the end of the nineteenth century, so rational recreation aimed to direct their energies into socially acceptable channels (Holt 1989). One example in Birmingham was the founding of the Athenic Institute that was set up as early as 1844, which unsuccessfully attempted to interest working class men in “cricket, quoits and other health inspiring sports” (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006: p.11). Football appeared more attractive to working class men and, thus, seemingly a more effective means for developing moral character, patriotism, and the courage to stand up for what was deemed ‘right’; to defend the ‘underdog’, to champion fairness, and to exercise self-control (Morford and McIntosh

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<sup>37</sup> Though a broad generalisation, this was essentially due to their behaviour being perceived by the dominant groups within society to be rough and uncivilised (Brailsford 1992).

1993). Through the BDWFA and support from the middle classes, football became a key player in social education (Russell 1997).

Essentially, the middle and upper classes aimed to ‘educate’ and civilise the working classes by instilling and perpetuating their own values, but for subtly different reasons and to various ends. The middle and upper classes’ views appeared to differ on the social purpose of football. The gentlemanly-middle classes appeared to want football to improve the values and behaviour within the lower echelons of society (Holt 1989), whereas the more commercially minded bourgeoisie appeared to view it more as essentially a socio-economic tool to provide good workmen, as well as a powerful opiate for the masses of skilled and unskilled workers (Smith 1989). These approaches were simultaneously combined with the religious views and values within society that aimed to create ‘muscular Christians’ as well as an able workforce (Vamplew 1988). The combination of these influences nevertheless helped football develop and diffuse across Birmingham.

#### Football and Class in Edwardian Birmingham

Even in the early twentieth century, football was not exclusively a working class sport in Birmingham. Dunning et al. (1988), drawing on Taylor (1971) and Mason (1980), suggest that in the late 1890s and early 1900s crowds were mixed in terms of social class, age and also gender. William McGregor<sup>38</sup> wrote in 1907 (cited in Dunning et al. 1988: p.40) that, in terms of spectators, football attracted men from the middle classes and the ‘respectable’ sections of the working classes. Though it is not clear what McGregor himself regarded as respectable, this goes against any basic notion that football had become merely entertainment for the working classes. Dunning et al. (1988: p.40) further quoted McGregor at length:

My business premises are situated in a thoroughfare, which... cuts through some of the worst slums in Birmingham. The inhabitants of these courts do not patronise football. The game is principally supported by the middle classes and the working

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<sup>38</sup> McGregor was a particularly significant figure within football locally – as vice-president of the Birmingham & District and Counties Football Association (BDCFA) and Director of Aston Villa FC – as well as nationally – as the President of the Football League and also the founder of the Football League in 1888 (Clives 1975).

man, and the latter are more particular in regard to the wearing of clean collars, than they were 25 years ago. When I first came to Birmingham, the lower classes... were much more slovenly in their habits than they are today, and football has undoubtedly brightened them appreciably.

McGregor provided an interesting, business oriented snapshot of Birmingham at the time, and explicitly stated that football was enjoyed by a mix of middle and (respectable) working class individuals. It could be argued that McGregor's extract provides a glimpse into the, somewhat skewed, *dominant* view (Williams 1977) of the time, as the commercially minded businessmen attempted to portray football as a preserve mainly of the middle classes, but open to the 'respectable' working class individuals who would pay for admission tickets, whilst still distancing themselves from the 'slovenly' lower sections of the community. This view appears to distinguish between 'lower' and 'respectable' working class identities<sup>39</sup>, without making clear the differences between the two and claims that the city had been undergoing a predominantly football-driven civilising process. Further evidence, however, seems to suggest that football was actually popular amongst all (sub)sections of the working classes, not just 'respectable' ones (Russell 1997) and that the middle class values initially inherent in football were not passively absorbed by the working classes.

Football was beginning to become part of the working class's *emergent* popular cultural identity, as attendances soared from the 1890s onwards (Vamplew 1988). Matches between local rivals Birmingham and Aston Villa were particularly popular. In 1907, a match between the two was witnessed by over 50,000 fans, a number which exceeded the regular capacity of Birmingham's St Andrews ground. Spectators were scrambling over the railings from the overcrowded stands in order to see their team, but were said to have "behaved splendidly" despite the excessive numbers, as a local newspaper reported "never before has such a scene been witnessed on a football ground in Birmingham" (Sporting Mail 1907: p.2).

Although McGregor chiefly credited football with improving the previously 'slovenly' people of Birmingham and their surroundings, his overly-positive functionalist view may

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<sup>39</sup> Similar distinctions have often been made in terms of the skilled and un-skilled working classes, for instance, see Tranter (1998).

be depriving Joseph Chamberlain (Mayor of Birmingham, 1873-76) and his progressive administration the credit they deserved as Birmingham was described the “best governed city in the world” during this period (Leather 2001: p.42). For the people of Birmingham, the most significant action of this era was taken by Chamberlain via the programme of ‘Municipal Development’. The three main features of this programme were the municipalisation, and subsequent central development, of gas and water services, and of the redevelopment of slums in the centre of the city (Powell 1977). These changes eventually led to improved living conditions as well as increased financial power for Birmingham’s City Council which was used for further civic investment such as leisure and sport development.

In support of the ‘masses’, Baker (1979: p.247) observed that the working classes had an interest in football and stated that in Birmingham supporters of the association game outnumbered those of the rival code (rugby) about five hundred to one:

Beginning early on Saturday afternoon, [males] engaged in their own game of soccer for two hours, then went to the stadium to cheer their local Birmingham City club. For amateur and professional alike, football transcended the necessities of life.

Baker’s quote further demonstrates the emergence of football and its interweaving with working class culture by highlighting the dual role of spectating as well as playing. In other words, there was an interdependent relationship between professional and popular football, which, Baker claimed, ran counter to the shallow assumption that the middle classes and professionalization created merely a spectator sport that was attended by the masses. In reality, “by the second or third decades of the game, many of the spectators were themselves playing, or had played the game in their youth” (Baker 1979: p.247).

#### **4.1.5. Development of a Working Class Football Culture**

Baker (1979) claimed that football provided a (brief) respite from factory life, and was a socially safe and acceptable arena for the working classes for social release. However, Baker also argued against this functionalist assessment of the links between football and



the working classes, which tended to frame them as passive cultural agencies, conned by the social apparatus. Baker highlighted the importance of football in helping the establishment of a strong working class identity, both in terms of individuals and as a collective. Hence, football was certainly more than simple, cheap enjoyment for the skilled and unskilled masses:

For its working-class participants, soccer meant much more than a job. Unlike politics, higher education, and commerce, which were still reserved for the well-born or moneyed, football provided an opportunity to compete on even terms, to heighten the sense of self, to strive for heroic triumph... the game of soccer was one of the few avenues wherein a young man of working-class origins could have his claim for self-importance internally satisfied and publically recognised. (Baker 1979: pp.246-247)

So, in addition to engaging with football as merely an escape from work, actually playing football was also a symbolic field for (masculine) working class self-expression, as one of the (perhaps very) few opportunities of the time to raise self-esteem and compete and even socialise, on relatively even terms, with the more dominant middle classes. In addition to the health-related, psychological and social benefits involvement with sports teams (Branscombe and Wann 1991; Wann and Weaver 2009) was to provide for the working classes, they arguably acquired some unforeseen and unintended social cohesion. Social unity was not necessarily what the dominant middle classes had intended through their support of the rational recreation movement. The middle classes' intentional actions to impart their own values to the masses had unintentional consequences that manifested in the emergence and solidification of a working class social identity. This suggests that the working classes were not passive recipients of middle class propaganda. On the contrary, football gradually became a social platform to provide an avenue for the working classes to acquire (at least some) power due to their involvement in high numbers. Perhaps, the last thing the bourgeoisie and the middle class would have wanted was to provide the proletariat with an opportunity to forge a solid class conscious identity by competing on even terms, with the means to gain some collective power. When highlighting the interdependency between individuals and groups within changing societies (Van Krieken 1998), it becomes evident that the working classes were not passively socialised into the values and behaviours of the middle and upper classes through football. Behaviour

deemed uncouth and violence remained – and still remains – in the game for some time (Frosdick and Newton 2006; Spaaij 2006; Stott and Pearson 2007), and through involvement in the game the working classes acquired a strong identity and had (albeit restricted) access to some power.

#### **4.1.6. Hegemonic Class Relations in Football**

As outlined so far, during the emergence and initial development of football there were a number of complex and interdependent attempts to use football as a tool to control and influence the working classes by the middle and upper classes, the commercially-minded bourgeoisie and the influential religious leaders. However, it has been argued here that these power relations were not based solely on ‘top-down’, unilateral domination and influence, as Hargreaves (1986) stated, power is far more complex than simply having winners and losers. Employing Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony, it can be argued that all sides – dominant and subordinate – gain something from the process of struggle and accommodation (Hargreaves 1986). In this particular case, the working classes employed their counter-hegemonic agency to subvert, to some extent, the dominant values and practices of the upper and middle classes whereby bringing into being their own cultural value system. In the words of Gramsci (1971: p.9), the individual “participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought”.

The social developments during the emergence of football could be explained further by employing Williams’ (1977) concepts of *dominant-residual-emergent*. Turner (2003) summarised that these three cultural forces roughly correspond to, respectively, the present, the past and the future. The dominant represents the foremost forces and values within society at a given time, the emergent are new cultural forces, often in resistance to the dominant forces. The emergent may eventually become the ‘new’ dominant, which would see the ‘old’ dominant become residual, a cultural force of the past. Through these concepts, Williams highlighted the importance of history, and how hegemony, power and domination are not static but are engaged in ever-evolving processes. The rational

recreation movement, muscular Christianity and the other *dominant* views of the middle and upper classes sought to instil their values through the introduction and development of more structured activities, e.g., association football (Vamplew 1988), as opposed to the mob games and blood sports that were popular. Regardless of their efforts, football remained a somewhat violent and rough game long into the twentieth century (Frosdick and Newton 2006). Far from instilling good values and encouraging appropriate behaviour in the working classes, the *emergent* working class football culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced, and was often characterised by, the rough and uncivilised behaviour the ruling classes wanted to eradicate. With the emergence of the football culture of the masses, the dominant values of the ruling classes became increasingly *residual*<sup>40</sup>. In fact, the ruling classes nostalgically looked back to the past when football was initially a preserve of the middle and upper classes (Russell 1997) and their values: when it was for gentlemen, was more exclusive and was hoped to be used as a means to instil gentlemanly or muscular Christian values. Football has been accompanied by violence since the beginning of the association game (Dunning et al. 1988), though research has demonstrated violence at football has certainly not been limited to working class individuals (Armstrong 1998; Spaaij 2006). In Birmingham, there is evidence of fan violence, pitch invasions and attacks on players and referees involving both Aston Villa and Birmingham City as early as 1885. This tendency continued throughout the 1900s, at varying levels (Walvin 2001), and is still observably present in the game (Ross 2007).

The working classes demonstrated that they had agency and in many regards resisted the dominant classes and their attempts to incorporate them into their hegemonic definition of the 'right' character (Williams 1977). Workers exercised influence over the socio-cultural development of football as spectators, players and club members (Russell 1997), and, if nothing else, gained power through their sheer weight of numbers. Furthermore, over time an *emergent* working class football culture developed, which not only provided them with numerous social benefits and an escape from the factory, but was also instrumental in enabling them to compete with the 'superior' members of society (Baker 1979). Once football became 'popular' and largely driven by working class values, the middle and upper classes' interest gradually faded and moved on to the more class-appropriate

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<sup>40</sup> For instance, Sheffield United were arguably initially 'middle class driven', but over time became regarded as more of a working class club (Armstrong 1998).

amateur and exclusive sports (Birley 1993), such as rugby union or, for instance in Birmingham, lawn tennis within the exclusive middle class Edgbaston area (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). It could be argued that this adherence to the *residual* values by the middle and upper classes represented a form of resistance against the increasingly dominant working class culture of football. However, one might argue that the bourgeoisie remained in relative, subtle control of football through club ownership, league administration and corporate sponsorship. The bourgeoisie adapted the structure of football in order to financially exploit the emergent working class football culture. Playing football kept many of the working masses happy and, in terms of spectating, contemporary fans have become consumers (Crawford 2004). Nevertheless, the combination of all the interdependent factors discussed here have shaped football in Birmingham, and during this early period of its development these factors resulted in strong foundations for football, large scale organisation and governance, and thousands of fanatical players and fans.

As previous literature has tended to focus on the middle classes and their influence on organised sport, one of the aims of this first section has been to highlight the agency of the working classes and their central role in, and mass participation during, the game's early development in Birmingham. Through a discussion of the numerous complex and interdependent factors that influenced the sport, it was argued that, far from being passive cultural dopes, the working classes developed their own emergent football culture. A culture which not only provided an escape from their factory life, but also provided individual and collective identity, social and psychological benefits and was symbolic in providing an avenue for competing with the dominant classes' value system. This culture and the sport more generally would continue its development throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

#### **4.2. Part Two: The War Years, 1914-1945.**

Part one of this chapter explored some of the relevant broader socio-historical processes and developments of football in Birmingham. Parts two and three will focus on more distinct time periods. This is done in order to provide a clear structure to a range of complex, large-scale developments, rather than to portray each section as hermetically

sealed and separate from the others. Part two is divided into three sub-sections; firstly the First World War, followed by the ‘inter-war’ period of the 1920s and 1930s, before addressing the Second World War era – all of which precedes part three, which focuses on the post-war period up until the present day.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4.2.1. First World War**

During the first part of the twentieth century, Birmingham was rapidly developing, both in terms of manufacturing and the city itself. The council created a ‘Greater Birmingham’, with smaller areas being absorbed by the expanding city, including Aston in 1911, alongside Kings Norton, Erdington and Handsworth (Barnsby 1989). This boosted the city’s population to 850,000 and established Birmingham as the country’s second city, in terms of both population and also geographical size (Leather 2001). At the same time, the small workshops and warehouses that had put Birmingham on the map during the Industrial Revolution were slowly replaced or dwarfed by large electrical engineering and car manufacturing plants in the city (Upton 1997), for example, Fort Dunlop in Erdington and Austin’s in Longbridge. Workers from around the country were encouraged to migrate to the area (Zuckerman and Eley 1979), further increasing the number of working class in the city, which, in sum, meant a further influx of new supporters for the local professional football teams and growth of the emergent working class football culture.

Despite the surge in the popularity and increasing number of clubs in the formative years of football, due to financial requirements (for instance, renting/buying a pitch/stadium, paying players, paying league fees, administration costs, and so on) and the organisation and commercial support of local businessmen (which many clubs lacked, Gibbons 2001) two football clubs eventually emerged as the most prominent in Birmingham: Aston Villa and Birmingham City. However, during the formative decades of the Football League, the two main Birmingham clubs did not actually play each other very often, which hindered the early development of this rivalry – as for the majority of the first three decades

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<sup>41</sup> It is acknowledged that more attention is given to certain historical eras than others; this is due to certain periods of time being more relevant to the rivalry and also, to a lesser degree, the availability of information pertaining to football in Birmingham, as it has been highlighted previously in this study that literature on football in Birmingham is relatively scarce (surprisingly so, especially when considering its position as the country’s ‘second city’).

Birmingham City were in the second division and Aston Villa remained in the first division (Bishop and Holt 2010). Not only did Villa remain in the first division from the creation of the League in 1888 up until 1936, during this time they won the Football League and the FA Cup on numerous occasions, and were regarded as the best team in the country up until around the outbreak of the First World War (Lerwill 2009). The legacy of Villa's success during these early decades remains, as during this study fans of both clubs acknowledged Villa's historical success and perceived it to be particularly significant when considering the rivalry dynamic (discussed further in section 6.2). The two main Birmingham clubs did play each other occasionally in the various cup competitions in these early years, especially some of the local cup competitions in the region – though these matches often lacked the excitement and importance when compared to the Football League and FA Cup matches (Lerwill 2009), which perhaps meant the tension and meaning was limited in the matches between local rivals during this period.

Generally, the upward curve of all aspects of football continued – crowds, gate receipts, wages, transfer fees – into the 1920s and 1930s, even despite the halt to progress and the cessation of the football leagues for four years due to the Great War (Dunning et al 1988). The lack of football leagues and matches during the war is reflected by a dearth of literature and media coverage on the subject, nevertheless, football still had a small role to play. Regardless of the outbreak of the First World War in September 1914, the Football League did not suspend their league and cup competitions until the end of the 1914/15 season (Walvin 2001). Many men involved with football, including players, did sign up for military service (Ward and Williams 2009), but the continuation of matches led to tension, condemnation and also to the reputation of the game being tarnished (to at least a small extent). Whilst football was criticised for being unpatriotic and diverting attention and athletes/soldiers away from the 'front', it has been argued that football 'did its bit' – lending its organisation and stadiums to the recruitment of men to the services (Walvin 2001), and footballers themselves acted as recruitment sergeants, by example and through the encouragement of fans (Russell 1997).

Specifically in Birmingham, towards the end of the war, football was used in an attempt to control the "problems of juvenile workers" (Brazier and Sandford 1921: p.305). The nature of the labour market during the war meant more young people within Birmingham

had jobs in factories and therefore more disposable income, but at the same time it was felt parental control was weakened with so many men away on duty and so many mothers working long hours in factories. With juvenile delinquency on the rise, the City Council set up a Clubs Committee to arrange clubs and activities to keep juveniles out of trouble during their leisure time – football being the most popular activity engaged with during the war, and though it was insignificant in terms of the broader context of wartime Britain, the initiative was deemed a success, demonstrating the value of football (Brazier and Sandford 1921).

#### **4.2.2. Inter-War Years**

The societal damage inflicted by the war, coupled with the on-going industrialisation, urbanisation and geographic mobility had damaged the communitarianism and fixed social identities of the past, traditional societies. Nevertheless, it can be argued that football began to have the social function of helping repair some of this damage by enhancing the cultural bonds and social integration of disparate individuals and groups in society (Giulianotti 1999). Although football may not necessarily be an essential ‘functional prerequisite’<sup>42</sup> within society, it certainly became very significant for a growing number of people following the war years, and also had a secondary function of providing a catalyst for the numerous flourishing media outlets during this period (Ward and Williams 2009), which shall be discussed below.

Though football was seen at times during the war as unpatriotic or a distraction from the war effort (Walvin 2001), once the war was over, football was increasingly recognised and used as a positive social function in a society to increase levels of ‘organic solidarity’ (Durkheim 2001), as society and social roles/interests became more complex and sophisticated. From 1919 onwards, football was seen not as something antagonistic to the country’s development, but rather at its very heart (Russell 1997). Ever since the changes to working hours and half-day Saturdays, it had become ever more popular for (mostly) men to either attend or participate in football matches on Saturday afternoons, as Saturday

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<sup>42</sup> Functional prerequisites are the parts of society that are essential for its survival, evolution and adequate functioning (Jarvie and Maguire 1994).

football started to become almost a ‘social fact’<sup>43</sup> for many during this period, as the norms and structures of the football culture became increasingly engrained in the population’s habitus<sup>44</sup> (Bourdieu 1984). The footballing culture that was emerging in England was formed by the ‘collective representations’ (Jarvie and Maguire 1994) of the actors within this specific social world, and this culture was reinforced by the increase in popularity, spectatorship and the number of leagues and clubs.

The Football League restarted in the autumn of 1919 – with two divisions of 22, and the following season they started a new division three, soon followed by a fourth (Tabner 2002). But even before 1919, some teams in the region had been fully operational, as Aston Villa took part in the Midland Victory League along with West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Derby County in March and April 1919 with attendances at Villa Park reaching 25,000 (Lerwill 2009). This demonstrated the enthusiasm and interest for football, even during these early stages of the post-war recovery. By 1920 the numbers of teams and competitions in Birmingham at all footballing levels was adopting the pre-war pattern of expansion, and by the start of the 1921 season there were 1,200 teams affiliated with the Birmingham County FA (Clives 1975).

With regards to this study, a significant development in the city around this time was Birmingham City’s promotion into the first division of the Football League for the first time in 1922 (Henry 2003). This meant that they played regular league matches against Aston Villa each season (for the subsequent fourteen seasons). Using the ‘dispute-density’ model (Geller 1993; Goertz and Diehl 1993), it could be interpreted that this aided the development of the rivalry, as there were more matches/‘incidents’ between the two local teams at the highest level of football at the time. The two clubs being in the top flight of the Football League for a sustained period of time also reinforced the position of these two clubs as the ‘biggest’ teams in the city (Matthews 2000), despite the increasing number of new football clubs across the region.

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<sup>43</sup> Social Facts are “both cultural norms and social structures that are external to and constrain and regulate social actors” (Jarvie and Maguire 1994: p.5).

<sup>44</sup> Habitus is the socialised subjectivity of people, which represents the system of classification that shapes people’s practices, beliefs, habits, ‘tastes’ and bodily techniques (Bourdieu 1984).



The general increase of football clubs in Birmingham was in line with the growth of the game across the nation, as the number of clubs affiliated with the FA rose from 12,000 in 1910 to 37,000 by 1937 (Russell 1997). One influential factor here was the early signs (and consequences) of the global political nature of football's development. Due to several disputes, the FA declined to send a national team to the early World Cup Finals in 1930, 1934 and 1938 (Giulianotti 1999). As the FA's contestations with their global counterparts continued, the country's footballing focus remained solely on domestic football. This focus enabled the domestic game to prosper, as clubs and fans alike were free from the distraction of big international or European competitions, which facilitated the continual rise in popularity of domestic football competitions.

Assisting the popularity and the evolving function of football was the expanding print and (radio) broadcast media. The relationship between football and the newspapers had always been present, but the sheer scale of the growth of the popular press and the coverage of football that developed made football all the more significant (Russell 1997). The media latched onto the clear surge in attractiveness of football during the 1920s and 1930s, as football was used as a weapon in the 'circulation wars'<sup>45</sup> between the print media outlets (Walvin 2001), which in turn meant that football's increasingly prominent place within society was reinforced by the media (Russell 1997). In Birmingham, enthusiasm and participation across the city flourished, local media's function was to provide news, reports and gossip not only from the top professional clubs but from amateur adult leagues within the Birmingham County FA, school leagues and also junior football (for instance, see Birmingham Sports Argus 1923).

Another feature of the inter war years was the development of supporters clubs. Many advocated the admirable aims of the supporters clubs to stand by their club during hard times and to fund raise for them (Taylor 1992). During the 1920s and 1930s the football supporter was still largely working class; however, Russell (1997) outlined how these supporters clubs were mostly made up of lower-middle and middle classes. Tabner (2002) claimed that there was a feeling in part that the supporter club movement was a conspiracy

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<sup>45</sup> The circulation wars were between the various tabloid newspapers, all trying to increase their numbers of readers (customers). It was recognised that people would pay to read and hear about both football and also the footballers themselves, with photos being particularly popular – so these newspapers used the nation's increasing love of football to sell their newspapers (Mason 1993).

by the middle class supporter to try and reform the behaviour of the ‘shilling supporter’ (lower classes) behind the goals, whether that be by highlighting the need for responsible support of the club or by creating the illusion of power via these supporter clubs that lower class fans could aspire to be involved in, providing they behaved. There is a clear link to the previous movements that tried to change the behaviour of the masses, namely muscular Christianity and rational recreation (Ingham and Hardy 1993), though broadly speaking there was a feeling that following the war those voices that had criticised and sought to change football/the masses in the past had come to accept football’s place in society, and football was viewed positively (Russell 1997).

However, it is argued here that there is a limit to the beneficial view of football during this period. The overly-positive functionalist analysis outlined earlier highlighted how football performed the function of increasing social integration, but with football violence and club rivalries present throughout this period (Giulianotti 1999) the progressive function of football could be disputed. Dunning et al. (1988) were also cynical of the overly positive view of football during this era, especially when it came to fans – as they claimed there were numerous incidents of violence – Queens Park Rangers, Millwall and Carlisle all had their grounds closed during the 1930s following crowd disturbances (Russell 1997), but the footballing authorities and the media often did not pick up on these incidents, or seemingly perceived them as irrelevant (Dunning et al. 1988). As alluded to earlier, the media outlets were benefitting greatly from football, so they may have wanted to focus on the positives and not lose popularity by criticising the very fans who bought their newspapers during the competitive circulation wars. A simpler explanation could be that the media may have just chosen to concentrate on the good news as they were continuing to profit from the positivity within football, though it is acknowledged that this goes against the traditional media perspective that bad news is privileged and more ‘newsworthy’ than good news in social interactions (Maynard 1997). Nonetheless, events were about to conspire that would lead to another World War, rendering so many of these developments irrelevant.

#### **4.2.3. Second World War**

Following the historic changes in democracy and self-government, and surviving the ravages of the First World War, Gill and Robertson (1938: p.88) wrote of Birmingham that it faced the future with “an infinite and inspiring hope”. Hindsight now demonstrates that this view could not have been expressed at a more unfortunate time. On September 3rd 1939, a Birmingham man, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced the declaration of war upon Germany (Sutcliffe and Smith 1974). The Second World War’s direct effects on Birmingham were much more marked than those of the first, as parts of the city were destroyed or seriously damaged by bombs.

If a discontinuation of sporting activity typified the reaction to the First World War then a “dogged determination to carry on regardless was a general response to the Second” (Wigglesworth 1996: p.124). Following the criticism the game received for continuing the 1914/15 league season after the outbreak of the First World War, the Football League immediately cancelled all fixtures (Tabner 2002). Although the official football leagues were again halted for seven years (1939-1946), various regional leagues and competitions were arranged. Football had its function for the broader society and was used during the Second World War to provide a “patriotic example to the youth of the country” and to boost morale (Wigglesworth 1996: p.125). The participants and the standard of play were extremely variable, nevertheless football’s mere presence contributed to the feeling of normality, whilst various war charities benefitted considerably from specially arranged games and collections (Russell 1997).

Birmingham’s teams continued to play throughout the war, with Aston Villa winning the Football League War Cup (North) in 1944 (Douglas and Douglas 1995), all amongst the back-drop of Birmingham being heavily bombed (between 1940 and 1943 only London and Liverpool were attacked more in England by the Luftwaffe (Leather 2001)). Many felt that it was not safe to have thousands of people in one place; in case the German bombers targeted a busy stadium, therefore there was a ban on the use of Birmingham City’s St Andrews ground. The Birmingham Post newspaper led a campaign to get it re-opened, claiming that “the Germans are foul and dirty fighters but even they could hardly be expected to choose Saturday afternoon as the time and St Andrews as the locale for their first manifestation of frightfulness” (cited in Wigglesworth 1996: p.125). It was argued that “people who spent long hours working in munitions factories deserved some

recreation, and that included watching football at Birmingham” (Rippon 2005: p.17). After the case being taken to the Home Secretary, the ban was lifted. St Andrews was subsequently bombed, and Birmingham had to play some of their games at Aston Villa’s ground as repairs were made (Matthews 2000). Due to its industrial location, St Andrews was bombed a total of 20 times during the war, but football was so important that the stadium was always repaired as soon as it was possible and there remained an emphasis to keep local football going during the conflict (Rollin 2005), especially the games between the local teams. Judging by the attendances, the rivalry between Aston Villa and Birmingham City was still of interest for the fans in Birmingham, as the ad-hoc games that were played drew higher crowds when the two rivals played each other than the matches against different opposition (Bishop and Holt 2010).

The high attendances in spite of the dangers of bombings and damaged facilities exemplified the spirit and collective identity of the Birmingham people, and further demonstrated the importance of football to the people and the strength of the emerging working class football culture within the city. Those in the football community helped with the war effort in other practical ways. Villa Park’s Trinity Road stand was used as a bomb shelter and storage, and the club’s home dressing room was utilised by the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Warwickshire Regiment’s rifle company (Rollin 2005). Such was Birmingham City’s contribution to the war effort that in total 40 of the club’s professionals served in HM Forces – 24 in the Army, 15 in the RAF and 1 in the Royal Navy (Rollin 2005). However, outside of the top level of the professional game, the war took an inevitable toll on football in Birmingham. Across the region, numbers of registered teams plunged during the war, with the 1,300 teams in the Birmingham County FA in 1939 being reduced to only 335 in 1940 (Clives 1975). However, football recovered as the war progressed and the rapid increase and popularity of Sunday football in Birmingham aided the game, the city and County FA, even despite ancient law, previous prejudice and the opposition from the national FA in Lancaster Gate (Clives 1975). Football had remained a popular and important feature of life in Birmingham, despite the challenges of the World Wars, and the second half of the twentieth century saw both the Birmingham rivalry and football in the city generally develop and evolve.

### **4.3. Part Three: Football in Birmingham, 1945-2012.**

The third and final part of this socio-historical account explores football in post-war Birmingham up until the present day. It is acknowledged that the scope of this study does not enable this account to be all-encompassing; therefore attention has been given to the factors that are interpreted here to be most significant to football and the rivalry within the city in each of the time periods specified. Particular consideration is given to the growth of the commercial aspects and the increased political influence at all levels of football, in addition to an overview of contemporary Birmingham and a discussion of the demographics of the local population.

#### **4.3.1. Post-War Birmingham: 1945-1961**

The post-war period in Birmingham was typified by three main, wide-ranging factors: the continued commercialisation of football; coupled with a boom in attendances in the late 1940s; and the influence of immigration on the city. Platts and Smith (2010) identified the post-war period as being the start of an increase in the commercialisation and politicisation of football; both of which were interconnected with the growing professionalisation and globalisation of football. The return of official league football saw an increase in admission prices following the war. By 1961 ticket prices across the country had exactly doubled over a fifteen year period (Tabner 2002), and the players' maximum wage increased from £12 in 1947 to £20 in 1961, just before the maximum wage was abolished (Tabner 2002). This increased commercialisation was evident in Birmingham. For instance, after the war, Aston Villa were in dispute with the Football League over charging a higher ticket price than the norm at the time (Rippon 2005).

Despite the rise in ticket prices, there was what is widely regarded as a 'boom' in the number of fans attending matches in the late 1940s (Russell 1997). Football attendances reached their peak in the 1948/49 season, when the total number of fans attending all the matches across the four Football League divisions was recorded to be 41.3 million (Tabner 2002). Both Birmingham clubs had their all-time record average home attendance during the 1948/49 campaign, with Birmingham City's average being 38,453 (Matthews 1995)

and Aston Villa's being 47,320 (Bishop and Holt 2010), which demonstrates the fans' growing appetite for the game in the city regardless of the rising ticket prices.

However, this growth was halted by a number of inter-related factors. Towards the end of the 1950s and during the early 1960s, as wages and leisure opportunities in Britain began to increase (Green 2000), fans began to vote with their feet; choosing to watch/listen to the match at home or get involved in other 'new' leisure pursuits, leading to the beginning of a decline in attendances (Dunning 2001). Russell (1997) pointed to the growing affordability of two commodities in particular that contributed to the decline of football attendances during this period: the purchase of private cars, which increased from 2.3 million in 1950 to 5.6 million in 1960, and to 9.1 million by 1965; and also television sets, which were rare in households in 1950 but were to be found in 75 per cent of homes by 1961. Both commodities offered leisure and entertainment alternatives to attending football, in addition to the financial implications their purchase may have had, as it would be difficult to pay to attend football matches if an individual had recently spent their disposable income on a car. This decline, following the initial post-war boom, marked the beginning of a constant waning of attendance lasting for three decades (apart from a brief spurt after England's 1966 World Cup triumph) until the 1985/86 season when it finally began to pick up again, with the 1980/81 season being the lowest attendance point during the period (Platts and Smith 2010). However, despite the general decline in football attendance during the late 1950s (and beyond), in Birmingham the big local derbies still drew in a large number of fans, highlighting the popularity and interest of the Birmingham rivalry. For instance, there was a crowd of 55,000 at Villa Park to see Villa draw 1-1 with Blues on the opening day of the 1958/59 season (Sports Argus 1958). The post-war increase in fan attendance coincided with an increase in Birmingham's population, and both these factors were influenced (at least to a small degree) by one of the most significant social developments in the city during this period – a surge in the levels of immigration.

#### **4.3.2. Immigration in Birmingham**

Between 1945 and 1961 the number of overseas immigrants nearly doubled in Birmingham; with 15,500 West Indians and West Africans (Grosvenor and Chapman 1982) arriving, alongside 7,000 from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Choudhury and Drake 2001) and 22,000 from the island of Ireland (Moran 2010). Around a decade later (1960s and early 1970s) there was also a large influx of immigrants settling in the city from China and Vietnam (Baxter 1986). Immigrants came for a variety of reasons, most notably for job opportunities. Recruitment into the armed forces was particularly high in the region during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, in addition to the opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled labourers in the factories and warehouses in the city (Grosvenor and Chapman 1982). In terms of communicating the opportunities available, the media advertised Birmingham's high employment rate in order to attract more workers for the growing city, for example, the Birmingham Mail ran adverts in 1959 highlighting how unemployment in the city was at 0.9% compared with 2.0% for the whole country (Birmingham ILT Services 1987). There had been a steady influx of Irish immigrants throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the 1930s and 1940s, however, figures increased following World War Two as migration restrictions were lifted, so increasing numbers came from southern Ireland to work on the bus transport system in the city and also work as nurses and factory assistants (Moran 2010). In fact by 1961 the census showed that there were 58,961 Irish born individuals residing in Birmingham (5.31% of the city's population) (Moran 2010). Many found work in some of the physically demanding manufacturing industries in the city, and as part of the working class masses many of them also enjoyed drinking in the countless pubs in Birmingham city centre and relished supporting the two local football teams (Moran 2010).

Moran (2010) claimed that the Birmingham football clubs were instrumental in integrating many of the new residents of the city, helping shape their individual and group identities and providing them with membership of an imagined (football) community within the city that became their new home. Football provided social activities for immigrants to engage with, helping to teach them the values and beliefs of the local culture and enabling them to become acquainted with the 'collective representations' (see Durkheim 2001) of their fellow residents/fans. However, it would most likely be an over-simplification to assume that integration into the new Birmingham football culture occurred free of conflict or tension. Whilst anecdotal evidence is available for migrants from Scotland, Wales and

(most notably) Ireland supporting one of the Birmingham based football clubs (Gall 2005; Brown and Brittle 2006; Moran 2010), there is little evidence to suggest that migrants and families from the West Indies and Asia have similarly joined the imagined communities of the clubs in any significant or proportionate numbers. This could be due to immigrants retaining their own sporting and cultural interests, but could also be due to barriers or prejudice that may have opposed their integration.

Unlike the previous immigrants (from elsewhere in the UK and Ireland), new settlers could be distinguished by skin colour, and often had to confront “grass-roots prejudice” whilst attempting to spectate or participate (Holt and Mason 2000: p.15). This was despite the black and ethnic minority population in Birmingham increasing throughout the twentieth century. For instance, the 1981 census recorded 38.4% black or ethnic minorities population within the ward of Aston and 43.0% in the ward of Small Heath (Birmingham City Council 1992). This is in line with the broader national context, as across the nation the pattern of immigrant participation in sport has been uneven, varying between different sports and amongst different ethnic groups (Holt and Mason 2000). Information is scarce in this respect, as King (2002) and Burdsey (2009) outlined, the involvement and socio-historical development of black and ethnic minorities within British football is an area that needs further academic attention.

#### **4.3.3. The 1960s: Years of Promise**

Coghlan (1990) described the 1960s as the years of promise for sport, due to the progression of (political) sporting organisations and also the evolving philosophies surrounding sport and leisure. By the 1960s, the philosophies and divisions within sports between the amateurs and professionals had become diluted. Using Williams’ (1977) value system model, the gentlemen amateur ethos had become increasingly residual, with commercialisation and more of an achievement attitude becoming the dominant value system in mainstream sports, as tennis, football and cricket had abolished the distinction between gentlemen amateur and professional by the mid-1960s (Coghlan 1990). Football’s expanding professional approach could be evidenced by the rising value placed on coaching and tactics, due in no small part to the influence of England national team



manager Walter Winterbottom, who managed his country from 1946 to 1963 and who was also FA Director of Coaching (Wagg 1995). Coaching was established as a legitimate and desirable activity in England for league clubs from the mid-1950s onwards (Wagg 1995). Academic centres were established and funded (for instance, the National Documentation Centre for Sport at the University of Birmingham), as the authorities began to recognise the importance of studying areas of physiology and sports psychology around this period (Coghlan 1990). Momentum was provided to these types of developments in 1966, as England's World Cup win delivered a sporting boom across the country, albeit one that was relatively short-lived (Russell 1997).

Towards the end of the 1960s it began to emerge that within the country's footballing culture so much of that promise went unfulfilled. Following the changes in the game resulting from the Professional Footballers' Association's action of removing the maximum wage and the retain and transfer system by 1963 (Platts and Smith 2010), and the World Cup win in 1966, the decline in elite football that had started during the late 1950s appeared to continue. Hill (2002) listed many of the previously revealed factors that were still detrimental to the game in the late 1960s and beyond: boring play, increasing admission costs, crowd troubles, relative decline of the international team's performance following 1966, and the counter attractions of other forms of entertainment and leisure. Football attendances were dwindling across the country, with the aggregate crowd decreasing from the previously mentioned 41.3 million during the 1948-49 season, to 27.6 million during the 1964/65 season (Ward and Williams 2009).

In Birmingham, this pattern was also manifested. During the 1968/69 season, when the two Birmingham clubs were in division 2, their attendances showed a distinct decline from the highs of 10-15 years previous, as Birmingham City's average home attendance was 26,008 (Matthews 2000) and Villa's was down to just over 30,000 (Bishop and Holt 2010). However, despite the general changes occurring in football, the popularity and interest of the Villa-Blues rivalry remained during the 1960s. For instance, a Villa-Blues game in 1963 had an 'enthusiastic' crowd of 45,000 at Villa Park (Sports Argus 1963), and even in the previously highlighted 1968/69 season in the second tier of English football the matches between the two saw crowds of 40,527 at St Andrews and 53,647 at Villa Park (Matthews 2000). This illustrates the importance of the Birmingham rivalry and

the fans' devotion to their teams. Away from the professional clubs, the city of Birmingham displayed considerable economic progress. As the first section of the M1 motorway between London and Birmingham had opened in 1959, transport links and the local economy had improved in the early 1960s, with the retail business further invigorated by the opening of the Birmingham Bull Ring Shopping Centre in 1964 (Upton 1997). Manufacturing was at its zenith in the city, particularly automotive production, with 65% of the city's employment within the manufacturing sector, compared to 39% nationally (Barber and Hall 2008). There was a great deal of promise in the city (in terms of financial possibilities and opportunities to develop the city's business infrastructure), though James and Upton (2003: p.13) described it as being "lost in a frenzy of re-building", something which would become more evident in the years to come. At a local footballing level throughout Birmingham, the number of people actually playing football was at an all-time high, as the Birmingham County FA had a record 2,540 football clubs registered (Clives 1975). This rise aligned with the broader context of a national increase in football clubs registered with the FA, from 17,973 in 1948 to 30,862 by 1967, partly owing to the legalisation of Sunday football in 1964 (Ward and Williams 2009).

#### **4.3.4. The 1970s: Unfulfilled Promise?**

Despite the transport links continually improving for Birmingham, with the opening of the M5 and M6 motorway links (Upton 1997), the 1970s and 1980s saw much of the city's manufacturing lost, which for so long had been the heart of the city (James and Upton 1998). These socio-economic troubles had a direct impact on the city's football culture, and leisure experiences more generally. Sport participation levels in Birmingham plummeted almost at the same rate as unemployment rose, as without a job individuals could not afford to pursue their sporting interests (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). Another blow to the city came on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974, when the city and many of its residents fell victim to an Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorist bomb attack. Two pubs in the Bull Ring were bombed on the same night, 21 people were killed and 162 injured (Moran 2010). Football played a small part in helping to heal the city and its people, as a fundraiser match was arranged and played at St Andrews with an All Star XI playing a West Midlands XI, which included players from both Villa and Blues (Matthews 2000).

However, the attacks on the city and the people of Birmingham left a destructive legacy for many years to come, as tensions remained within Birmingham's Irish community (Moran 2010).

At a national level, during the 1970s, one of the most significant social structures within the sporting society was the Sports Council. Following the Influence of the Wolfenden Committee report in 1960, plans were made to set up the Sports Council, which was finally given executive powers in 1970 (Coghlan 1990). The Sports Council became the first intermediary between the government and sport which included selecting where the first government funding allocated specifically for the development of sport should go (Holt and Mason 2000). The Sports Council's vision was for 'Sport For All', and it had a wide range of objectives, but the nations' facilities were perhaps most influenced at this time, as for instance there was a proliferation of multi-purpose sports centres and swimming pools being built; as in 1972 there were 27 of these, by 1981 there were 770 (Holt and Mason 2000). The seventies were the decade when the public leisure centre became a common feature in every town and city. The opportunities and facilities provided a much broader, more accessible range of sporting experiences throughout the country, which also partially accounted for football's decline (Polley 1998).

As has been outlined here, the creation of the Sports Council and subsequent influence was just one of the structural processes that impacted upon society and sport during the 1960s and into the 1970s. Even from the post-war period up to this point, it is clear to see how a broad range of social factors conspired to change the face of football (both nationally and in Birmingham) and specifically endeavoured to change the manners and habits of the fans. The initial post-war boom in attendances followed by a steady decline, with only the occasional spurt upwards in numbers (like post-1966 World Cup), was a result of countless factors, which highlight the importance of adopting a multi-causal rather than a mono-causal approach to understanding society over periods of time (see Elias 2000). However, as the process of football's development continued, the commercial aspects increasingly drew the focus of those in the game.

The English FA began to tentatively embrace commercialism during the 1970s, as the Football League had done away with the maximum wage ceiling for players in 1961 so

they could no longer treat the national team players like they did in the 1950s, giving them a minimum match fee and providing facilities that were inadequate (Wagg 1995). With changes made to the 'retain and transfer' system in 1963 (Platts and Smith 2010), transfer fees rose considerably. Birmingham City were involved in the first million pound British football transfer, as Nottingham Forest paid Blues £1,180,000 for Trevor Francis in 1979 (Polley 1998). Many clubs began to find themselves in financial crisis across the country (Tabner 2002), but the Birmingham based clubs benefitted from strong fan bases in an increasingly populated city. Even despite the gloom around the sport and the socio-economic problems, money was always coming in from the fans in steady amounts, especially when the two clubs played each other, as there was 50,084 fans at Villa Park in 1976/77 season and 43,721 at St Andrews when the two Birmingham clubs played each other when they were both in the first division (Bishop and Holt 2010). This highlights how the rivalry had progressed and developed – in both intensity and the interest it now generated, as fans continued to pay to see the 'biggest game' of the season against their bitter rivals (Matthews 2004). Throughout the data collection it was highlighted by fans of both teams that (apart from reaching a cup final, which is very rare) the matches against their rivals are always the most significant games of the year and attract the most interest.

English football from about 1970 to the mid-1980s tends not to be remembered for epic matches or great teams, but instead for the social problems which came to dominate the game; most notably racism and hooliganism (Walvin 2001). Hooliganism was considered a social problem throughout the second half of the twentieth century in England (Spaaij 2006), but football violence has always been present in the game (Dunning et al. 1988) (football hooliganism has been discussed at length in section 2.2.1 in the review of literature). However, the focus on the physical violence in football has tended to draw attention away from the racist ideology that has been evident in football. An increase in black players during the seventies, often who were born into second or third generation immigrant families in Britain, led many in society to view them as a threat rather than a novelty (Russell 1997). Abuse and taunts were common place at football matches all over the country (Holt and Mason 2000), with Birmingham being no exception despite its relatively high percentage of black and ethnic minority residents. As Back et al. (2001: p.xi) outlined:

In the major cities like Birmingham, football grounds had remained a bastion of whiteness in which racism could be expressed openly to such a degree that even those who opposed it felt helpless to say anything in response... the social composition of the stands pointed to the ways in which white Englishness remained unaffected by the cultural diversity that increasingly defined what it meant to live in England.

Efforts were made within football to tackle this social issue, with campaigns such as 'Kick it Out' gaining momentum in the coming decades (Burdsey 2009). This was against a backdrop of an unstable economic climate and the rise of the influence of the far right (Russell 1997), though this is hardly considered an excuse for such behaviour. It was not until 1991 that racial outbursts were banned by an act of parliament (Walvin 2001), and more recent events (see Hutchinson 2012; Sale 2012) demonstrate that this social issue is still evident within football and that there is still work to be done.

To summarise, the 1970s could arguably be described as a de-civilising spurt (Elias 2000) in English football, as the violence and (racial) tension that by many accounts was prevalent in the game could not be manifested in a sport that claimed to be increasingly civilised and that was codified almost a century before. The evidence presented above indicates that these are brief spurts, and that society's development should not be viewed as a straightforward, linear progression, instead it must be acknowledged that development fluctuates (Van Krieken 1998). However, applying a figurational approach to football hooliganism (Dunning et al. 1988) and to racism may fall short of being able to explain how this de-civilising spurt has seemingly continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and into the 1980s, 1990s and beyond, as arguably the footballing culture in England has yet to become 'civilised' enough to rid itself of these two uncivilised types of manners and habits, as literature even in the new millennium has established that these problems continue (for instance, see Frosdick and Newton 2006; Spaaij 2006; and Burdsey 2009). There are, of course, many more social factors that have had an impact upon both the rivalry and the game generally, especially in Birmingham during the 1980s, which would continue to change football further.

#### **4.3.5. 1980s: Change is Required.**

The 1980s saw the economic decline in Birmingham continue. To put this decline into context, in the mid-1960s, Birmingham's gross domestic product per capita was 10% above the UK average, second only to London (Spencer et al. 1986). Between 1965 and 1981, Birmingham and the West Midlands lost 370,000 manufacturing jobs (Barber and Hall 2008). From 1971 to 1981 alone, more than 40% of employment in the motor industry was lost, which led to the gross domestic product per capita in 1981 being 10% *below* the UK average, making Birmingham and the West Midlands the second poorest region in the UK, after Northern Ireland (Spencer et al. 1986). Although sports participation decreased as unemployment rose, for brief periods during the 1980s the fans of the two Birmingham based clubs had their spirits lifted. Aston Villa won the Football League Championship in 1981<sup>46</sup>, and the following season won the European Cup (now Champions League) by beating Bayern Munich in Rotterdam (Betts 1998). Villa winning the European Cup was a significant factor in terms of the history of the rivalry, as it signified a major distinction between the two Birmingham clubs – as fans discussed during data collection, only a handful of British clubs have ever won the European Cup which affords Villa high levels of cultural capital (discussed further in section 6.2.1.). Birmingham City won two promotions during the 1980s, but were regarded as a 'yo-yo' club during this period as they were promoted and then relegated frequently as attendances continued to dwindle (Matthews 2010).

The matches between the two Birmingham teams certainly could not draw in the numbers they had in previous years, with the game in the 1980/81 season at Villa Park attracting 41,101, despite this being the season Aston Villa won the Football League (Bishop and Holt 2010). Attendances deteriorated further, as in the 1985/86 season when the two teams faced each other the attendance was 26,694 at Villa Park, with Villa's average for the season being 15,237 (Bishop and Holt 2010). There was a similar story at St Andrews, where the Birmingham-Villa match had a gate of 24,971, with Blues' average crowd for the season being 10,889 (Matthews 2000). This was to be the last time the teams would play each other in the top flight of English football until Birmingham City were promoted into the Premier League in 2002. The loss of manufacturing jobs for so many working

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<sup>46</sup> Aston Villa have won the football League on seven occasions (in 1894, 1896, 1897, 1899, 1900, 1910 and 1981), in addition to winning the FA Cup seven times (in 1887, 1895, 1897, 1905, 1913, 1920 and 1957), and also winning the Football League Cup five times (in 1961, 1975, 1977, 1994 and 1996).

class fans in Birmingham, especially amongst automotive production workers, was clearly limiting the crowds. Though Taylor's (1970; 1982) Marxist explanation of hooliganism has been found to be limited (see section 2.2.1), the social processes leading to the situation in which many of Birmingham's working class fans found themselves during this period could partially explain some of the tension and fan violence in Birmingham (Gall 2005; George 2006).

Working class fans were arguably alienated from the working class football culture that they had been socialised into over many years, either through no longer having the funds to buy tickets or due to the 'bourgeoisification' of the game (Giulianotti 1999). The (predominantly male) working class fans that did attend games were also often adding to the stigmatisation of the working classes during the 1980s. The previously positive overtones of the working class culture were gradually replaced with connotations of backwardness, violence and irrelevance (Russell 1997). This disenchantment with the working class football culture (Walvin 2001) was coupled with others trying to distance themselves from football, for instance, the Labour Party and working men's clubs, which compounded the negativity surrounding the game (Russell 1997).

Unfortunately, more than anything else, the 1980s are remembered for the tragedies that haunted the game, and more significantly afflicted the fans. Known by many as football's *annus horribilis* (Russell 1997), 1985 saw scores of fans lose their lives and hundreds injured in a number of incidents. These tragedies came after a golden spell for English football in Europe, as between 1977 and 1982 the European Cup was kept in England by Liverpool (3), Nottingham Forest (2) and Aston Villa (1) (Polley 1998). On 11 May 1985, mass fan riots between fans of Birmingham City and Leeds United at St Andrews led to a wall collapsing, which killed a 15 year old boy (Birmingham Post 1985). This fan violence in Birmingham resulted in eighteen police officers and fifty fans requiring hospital treatment, with 125 fans being arrested (Ward and Williams 2009).

The death in Birmingham was overshadowed to a large degree, as this occurred on the same day as the Bradford fire in which 56 fans lost their lives at Valley Parade, in front of a horrified television audience (Giulianotti 1999). Less than three weeks later, clashes between Liverpool and Juventus fans in the Heysel Stadium before the European Cup final

caused the deaths of 39 Italian fans (Spaaij 2006). The events here would eventually culminate in English teams being banned from participating in European competitions for six years, which marked a new low for English football (Taylor 1992). A further tragedy occurred in 1989 with the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans at Hillsborough Stadium (Scraton 2013). A combination of factors including the poor state of a stadium, inadequate stewarding, negligent policing and failures in the emergency response allowed thousands of fans to converge into one section of the Leppings Lane End of the ground, crushing those trapped at the front of the stand (Conn 1997). Regardless of the tragedies and negativity in English football around this period, and despite the two clubs often not being in the same league for much of the 1980s, clashes between the (minority) hooligan elements of both Villa and Blues continued within the city; as non-academic accounts have 'boasted' of the frequent clashes between rival fans throughout this period and beyond (Brown and Brittle 2006; George 2006).

With a loss of European football revenue, the top clubs in England started to look to maximise their own income, and so the authorities began to seek new ways of commercialising their product, which put the wheels in motion towards initiating the Premier League (Wagg 1995). This provided a fresh catalyst for marketing, and the commercialisation of football had a new chapter. Most leading clubs were beginning to employ brand marketing and merchandising by the end of the decade in order to maximise their revenue and, perhaps more importantly, keep up with their competitors (Giulianotti 2005b). A vast increase in the number of televised league matches helped to repair the financial problems in the game, after two decades of political opposition on this issue by the football authorities, as they felt it might damage stadium attendances (Giulianotti 2005b). In addition to the increased commercialisation towards the end of the 1980s, the politicisation of football progressed to a new level, as the government actively intervened in the way football was run and structured; especially with regard to health and safety following the broad, encompassing recommendations made by the Taylor Report (1990). Wide scale changes were made to both St Andrews and Villa Park to ensure that they complied with the new regulations, providing fans with a safer environment. Commercialisation and the growing politicisation essentially acted as an interdependent catalyst to not only save football from its dark depression but to transform it, the results of which became evident during the 1990s.



#### **4.3.6. The Commercial Growth of the 1990s and Beyond.**

Following the downturn in Birmingham during the 1980s, the city council and the local government had to take action, and this came in the rise of flagship developments, which offered Birmingham a new face to counter the perils of deindustrialization and the imperfections of its modernist utopian dream (Chan 2007). Significant city centre regeneration came with the opening in 1991 of the International Convention Centre and the National Indoor Arena, costing £180 million and £57 million respectively (Barber and Hall 2008), and the later refurbishment of Brindley Place to the sum of £300 million and the substantial refurbishment of the Bull Ring which cost £500 million, which are now central to the cultural economics of the city as both ‘branding’ and ‘consumption spaces’ (Barker 2008). These developments were accompanied by hopes that there would be a rise in the building and housing markets in the area, however critics felt that the elite international enclave built in the centre of Birmingham for the tourist and business class was increasingly divorcing the city centre from its regional and local context (Henry and Passmore 1999).

At the same time as Birmingham’s period of development in the early 1990s, the Taylor Report (1990) was seeking to change English football, as it recommended that all major UK stadiums should become all-seater by the summer of 1994, and this was implemented by the Conservative government, endorsed by the FA. The violent and disorderly terraces of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were replaced with individuated regimes of spectator consumption, and fans were encouraged to attend with their families in order to integrate these new soccer consumers (Giulianotti 2005b). Having ‘family sections’ had a dual purpose of creating a safe place for families (consumers) to come (perhaps even at discounted prices) and also to create a safe zone of the stadium where trouble would be unlikely (King 2002). The implementation of these changes were certainly reflected in the steady rise of attendances in Birmingham, at games at both St Andrews (Matthews 2000) and Villa Park (Bishop and Holt 2010) during the 1990s. The headline changes proposed by Taylor (1990) of all-seater stadia and CCTV (closed-circuit television) throughout grounds were aimed at creating a controllable crowd. King (2002) drew on Foucault’s

(1977) understanding of the panopticon<sup>47</sup> to highlight how these measures aimed to create disciplined, docile bodies. In theory, the crowd would be under constant surveillance in the ground, and the CCTV made them identifiable when trouble did occur, which would lead to a variety of punishments. A strict adherence to a Foucauldian (1977) approach might result in criticism of the authorities' control of the masses through the use of surveillance, discipline and punishment in order to produce docile bodies. However, more recent research suggested that many fans continue to resist this control, and whilst they might remain docile bodies within the stadium it has been argued that football related violence has merely moved from inside to outside the stadium, with football-related disorder occurring in city centres, outside train stations, bars, and similar locations where surveillance may not be quite as prevalent (Frosdick and Newton 2006; Spaaij 2006). This is certainly supported by the pop-culture literature written by/about self-proclaimed hooligans that supported Aston Villa (Brown and Brittle 2006) and Birmingham City (Gall 2005; George 2006). There are extensive anecdotal accounts of fan violence throughout the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century between the rival fans in Birmingham, and this is despite the two clubs not playing each other in the league between 1987 and 2002.

The changes in football were due not only to the long standing social processes of the previous decades, and the disasters of the 1980s, but also due to the forces of the market, which remade football as classless commercial entertainment during the 1990s (Holt and Mason 2000). The new structure of the Premier League (inaugurated in 1992) enabled the top clubs to pursue increased admission and television revenues (King 2002). The FA Premier League was the first sports league in Europe to be developed by and for television, with Rupert Murdoch's BskyB out-bidding ITV for the rights (Ward and Williams 2009). The new Premier League deal was worth £304 million to football over five years, with this figure rising dramatically each time the contract was renewed (Giulianotti 2005b). In terms of the Birmingham clubs, Aston Villa were suitably placed at the 'top table' and could benefit from the Premier League, as they finished second behind Manchester United in the inaugural Premier League season and are one of only a handful

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<sup>47</sup> The original panopticon was a structural design by Jeremy Bentham, its focus being on a prison where all the cells encircle and are visible from a central guard tower. The prisoners cannot see whether the guards are watching them – therefore they must assume they are being watched at all times, so therefore they must behave. So the guards have power over the prisoners. Michel Foucault (1977) adapted this and used it as a metaphor for power and 'disciplined' societies, as people are under constant surveillance by the authorities, and under the threat of punishment the people will conform and behave, and are therefore disciplined bodies - just like the prisoners in the panopticon.

of clubs to have remained in the top flight since the start of the Premier League (Bishop and Holt 2010). However, it was a different story for Birmingham City, who were not promoted into the cash-rich Premier League for another ten years (Henry 2003) and they struggled financially. The Kumar brothers had bought Blues for £1.6 million in 1989 (Matthews 2000), but their running of the club was derided by many, including the fans (Gall 2005), and the club had to be (financially) saved by David Gold and David Sullivan in 1993, as they appointed Karren Brady as the Managing Director of Birmingham City at the age of 23 (Polley 1998). For some fans in Birmingham, especially those involved in the football subculture during the 1990s, this imbalance between the finances of the two clubs is a source of tension that underpins the rivalry – as Birmingham City struggled financially (Matthews 2000) whilst Aston Villa enjoyed moderate financial success during this period (Woodhall 2007). The poor finances and (arguably questionable) decisions of past owners of Birmingham City was highlighted in this study by some Villa fans during interviews in a derogatory manner, contrasting their rivals perceived financial misfortune with their perception of their own clubs financial stability. This is evidently a source of tension amongst rival fans, and a topic that Brown and Brittle (2006) also drew attention to – attempting to frame their own club as having high levels of economic capital and their rivals as severely lacking in this regard (these socio-economic perceptions of the clubs and their respective fans is discussed at length in chapter six).

Elsewhere in Birmingham, there was significant growth in financial and professional services from the early 1990s onwards. These sectors included a significant proportion of highly skilled, high value jobs - though there was criticism regarding the extent to which these new jobs offset the losses of thousands of manufacturing jobs, particularly in automotive manufacturing (Barber and Hall 2008). International level sport was recognised as providing various significant social functions for the city, as the council rolled out a number of plans and projects to change the face and the socio-economic fortunes of Birmingham (Barber and Hall 2008). The building of the aforementioned NIA (National Indoor Arena) in 1991 was significant, which at the time was the largest and most expensive arena of its type in Britain (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). The ‘visitor’ economy – including retail, hospitality and leisure – emerged as a driver of employment growth. The number of jobs in tourism-related industries in Birmingham grew by 24% to nearly 31,000 between 1991 and 2002 (Barber and Hall 2008). The most notable increase

in visitors was from overseas, with visitor totals increasing from 390,000 to 670,000 between 1991 and 2002; a performance that improved Birmingham's relative standing, rising to become the UK's third most visited destination behind London and Edinburgh (Barber and Hall 2008). Principally, sport was used as a tool to increase tourism and investment in the city, by attracting interest in the city through international cricket at Edgbaston, international tennis at three different lawn tennis clubs in Birmingham (Holt and Mason 2000), the NIA hosting the indoor international athletics championships and Villa Park hosting England football internationals, after also hosting matches during the 1966 World Cup and the 1996 European Championships. There were also (failed) bids for Birmingham to host the Olympic Games in both 1992 and 1996, plus the failed bid in 1996 for the new national stadium (to replace the old Wembley) to be built on the Bickenhill site in Birmingham (Beauchampe and Inglis 2006). This highlights the importance of sport for the local people and the city council, and how sport was placed at the centre of Birmingham's regeneration and development plans following the loss of manufacturing in the 1980s (Barber and Hall 2008).

Football has remained at the heart of Birmingham's sporting culture, but the rate of commercialisation of football during the 1990s and beyond has affected the fans, particularly in terms of attendance. Whilst it has been argued that clubs have long priced tickets in a way to exclude certain (lower) classes, the 1990s were characterised by the top clubs attempting to capitalise on their status and position as global brands, with clubs adopting an increasingly market-centred approach (Nash 2000). Also, to return to the influence of the Taylor Report (1990), it has been argued that Taylor under-estimated how much the spectators would have to pay in order to ensure that the ground developments and security measures could be implemented, as ticket prices have risen far more than the £2 that Taylor initially expected (King 2002). Rather than achieving the aims of making football more inclusive (Taylor 1990), the changes based on the report arguably meant that football became too expensive for many fans. In Birmingham, fans at both clubs have raised concerns about ticket prices and their ability to support their team since the beginning of the Premier League (Brown and Brittle 2006; George 2006). This perspective supports Ian Taylor's (1970; 1982) much earlier observation of the 'bourgeoisification' of football, as the middle class influence grows and the 'traditional' working class dominance begins to become residual. Due to the ticket prices and ticketing systems, football's

working class social networks have since become increasingly fractured owing to the social exclusion surrounding the English football league, as these networks were based primarily on 'active attendance' (Nash 2000), despite the other various ways fans can engage with their teams' matches (for instance, watching games in the pub, see Weed 2006).

However, despite the claims for the improvement of football finances with the advent of the Premier League, English football (the four football league divisions) sustained a loss for eight out of the ten years starting from 1993/94 season – with sporadic finances across the leagues (Buraimo et al. 2006). Due to the substantial increase in income during the 1990s, the losses can only be put down to the unsustainable increases in wages, as clubs sought footballing success and further revenue opportunities (Ward and Williams 2009). Contemporary football still faces financial trouble for football clubs, with clubs throughout the football league struggling to survive, the recent examples of Portsmouth FC going into administration twice in two years (Callow 2012), and in Scotland, Glasgow Rangers being liquidated after their illustrious 140 year history (Conn 2012) are indicative of the grim financial reality for clubs. Clubs have entered administration for the past 20 years due to a number of factors: inability to sell players through the transfer market, loss of revenue due to relegation, inability to maintain loan repayments, and failure to realise expected expenditure from TV rights deals, for instance, many clubs suffered following the collapse of the television channel Setanta Sports, as they had relied on revenue from broadcasts that never came (Buraimo et al. 2006). The clubs in Birmingham have had contrasting finances in recent years. Aston Villa were bought by American billionaire, Randy Lerner, in 2006 who has invested approximately £250 million on players and the club's infrastructure (Conn 2010). Whereas, Birmingham City were relegated from the Premier League three times in six seasons from 2005 onwards (which has significant financial consequences for most clubs), coupled with their owner Carson Yeung facing protracted money laundering charges in Hong Kong and having his assets frozen whilst the club is persistently rumoured to be on the verge of administration (James 2012).

Nevertheless, the game continues to evolve. At grass roots levels, the Birmingham County FA continues to thrive, and the Association now boasts over 4500 teams, playing in over 50 leagues, from the region's professional clubs to the grassroots entry level of under 7s

for mini soccer, with hundreds more playing futsal or small sided football at dedicated centres (Birmingham County FA 2012). At the professional level, Birmingham football has been dominated by the rivalry between Birmingham City and Aston Villa, especially since Birmingham City's promotion to the Premier League in 2002, as the two clubs had not playing in the league since 1987. For the past decade, the fans and local media alike have been engrossed in the derby games (Howell 2006; 2008; Kendrick 2010a). Rather than the period without regular matches decreasing the intensity, it appeared that it remained and when the teams did meet following such a long time the passion and the animosity was very much still present, as the games at both St Andrews and Villa Park that season saw 'violent skirmishes in the stands', pitch invasions, players on the pitch sent off and many arrests and injuries (Glendenning 2002; Fifield 2003). This intensity, tension and (unfortunately) violence has remained a constant theme between the rival fans into the present era – which are key factors in terms of the rationale for trying to understand the underpinning aspects of the contemporary rivalry during this study. In addition to the socio-historical context provided in this chapter, it is also pertinent to develop a clearer understanding of contemporary Birmingham and its people, in order to inform the later discussion chapters and to help to locate the data analysis within this specific social milieu. Therefore, the subsequent sections contribute further context by providing a brief overview of contemporary Birmingham, before exploring the demographic data available for the people of Birmingham – many of whom make up, broadly speaking, the fan groups being explored in this study.

#### **4.4. Contemporary Birmingham**

It is possible for the flâneur<sup>48</sup> (Bairner 2006b) to stroll around the city, taking in the varied architecture of Birmingham amongst the post-modern refurbishments and developments of the city centre. Due to the growth during the Industrial Revolution, many of the buildings pre-dating the revolution did not survive, so the majority of buildings are from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Skipp (1983: p.9) observed “the face of the town as it

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<sup>48</sup> The flâneur is said to wander through the city or the urban landscape, taking in sights, experiences and anything else the city has to offer. Additionally, Bairner (2006) highlighted that the Flâneur seeks understanding and should actually be viewed as a social scientist, an embryonic urban sociologist who 'reads the city', offering an impressionistic rather than a realistic portrayal.

is today still represents an extremely useful and precious resource for the study of its Victorian history”. There are however exceptions, with 1,946 listed buildings in the area, some of these examples being medieval; such as the original parish church St Martin-in-the-Bull Ring, and some Georgian; St Philips Cathedral, Soho House and the Town Hall (Birmingham City Council 2008). The flâneur can enjoy further city highlights, including the clock tower, Town Hall and Museum and Art Gallery in Chamberlain Square, and the controversial pieces of art by Antony Gormley and Dhruva Mistry in Victoria Square, which is also a communal meeting place for the community for St George’s day celebrations and the German Christmas market each year. These are also social spaces within the city where fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City may interact, as family members or as ‘ordinary’ members of the community. Shared spaces such as these in the city centre may be considered a sort of ‘in-between’ space for football fans. Using Goffman’s (1959) concepts of frontstage and backstage regions and performance management, depending on the exact time, these spaces are sometimes front regions where fans will be acting out ‘on-stage’ stylised performances, in this case as football fans involved in an intra-city rivalry. At other times, when there may be no rival fans present or when there is no match, areas could become back regions where fans are relaxed into less formal modes of behaviour and speech (Barker 2008).

In 2006 the Government’s National Statistics estimated the population of Birmingham to be 1,006,500 (Birmingham Economy 2009), a number which demonstrates the size of the city and metropolitan borough – and also helps to explain the large historical fan bases of both Birmingham football clubs. Birmingham is the largest city in the Metropolitan Borough of the West Midlands which has a total population of 2,600,100 (Coventry has the next largest population in the West Midlands, estimated at 306,600 in 2006) (National Statistics 2008). Birmingham is a collection of 40 wards, compartmentalised into ten constituencies; Edgbaston, Erdington, Hall Green, Hodge Hill, Ladywood, Northfield, Perry Barr, Selly Oak, Sutton Coldfield and Yardley (Birmingham City Council 2009). Birmingham became a Municipal Borough in 1838, and was granted city status in 1889. To place this in some context, Manchester was awarded city status in 1853 (UK Cities 2009). However, what is significant for the current study is the people of Birmingham – the demographics of Birmingham can provide more insight on the city’s population.

#### **4.4.1. Demographics of the City**

Examining the available demographic data on Birmingham, and specifically the two wards where Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs are located, may indicate significant differences or similarities between the two imagined communities of fans – in addition to developing an understanding of the city's broader social milieu under investigation. These potential differences or similarities may prove to be significant sources of tension and underpin the football fan rivalry in question – especially as factors relating to demographic and population differences have been identified in previous literature on football rivalries, as outlined in the literature review (see section 2.3).

As stated above, the population of Birmingham was estimated in 2006 to be 1,006,500, the last calculated figure was 977,087 in the 2001 Census (Birmingham Economy 2009). In 2001, 51% of the 977,087 population were female (503,821), a figure which is 0.3% higher than the national average. Though there is increasing numbers of females attending football (Giulianotti 1999), and with that an increase (albeit gradual) of academic attention towards female football fans (for example: Jones 2008), issues of gender have not previously been identified as a significant factor underpinning a rivalry. This is based on previous literature and thematic analyses relating to football fan rivalries (see Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b; Majumdar 2008). Though the lack of gender issues within existing fan rivalry literature has been acknowledged, the current study remained open to the emergence of diverse factors that informed the rivalry – however, issues of gender did not emerge during data analysis.

Edensor and Augustin (2001) outlined the significance of ethnicity of football fans in Mauritius, describing how intense football rivalries mirror wider ethnic tensions throughout the island. In terms of ethnicity in Birmingham, there is a significant difference when comparing the statistics of Birmingham's population with those of England as a whole. The percentage of white members of Birmingham's population is 70.4% which, when compared to the national percentage, is over 20% lower (white percentage of the English population in 2001 being 90.9%). This means that the ethnic minority percentage of Birmingham's population will be higher in comparison to the country as a whole.



Asians make up 19.5% of Birmingham's population (nationwide – 4.6%), with the black population of Birmingham calculated at 6.1% (nationwide – 2.3%) and the Chinese population is just slightly higher than the national figure at 1.1% (nationwide – 0.9%).

The difference between Birmingham's ethnicity and the national statistics is also reflected in the statistics for faith. Religious tensions and sectarianism have previously been found to be at the heart of a number of football fan rivalries (Bairner and Shirlow 2001; Bairner 2002). The most common faith is Christianity in Birmingham with 59.1% (compared with the national figure of 71.7%), but the most obvious difference is in the percentage of Muslims, with 14.3% of Birmingham's population being Muslim whereas only 3.1% of the country's population is actually Muslim. There is also a higher percentage for the Sikh faith in Birmingham (2.9% compared with the national figure of 0.7%) and also Hinduism (2% compared with the national figure of 1.1%).

Socio-economic status, or the perceived status, of imagined communities of fans is another factor that has been identified as underpinning football fan rivalries (Armstrong 1998; Burnett 2002). The 2001 Census outlined the employment situation in Birmingham. The data shows that 66.9% of the population are economically active (405,252 people, between the age 16-74) compared to the national figure of 74.4%. Out of that figure 9.5% of the population are unemployed which amounts to 38,572. The data shows that this figure is quite substantially higher than the national percentage for unemployment which at the time was 5%. This figure may prove to be significant when examining theories of football hooliganism. Taylor (1982) considered football hooliganism to be, amongst other factors, a consequence of rising unemployment, though Dunning (2001: p.140) dismisses this as just a "favoured cause of the political left", and there is no apparent evidence to support Taylor's claim. In relation to fan rivalries, if one imagined community is perceived to have higher socio-economic status than another, this may be a source of tension with one group assuming a dominant identity and the other a resistance or project identity in opposition (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). It is also possible to analyse census data on the areas where the two football clubs are located, in order to ascertain whether there are any obvious differences or similarities that could provide further understanding, whilst simultaneously developing a more coherent appreciation of the people that live in the specific football club localities.

#### **4.4.2. Aston and Bordesley Green**

It is important to acknowledge that examining the demographics of Aston and Bordesley Green, and considering the above statistics in terms of the supporters of each football club, by no means assumes that fans of each club come exclusively from these specific areas of Birmingham. Equally, it is not assumed that every football fan who lives in Aston (thought to be predominantly Aston Villa territory) supports Aston Villa, with the same applying to Bordesley Green residents (predominantly Birmingham City territory) supporting Birmingham City.

The above information demonstrates that Birmingham is a relatively diverse city. Aston Villa and Birmingham City are located extremely close to one another, in the wards of Aston and Bordesley Green respectively (separated by 2.38 miles), and both draw fans from all over the region. Therefore, it could be argued that it is likely that the ethnicity, class, unemployment and religion of both imagined communities of fans may be relatively similar.

The statistics of the ethnicity of both Aston and Bordesley Green are potentially significant, as the ethnic majority in both is Asian, which is different to both the Birmingham and national figures (Aston's Asian population 50.1%, Bordesley Green having an Asian population of 62.6%). The ethnic majority for Birmingham is White, the White population in these two wards is similar, with Aston having 23.4% and Bordesley Green 28.6%. As in the rest of Birmingham, the third largest ethnic group is Black in both Aston (20.2%) and Bordesley Green (4.9%), and again as in Birmingham the Chinese make up the fourth largest ethnic group in Aston (2.1%) and Bordesley Green (1.2%). Aston has an unemployment rate of 25.1%, with the Royal Mail providing most of the jobs for the area. Bordesley Green has an unemployment rate of 16.0% with Heartlands and Solihull Hospital Trust providing the majority of jobs for residents, which is not a particularly significant disparity. It could therefore be argued that none of the above factors analysed represent an obvious source of tension between the two sets of fans. It can also be concluded from this information that there is no clear indication that either imagined community of fans would obviously assume a legitimising, resistance or project

identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b) in relation to the above demographic factors. However, for the current study, it is the lived experiences and perceptions of the social actors involved (the fans) that are important. There are tensions and unequal power relations that the demographic statistics do not demonstrate, which emerge during the data collection.

#### **4.5. Summary of the Socio-Historical Overview of Football in Birmingham**

This chapter has provided a socio-historical context for the current study, by exploring the development of football in Birmingham, whilst also attempting to trace the emergence of the two clubs and their rivalry from the limited available literature and the accessible demographic data. Various social-cultural, political and economic conditions and processes have been identified that influenced the engagement of the fans with football in the city – many of which inform and underpin the rivalry in Birmingham. It was certainly evident that, regardless of the historical era and the external circumstances, the rivalry has stayed alive and very much a central feature of the footballing culture in contemporary Birmingham. Even during some of football's darker days, or when crowds and popularity diminished, fans in Birmingham still had an appetite and a fascination with the rivalry – which is demonstrated by attendance figures, newspaper reports, fan memories and stories, fan literature and also the (relatively scarce) academic literature on football in the city.

This socio-historical account of football in the city helped to explore some of the emergent themes that were identified during the data collection process. The rivalry is not viewed by the fans, or by this study, as only a contemporary manifestation – the history of the two clubs and of the rivalry itself is integral to the fans and the construction of their collective identities. To borrow from Mills (1959), connections between past and contemporary cultures and perceptions were constantly made and highlighted by fans during data collection – which is in keeping with the stories told and emphasis placed on certain historical developments and events by fans in the fandom literature (Gall 2005; Brown and Brittle 2006; George 2006), and also in fanzines and throughout online fan forums. Thoughts and opinions expressed by fans (ranging from trophies won and club histories through to events during the war and famous matches between the rival teams) could be

located within the context of the complex development and history of football in Birmingham. For instance, it was particularly useful to explore the historical footballing success of the two clubs, as this emerged as a central theme that fans referred to consistently – especially Aston Villa’s success during the early decades of the Football League, a legacy that appears to have endured over the subsequent decades to underpin and reinforce the rivalry (historical success of the clubs discussed further in section 6.2).

Similarly, the perceptions of socio-economic status and class that fans had of the rival groups (discussed in section 6.3) could be explored and analysed within the context of both historical class issues and contemporary demographic statistics relating to the Birmingham football culture and the city more generally. Particular heed was paid to the working classes and their involvement in football in part one, as previous literature has tended to focus on the middle classes and their influence on organised sport. Far from being passive cultural beings, the working classes developed their own emergent football culture, which not only proved to be an escape from their factory life, but also created individual and collective identity, which contributed to the creation of a symbolic social avenue for competing with the dominant classes. The subsequent two chapters discuss the central themes that emerged from the data, whilst simultaneously building on and being informed by this socio-historical account.

## **5. Discussion – Part One: “The City is Ours”: Football Fan Rivalry and Territory in Birmingham.**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the central themes that emerged during data analysis, one of which was space in Birmingham. Further engagement with previous literature in this area (discussed in chapter four) reinforces that, specifically, the contestation over territory is at the heart of this rivalry. This is then explored further in order to develop a ‘partial interpretation’ (Klein 1993) of this theme. From this interplay process, it becomes clear that the concept of territoriality (Sack 1986; Storey 2001; Delaney 2009; Elden 2010) seems to align well with the data, and provides a useful structure for discussion. This is due to the connections that emerged between the literature on territoriality and the data. Therefore, this first discussion chapter centres around two of the main facets of territoriality<sup>49</sup>: Firstly, the majority of this section centres on the *Classification of Area*, which essentially focuses on claims to control or own territory in Birmingham, as the data collected suggested this was of central interest to the fans; and secondly, the *Communication of Boundaries* is examined as a secondary, inter-related theme, which explores the ways some of these claims for territory are communicated and the meanings behind this communication.

### **5.2 Classification of Area**

Football rivalry is an integral facet of the city’s broader culture – as Alan (Blues, IT2) stated “you can’t grow up in the city and not be aware of it - you are either Villa or Blues”. Specifically, territory within the city of Birmingham and the location of the two clubs are

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<sup>49</sup> Territoriality is the contestation between two or more groups over territory, and is said to be based on the expression of power (Sack 1986). Sack outlined the three main facets of territoriality as: 1) classification of area; 2) communication of area; and 3) the enforcement of boundaries. The third facet of enforcement is based on the control of the areas, once they have been classified – for example, at international level, border patrols, armed guards and customs officials at the border between two countries. This was not interpreted here as being relevant, as it was not referred to in any significant way by fans, even after further probing, and was not perceived to be of any significance during participant observation. Therefore, this chapter shall only focus on the first two aspects.

central features of this particular rivalry. When focusing explicitly on football in Birmingham, there is evidence of contestation over territory between rival imagined communities<sup>50</sup> of football fans. In attempting to identify areas or boundaries within Birmingham, this section shall focus firstly on space, territoriality and the specific locations of the two football clubs, before addressing the claims made by fans to ‘own the city’ itself and the hegemonic struggle for control.

### **5.2.1. Space and the City of Birmingham**

Despite the ‘spatial turn’ of the 1990s (Soja 2003: p.277) that “created a wider and more receptive academic audience... [towards] a powerful and critical spatial perspective”, the study of sport and space remains relatively limited. The notable exceptions of John Bale (1993; 1994; 2003; Vertinsky and Bale 2004) and various scholars of sport, space and national identity (Bairner and Shirlow 1998; Fulton and Bairner 2007; Shirlow 2005) have provided an impetus for rectifying the neglect within the social theorising of sport of what Lefebvre (1991) labelled as discussions centring on social space. The social production of space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, although space is not to be understood as fixed or merely a reflection of society (Soja 2003). Lefebvre (1991) presented the view of space as being inter-reactive and interdependent, in that social relations of production are continually both space-forming and space-contingent. Following Lefebvre’s influence, theorists have posited that space is socially produced and intricately connected to the maintenance of power (Fusco 2004), which aligns well with a cultural studies approach to exploring this rivalry.

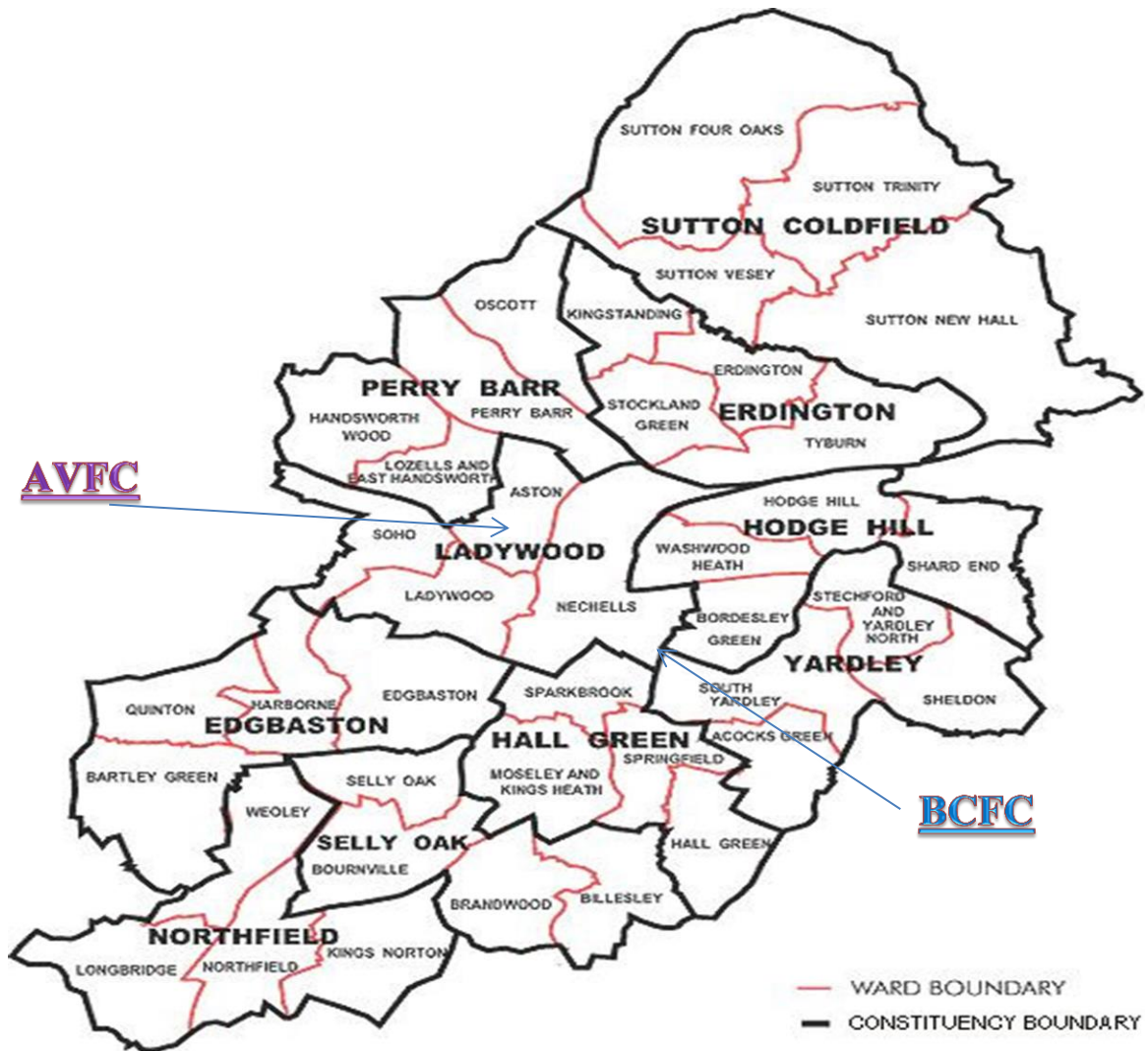
Throughout the data analysis it has emerged that, within this rivalry, space within the city is socially produced through fans negotiating the boundaries of each group’s territory. Bale (1993) highlighted the importance of territoriality in football, but also made an important distinction when using the word territoriality: Bale interpreted this not in an almost instinctive defence of territory, as used by Morris (1981), but in the sense used by Sack (1986) who viewed territoriality as the *control* of space or territory, seeing it as “a primary geographical expression of social power” (Sack 1986: p.5). Power can be exerted

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<sup>50</sup> For discussion of Imagined Communities, see section 2.2.4.

over individuals within a space, whether through controlling the behaviour of those in a specified territory or through excluding people from the territory, so territory is a primary geographical expression of social power (Storey 2001). Fans attempt to assert control over territory within Birmingham, in order to gain (or to be perceived to gain) more power than their rivals and therefore become/remain the dominant, legitimising identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). As indicated in Figure 1, the two clubs are located in the centre of the city and are just 2.38 miles apart. The subsequent discussion aims to elucidate how the city, the location of the clubs and the metaphorical battle over territory are central factors that underpin this rivalry.

Figure 1. City of Birmingham map and the location of Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs:



Source: Birmingham City Council (2011) website.

### 5.2.2. Territoriality across Birmingham

Judging by the amount of differing claims and opinions offered by fans who declare territory as ‘theirs’ within the city (and therefore assume to have some power over their rivals), it would appear that many fans feel passionately about territory within the city. However, the data collected outlined the constant contradictions and inconsistencies – not only between fans of each club, but also between fans of the same club.

When initially questioned, many fans talked in terms of a simple north-south divide in Birmingham, with Aston Villa territory being to the north (or north-west) and Birmingham City territory to the south (or south-east). For instance:

It’s generalising a lot, but I would say, south and east of the city are predominantly Blues areas, with the city centre fairly mixed between the two – and then the north and west sides of the city being predominantly Villa areas... north-west Villa and south-east Blues, with the inner city a mix really.

(Rod, Villa IT4)

Dan (Blues IT1) went into further detail:

I... see that there is a north – south Birmingham split on this, north being Villa and south being Birmingham. There’s obviously not a big dark black line down any particular roads, but if you sort of come down from the top of the city in Birmingham anything that is sort of from West Bromwich that goes round the left of the city I guess to the edges of Northfield sort of thing and then go round the right of the city as you look at a map down to the Sheldon area, anything north of that is generally stereotypically a Villa area, under that generally a Blues area, as you sort of drip down into the likes of Coventry and what not, generally north-south is the way I’d see it. And I’d say just outside by Redditch there seems to be a Blues following, there seems to be a little outpost there.



However, when probed further and coupled with information from online fan forums and books, a slightly different, more complicated picture begins to develop. These examples are illustrative:

Basically we're everywhere and they're just in isolated areas. If they had as many fans as they think then they'd have a stadium fit for it. As it is they can't sell out the shithole that they've got. Says it all.

(Post from a Villa fan taken from Villa Talk, an online fan forum)

The whole of Birmingham is full of real Brummies, it's all Blues fans really, the only Villa areas are outside the city, in places like Worcester or Staffordshire. Maybe around their ground a bit, but I'm not even sure about that, they all drive in. I reckon most people would have to agree most of the city belongs to Blues.

(Ricky, Blues IT10)

The only areas which have more Blues in them in my opinion are Northfield, Sheldon, Stetchford and Yardley, Acocks Green and Bordesley Green. Even in these wards, there are plenty of Villa. That's six out of about 40 Birmingham wards. Hardly making the "City" belonging to them? The wards of Moseley, Hall Green, Springfield, Hodge Hill etc are very mixed in my opinion.

(Post from a Villa fan taken from Heroes and Villains, an online fan forum)

Well they probably have Aston and Perry Barr, and right in the very north around them Sutton wards, but apart from that it's all us, deffo! There might be some Villa friendly pubs dotted about but the rest of the city and the town centre belongs to Blues, forget about the rest.

(Post from a Blues fan taken from Keep Right On, an online fan forum)

I'd say Villa has a slight majority in wards such as Bartley Green, Weoley, Quinton, Harborne, Edgbaston, Selly Oak, Nechells and Ladywood. And then Villa strongholds would be the four Sutton wards, Erdington, Kingstanding, Stockland Green, Handsworth Wood and Perry Barr. About nine wards. Although it's not a Birmingham ward I'd say Solihull too was very evenly split. This whole Villa is north, Blues are

south idea is only a very rough generalisation. Blues' main stronghold is clearly the wards immediately in the vicinity to the Sty<sup>51</sup>, in the south-east of the city. In the south-west, Northfield being an exception, it is pretty mixed. Whereas in the north you don't get any majority Blues' strongholds. My conclusion is: Fuck off Small Heath, the city is ours!

(Post from a Villa fan taken from Villa Talk, an online fan forum)

The underlying message in all of these excerpts is that the fans are trying to claim that their club and fans are dominant (legitimising identity), and, either explicitly or implicitly, that their rivals are inferior (resistance identity). The above comments can be interpreted by again using Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse<sup>52</sup>. Historically, and currently, both sets of fans have attempted to influence the discourse surrounding football in Birmingham, by trying to establish that their team is superior through messages on websites, fanzines, word of mouth, and so on. Drawing directly from Foucault's work, Markula and Pringle (2006) emphasised that discourse is not to be viewed merely as a group of signs, but as a practice that systematically forms the object or subject of which is discussed. Moreover, discourse "should *not* be considered as a simple translation between reality and language but as *practices* that shape perceptions of reality" (Markula and Pringle 2006: p.31, original emphasis). In this instance this refers to the fans' perceptions of the rivalry in Birmingham. Territory is one of the themes that the discourse centres around. Influencing the 'knowledge' of the Birmingham football rivalry is viewed here as another way that fans try to claim power and become the dominant, legitimising identity.

What is considered significant here is that there are contradictions and contestation regarding this discourse. There are many more examples like these above, and often during informal discussions amongst fans at games or in pubs, or on fan forums on the internet, debates persist with no clear outcome. Therefore the claims for territory and power continue, and lead to further tensions. There are even inconsistencies from individuals on this issue. This collection of extracts from an interview with Alan (Blues IT2) is illustrative of this (emphasis added):

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<sup>51</sup> The 'Sty' is a derogatory term used by Villa fans for Blues' St Andrews stadium.

<sup>52</sup> Discourse is understood here as regulated ways of speaking about a subject through which objects and practices acquire meaning. Foucault focused on the historical conditions under which statements are combined and regulated to form a distinct field of knowledge (Markula and Pringle 2006). Discourses create meaning, but are not neutral, as power relations will influence who can speak, when and where (Barker 2008).

... you *don't think of many Villa fans as being from the city* itself...

... obviously some fans are, you know you've got places like Erdington which *are mainly Villa*, and I imagine there are *places in south Birmingham that are*, but the general opinion of Blues fans is that there's not that many Villa fans in and around the city...

... either team [claiming] that they wholly own the city *is gonna be wrong*, you can't be [two] miles away from each other and have 100 per cent of the support...

... it is such a ridiculous notion that the city belongs to Villa, we'll joke and we'll laugh and we'll turn it round. We know *the city is ours*, we don't need to sing songs to prove it, it's in the name, you *don't see an awful lot of Villa shirts around the city centre*.

With both imagined communities of fans having contradictory perceptions, there is no stable classification of areas or boundaries – so negotiation, tension and contestation remain on-going. It began to emerge that these territories could be regarded as relatively fluid spaces, as areas and boundaries were either unclear or were changing due to constant negotiation. This led to the exploration of the specific locations of the clubs throughout their history.

### **5.2.3. Location of the Clubs**

The location of the football club as a 'place' is important to fans and influences the local Birmingham football subculture (Giulianotti 1999). Football clubs and stadiums provide a sense of place, as "at football matches places unite in support of 'their team', a form of unity seldom experienced in other contexts" (Bale 1993: p.56). Historically, although both clubs moved short distances around a number of locations during their formative years<sup>53</sup>, both clubs and imagined communities of fans have each had their territorial base in a

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<sup>53</sup> The two clubs' locations are discussed in chapter four.

specific locality for more than 130 years (Aston and Small Heath). Storey (2001) stated that once these territories have been produced they become the spatial containers within which people are socialised. However, with football clubs it appears these territories can be fluid and often blurred. At an intra-city level, the catchment areas of supporters of particular clubs may be strongly associated with certain subcultural features (Bale 2003), for example, a strong affinity for ‘your’ team and a strong dislike of ‘your rival’. The area surrounding Birmingham City’s St Andrews Ground may be regarded by all fans as Birmingham City’s (known as the ‘Blues’) territory, where children (potential fans) are socialised into thinking that ‘Blues’ are the ‘pride of Birmingham’<sup>54</sup>, and that Villa are the ‘shit of Birmingham’, and vice-versa (though this is not to say that all the individuals in the vicinity of a football ground support that team or follow football). As Kevin (Villa IT11) discussed, as a fan in Aston “you just grow up knowing that we’re the pride and they’re the scum, I can’t even remember when I knew this, I just always have”. The individuals from each of the locales of the two clubs are bound together into these imagined communities. Apart from war, “sport is one of the few things that binds people to place simply through ascription” (Bale 2003: p.14). However, whilst this was found to be the case for the majority of fans during the data collection, there were some who did not feel ‘bound together’ simply because of their location, and in this instance Bale’s metaphor with war may not fully apply to this case. Therefore, it is argued here that all football fan rivalries are influenced in some way by geography and territory, even if it is not always perceived to be such a central feature of rivalry by each individual fan. For instance, some fans no longer live in the Birmingham area, as Kenny (Villa IT12) explained:

I moved away from the area a long time ago now, so I don’t feel that sort of strong link to the area like I know many of the supporters do... I’m more interested in my team doing well, and beating them lot [referring to Birmingham City], rather than having those sorts of arguments over who owns which bit of Brum [Birmingham].

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<sup>54</sup>This is a common chant sung by fans of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City “we’re the pride of Birmingham”, and conversely “you’re the shit of Birmingham” (based on data gathered from participant observation).

Despite being one of the few fans who was not interested in the local geography aspect of the rivalry, the above excerpt demonstrates that Kenny still acknowledged how many of his fellow fans within the imagined community found it to be significant.

Whilst it may be understandable that the stadiums and immediate vicinity are perceived as each club's core territory (formally defined), other spaces between these locations and across the city are less easy to identify, as those spaces are not formally or clearly defined. Spaces may be somewhat "informal or ill defined", as is the case when considering "the territories of rival urban gangs whose 'patch' or 'turf' may well have a core but the precise boundaries of which may be unclear" (Storey 2001: p.6). This is where spaces become contested and the imagined communities of fans within Birmingham compete for spaces and territory as central features of the rivalry power dynamic, as the "division of geographical space into territories, at whatever scale, represents the spatial expression of power" (Storey 2001: p.172). This power is relational, rather than being an absolute power or involving complete domination (Smith-Maguire 2002), as one group is perceived to have more power in relation to another. That is, these power relations can then become evident in terms of the individual and collective identities of fans, and further, can influence the discourse surrounding the rivalry. Vertinsky and Bale (2004) described how Foucault emphasised the importance of discourse, as it is how this power is actually manifested in terms of space and territory. The discourse surrounding the rivalry, and in particular the territory of the fan groups, extends over the city and the fans and acts 'upon their actions' (Smith-Maguire 2002). The discourse may influence fans to 'keep out' of opposing fans' territory. A Foucauldian interpretation may view this as fans being 'disciplined' into certain spaces within the city of Birmingham. Rival fans' space becomes perceived as the territory of the 'Other' (Philo 2011). However as stated above, there is no complete domination of that area by the 'Other', as the subordinate group still has the freedom to enter if they wish (for example, on match days or due to their occupation or residence) – but the discourse of the territory does have some influence and, to borrow from Smith-Maguire (2002), can act upon or influence their actions. As Kevin (Villa IT11) stated "I go to the home games against Blues, but never away. I'm not heading over to their bit, its rough and I just don't want to go there, I leave them to it". It can be argued that this is an example of the territory discourse acting upon the actions of fans; as, if fans think or are told that certain areas are considered rival territory, then they may be reluctant

to enter that area – which might in turn then further reinforce the construction of that territory belonging to a certain group.

The locations of the two clubs is relevant to fans. As Jake (Blues IT5) stated, the closeness is “very important [due to the] small geographical divide compared to many other clubs”. As outlined by Ricky (Blues IT10), the rivalry is “much more intense and passionate” due to the extremely close proximity of the two clubs (2.38 miles apart) in the centre of the city. Rod (Villa IT4) went as far as saying that if the two clubs were located 20 miles apart instead then he “wouldn’t expect [the rivalry] to be anywhere near as bad”. This view was reflected by the majority of fans. When probed further as to the significance of the close proximity of the two clubs, Rod (Villa IT4) explained:

Because both sets of supporters are constantly using the same bars, nightclubs, the same train stations, the same bus stations, they are constantly in one another’s faces, so there’s a lot of opportunity for baiting the opponents, for want of a better word, particularly on match days. Both sets of fans will be using the city centre to get to the games, whether its respective home or away, so the proximity of them both being a couple of miles away is a big issue for it... so, because they are on top of one another, both from a living point of view and a work point of view, a socialising point of view a commuting point of view, yeah, I do think it has a big say in it.

Similarly, when questioned about the close proximity, Gary (Blues IT3) added “Yes... a lot of them work side by side in the city and in the factories and offices and that, you get many supporters working together and having to suffer if they’ve lost, jibes from the other side and so on”.

The above extracts highlight how the city is used by fans of both teams, and that during their daily lives they have to share and often work in areas of the city that, as a fan of a particular team, they might not always be welcome – in terms of the local footballing subculture. As previously discussed (see section 2.2.3), Stone (2007) provided an explanation of the role of football in everyday life, with a focus on how football is consumed beyond the match day experience in the UK. Stone (2007) described how football transcends an individual’s daily activity space, including their domicile and their

place of work, the pathways, transport and venues which connect those two, and their leisure pursuits. Many fans bore witness to this, describing the time they spend ‘on football’ throughout their daily lives, in terms of going to matches, watching football on television, reading and talking about it, and – for an increasing amount it seems – accessing online fan forums for information, entertainment and even for their job. Therefore, it could be argued that the football fan rivalry in Birmingham transcends the everyday lives of the fans, and these activities and interactions with both fellow and rival fans continues to inform and reinforce the rivalry – at the very least in terms of friendly and humorous ‘jibes’, ‘banter’, ‘one-up-manship’ and ‘taking the piss’ – as discussed by many fans included in this study.

From this it would seem that, as suggested by Sack (1986), a place can be used as territory at one time but not at another. For instance, referring back to the above excerpt from Kevin, the territory in the vicinity of Birmingham City’s St Andrews Ground may be viewed as Blues’ territory and therefore considered off limits to Villa fans on match day – i.e., Villa fans entering this area may lead to contestation or conflict. However, Villa fans may, for example, work in the local factories during the week for their livelihood. Therefore, away from football, in people’s working lives this territory around the ground may be neutral. This highlights how territory is not static but constantly being (re)negotiated. By drawing on Goffman’s (1959) ‘Dramaturgical Model’<sup>55</sup>, Armstrong (1998: p.198) described the dynamic and evolving nature of space and territory in relation to rival fans on a macro-level:

In the space of the ten years or so between 1970 and 1980, the football ground went from being the front stage for the expression of animosities to being the back stage, where analysis and post-mortems between rivals could be shared through epithets and humour concerning ‘no man’s lands’. The new venues of contested rivalry became the

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<sup>55</sup> Goffman’s dramaturgical model is based on a theatrical metaphor, which stems from symbolic interactionism. It seeks to explain social actions through this metaphor – viewing some actions and behaviour as ‘frontstage’, in front of an audience, and others as ‘backstage’ where there is no audience and the ‘actors’ are preparing (Williams 2008). A basic analysis using this model might suggest that fans ‘perform’ in a certain way when ‘frontstage’ in view of rival fans – emphasising the strength of their own group and going to certain lengths to denigrate their rivals (e.g., through chanting or shouting abuse), whereas their ‘backstage’ behaviour might be different – they may be less overt with their team identification or denigrating of rivals – and perhaps even acknowledge some of the positive factors of their rivals. For instance, during interviews (backstage or arguably a ‘third’ stage, see further discussion in section 5.3.1.) some Blues fans acknowledged Villa’s historical success (as outlined in chapter four and discussed further in chapter six), whereas they suggested that they certainly would not behave like that in front of their rivals (frontstage).

more contextual and inconsistent centres of the train-station, the public house, and the city centres.

This shows both the long-standing, historical significance of space and territory for fans, and also how these contested spaces are fluid and change over time. At a more micro-level, specific places or areas can be especially relevant to this football fan rivalry at certain times. Rod (Villa IT4) stated “both sets of fans will be using the city centre” on match days. Therefore the bars, clubs and transport hubs used by all fans may be perceived to be either Blues or Villa territory depending on which team is playing on the day. This suggests territory is not fixed; therefore it is difficult to make classifications of areas or boundaries, which is a central facet of territoriality (Sack 1986) – although, as is the nature of territoriality, fans still *attempt* to make classifications. Elden (2010: p.4), also claimed that “a place can be a territory at times but not at others”, as territoriality is not always permanent, as football fan territory may be perceived as being neutral in certain contexts (explaining the factory workers example given above). This complexity regarding territory can be explained further using Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and capital (Bourdieu 1993). Within the cultural field<sup>56</sup> under investigation (football in Birmingham), fans gain access to certain knowledge through their habitus<sup>57</sup>. In this instance, they develop an understanding of territory in relation to their team and their rivals, which areas of the city are regarded as Blues’ territory, and so on – information with which outsiders will most likely be unfamiliar. This knowledge can be analysed as being a form of subcultural capital (Giulianotti 2002) within this cultural field, or as Thornton (1995) described it, being ‘in the know’. Bourdieu (1984) equated having high levels of (subcultural) capital with having certain levels of power and influence within a specific field. Therefore, being in the know is viewed as desirable by fans, in order to gain more power within their cultural field. More significantly, having ownership and control over territory can actually be viewed as a form of capital, so that rival groups of fans contest this ‘territorial capital’ within this power dynamic – both attempting to become the dominant group, or as Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b) called it, the legitimising identity. If fans became aware of one group’s higher level of ‘territorial capital’, this may influence the fans’

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<sup>56</sup> A Cultural Field is a social setting where individuals and their power relationships are located, the field is hierarchical and the location of struggles for power based on various forms and levels of capital (Bourdieu 1984).

<sup>57</sup> Habitus is the socialised subjectivity of people, which represents the system of classification that shapes people’s practices, beliefs, habits, ‘tastes’ and bodily techniques (Bourdieu 1984).



habitus, which can then (according to Bourdieu's formula for practice<sup>58</sup>) influence the practice and behaviour of fans. Further application of Bourdieu's formula can demonstrate how, generally speaking, a legitimising identity may use its territorial capital to continually reproduce its control of a space, as strategies are developed by the dominant group in order to condition individuals within a subculture into becoming accustomed to their perceptions, tastes and judgements (Bridge 2011). However, the link between habitus and a specific space could be viewed as contentious, as Hillier and Rooksby (2002) questioned whether habitus is actually relevant to a definite space in a rapidly globalising world. Therefore, it may be more suitable here to interpret the habitus as being that of the individuals within the two imagined communities of fans, rather than connect habitus to fans who inhabit a precise territory of Birmingham. This is due to the lack of classification of fan areas, which is the over-arching argument here. Though both sets of fans may *attempt* to gain territorial capital in order to then control a certain space and potentially become the dominant group, it appears in this rivalry that neither group can be identified as the legitimising, dominant identity with regards to the territorial aspect of the rivalry – so the contestation and tension continues.

As Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001b) outlined, the struggle to become the legitimising identity is not static, as the legitimising identity is challenged by the resistance identity and it can be overthrown. This is a fluid, on-going process. Similarly, the territoriality in Birmingham discussed here is a constantly fluctuating process of fans claiming power and authority over their rivals, and requires constant effort to (re)establish and maintain boundaries (Sack 1986), if it is even possible to establish them at all. Fans of both clubs continue to attempt to claim territory in the city for themselves – which it is argued here leads to further tension and contestation. The contradictory and inconsistent nature of these specific claims by fans is the focus of the following section, using data from field notes, interviews, online fan forums and fan biographies<sup>59</sup>. However, this territoriality and battle for power between rival fan groups is not just limited to claiming certain, specific areas of the city as their territory.

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<sup>58</sup> The formula for Bourdieu's conceptualisation of practice is: (Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice (Laberge and Kay 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Though the clear focus of the books by Brown and Brittle (2006), Gall (2005) and George (2006) is hooliganism involving Aston Villa and Birmingham City – some of the more general information provided by fans of each team has been informative throughout this study.

#### 5.2.4. Owning the City

It has become evident during the data analysis that both groups of fans try to claim the whole city itself as their territory – virtually like the ultimate power-play, each claiming that they are so dominant that they literally ‘own the city’<sup>60</sup>. Data revealed that claiming to ‘own the city’ of Birmingham is becoming increasingly popular amongst both imagined communities. It was also evident that this theme of ‘owning the city’ was more prominent when a team was doing well – for example, it was often sung by fans immediately after their team scored, both when Villa and Blues played each other and when either side played another team. Singing ‘the city is ours’ straight after scoring was a very common theme during participant observation with both Villa and Blues fans. At the cup match between the two teams in December 2010 (BCAV1), it was noted that:

When Blues scored and went 1-0 up the first chant the fans collectively sang (after all the initial delirium and cheering) was ‘the city is ours’... When Villa equalised the Villa fans immediately also sang their version of this, amongst the frenzied celebrations... When Birmingham later scored the winning goal to make it 2-1, it was their turn to sing this again, and they did so repeatedly until the end of the match – this highlights how fans relate success on the pitch to dominance and ownership of the city. It almost seems like you can’t sing this chant without having some form of success ‘on the pitch’ by the actual team to back up the claim or provide some form of validation. Therefore, due to the short-term nature of football and the scores constantly changing in every game, this further draws attention to the non-static, changing nature of the power dynamics of the rivalry and the claims by fans – constant (re)negotiation it seems.

This highlights the strong links that were found between power, location and sporting success. Bale (2003) emphasised a number of ways in which sport success has been used to demonstrate place pride and put a small locality ‘on the map’, for instance, small American towns proclaiming sport success on billboards on the entrance to the town.

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<sup>60</sup> Also a common chant, as both sets of fans often sing their own version: “the city is ours, the city is ours, fuck off [Small Heath/Aston], the city is ours”, in order to attempt to claim or establish ownership of the city of Birmingham (based on data gathered from participant observation).

However, in the large city of Birmingham, the two imagined communities of fans use sporting success to not only demonstrate place pride ('we're the pride of Birmingham' is a popular chant for both teams), but also to lay claim to the city as theirs, as they claim themselves to be *the* dominant football club and group of fans. These chants are intended to add to the discourse surrounding the rivalry, in a similar way to the internet messages discussed above. In addition to using this discourse to remain the legitimising identity within the rivalry dynamic, fan groups could also generate a new project identity that aims to challenge the dominant group. Many fans suggested that this was done by Birmingham City when they were promoted into the Premier League in 2002, after more than a decade outside the top league (as discussed in chapter four). It could be said that sporting achievement equates to territorial 'ownership' which equates to power. How these types of claims are communicated shall be discussed further in the subsequent section (communication of boundaries).

When asked about the importance of these claims to 'own the city', many fans stated it was "extremely important" (Rod, Villa IT4), and was, perhaps, becoming more so. As Dan (Blues IT1) explained:

It's quite strong, I think it's becoming increasingly more so, ... I think its evidenced itself through the 'city is ours' song, I'm sure you've heard it many times, which I don't believe either of the teams started I believe it came from Manchester, Man Utd, it seems to have been adopted locally. I'm not sure whether it gets sung at Villa Park I don't know. It's quite a strong theme at Blues now, things that made me laugh when we played in the Carling cup final and I know there was a banner left on the gates at Villa Park saying we're leaving it with you temporarily but don't forget the city is still ours – I think it's becoming stronger is how I'd answer that question.

Therefore, through claiming ownership of the city, fans of both teams are attempting to gain superiority and establish themselves as the more powerful imagined community of fans, even if there is no tangible evidence of this 'ownership' of territory. The link between territory and this rivalry is related to the social understanding of territory and that the expression of power over the city brings social status to the club (and its fans), and at the same time denigrates the opposing group of fans who, by implication, may appear to

be relatively insignificant and lacking in power. Bourdieu's concept of capital is again useful here, as the social status of 'owning' territory can be viewed as (sub)cultural capital. Therefore, more territory equals more (sub)cultural capital, which equals more power within the cultural field of the Birmingham football rivalry. This theme of claiming ownership of the city appears to breed further tensions and one-up-manship, using different 'facts' to support rival claims of dominance within the field. According to Giulianotti (2005a), Bourdieu viewed the power relations within a field as a kind of 'game', where social agents take up positions according to their habitus and capital endowment. Understanding the Birmingham rivalry field in this way also highlights the use of educational capital by fans, as "new players must acquire practical understandings of the game and its history" (Giulianotti 2005a: p.158). So, referring back to the above extract, Dan demonstrated his understanding of the importance of this territory theme within the 'game'/sub-culture, and also through his knowledge of the history of the rivalry (educational capital) he was able to identify how it was changing over recent history and becoming an increasingly significant factor for fans – which was in keeping with the data collected from other fans. Taking Bourdieu's thinking further, fans with high levels of educational capital like Dan will be afforded greater amounts of power or influence due to their knowledge, so within the 'game' they may choose to use this to influence the discourse surrounding the rivalry – presumably to attempt to increase their clubs (perceived) superiority by claiming to 'own the city'. However, it is difficult to discern to what extent this actually works. As stated previously, there is not a clear legitimising, dominant group within the rivalry when it comes to territory – so it is difficult to ascertain how successful fans might be as neither group completely 'owns the city'. Instead there is contestation and tension created through the struggle – but what was clear was that this was a central concern for fans when considering the rivalry.

With regard to the importance of owning the city, the above discussion outlines how fans of both clubs placed emphasis on this aspect. However, during the data analysis, it began to emerge that there was a contemporary perception that there were conceivably more Blues fans within the city itself (whether this legitimises any claims to own the city was unclear), but there were many more Villa fans located outside of the city. Kenny (Villa, IT12) alluded to this point:

You have to admit there are a lot of Blues in Brum centre, now like. But I'd say Villa's followers as a collective are unrivalled in the wider region, no doubt for me. Many of them might live out in the sticks a few hours away now, but look at the attendances at the two [clubs]... Villa wins it if you think about the big picture.

Outsiders may perceive having a broader and larger fan base across the country (and perhaps even globally), like Villa's fan base now seems to be, which would be an indicator of a superior club and fan community. But this is certainly not the case for Blues fans, as it appeared that having fans from outside the city was almost a negative, as the earlier quote from Ricky (Blues, IT10) indicated: "The whole of Birmingham is full of real Brummies, it's all Blues fans really, the only Villa areas are outside the city, in places like Worcester or Staffordshire". For Ricky, and many other Blues fans, there is more cultural capital to be had from having a strong fan base in the city, rather than Villa's recent history of having a large proportion of their fans based in neighbouring regions, which seemed to be viewed with a certain amount of disdain. When this point was discussed informally with Villa fans during participant observation, many did disagree with this perspective, though this may have been due to it arguably affording Blues more subcultural capital than themselves.

Throughout the data collection it was apparent that the historical aspect of the rivalry was clearly important for the fans. When considering power relations and social conflict in relation to a specific (sub)culture over long periods of time, the concept of hegemony has also been instructive (Rowe 2004), and has been used frequently by cultural studies scholars to explore how history, experience and ideology are stitched together in people's everyday lives (Turner 2003). Therefore, this concept shall be used to assist in the analysis of the above territorial themes.

### **5.2.5. Hegemony: The Struggle for Territory**

The Gramscian concept of hegemony is a term used to describe the relations of domination which are not visible and involve not direct coercion but consent on the part of the dominated (Gramsci 1971). Raymond Williams in particular benefited from the

utilisation of the concept of hegemony (Jarvie and Maguire 1994). Williams' idea of culture merging with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, placing emphasis on the interplay between history, experience and ideology in everyday life (Turner 2003), is informative when considering the territoriality element of the Birmingham rivalry.

Employing the notion of history combined with location, many fans pointed to the footballing success<sup>61</sup> of Aston Villa in order to claim legitimacy or 'ownership of the city'. An illustrative example being the view of Kevin (Villa IT11): "there's only one team in Birmingham, look at all the trophies and league wins and the bloody European Cup for God's sake! No comparison for me". This claim is built on the relative footballing success of each club in the city, and Villa fans perceived this to be important. Although most Blues fans initially dismissed this aspect, once probed further there were many who felt they had to (begrudgingly) acknowledge the historical success of their rivals in the region. For example, Jimmy (Blues IT8) conceded: "you have to admit they have been a lot more successful with how much they've won, we can't compete with that". Also, as suggested in the literature review, several Villa fans claimed legitimacy when it came to being the established club, as they have been in the Premier League since its inception in 1992, whereas Birmingham City have only re-joined the top-flight in 2002 and have since endured three relegations, most recently in 2011. Whilst the historical footballing success does not legitimise Villa fans' claims to 'own the city', the data suggested that (eventually) fans from both sides would agree on Aston Villa's dominance in terms of this historical facet. However, though Villa may be regarded as dominant (legitimising identity) in historical terms, this dominance is not complete. This is an important aspect of hegemony, as hegemonic control offers opportunities for negotiation and consent, not just complete domination (Gramsci 1971).

Within these power relations, both the dominant and the subordinate group can gain something from the struggle through the process of accommodation that occurs between them (Hargreaves 1986). For instance, there are other aspects within the broader territory theme that mean Birmingham City fans can claim some cultural capital – like Birmingham City football club having the name of the city in their name. Dan (Blues IT1) explained "Yeah, there's one team that carries the name of the city really and the other is just a small

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<sup>61</sup> The success of the two clubs is also discussed at length in the subsequent discussion chapter.

suburb of the city” – referring firstly to Birmingham City FC bearing the name of the city in their own name, and secondly to Aston being ‘merely’ a small part of the conurbation – which fans of Birmingham City perceived to be significant. Fans of Aston Villa seem to pay less attention to this factor, but concede that it holds a certain amount of significance (cultural capital). It could be argued that through identifying their team in relation to the names (and therefore the physical size) of these locations – Birmingham and Aston – Blues fans are attempting to ‘prove’ that Birmingham City are the ‘established’ club because Birmingham is the larger ‘place’, with Aston being a small constituent part of the city. Therefore, Aston Villa and its fans are perceived to lack authority and authenticity in this respect. However, for some fans it is more complex than that. For instance, when questioned as to whether Birmingham City fans may perceive themselves to be the ‘established’ club due to their name and the size of Birmingham, Gary (Blues IT3) discussed his perception of his fellow Blues supporters:

I think there might be an element of that, but, I mean they can’t really see it as more established because they’ve not got the [footballing] record in any way to justify that, I think they do feel because their club [Birmingham City] carries the city’s name, it deserves a bit more recognition than it gets. And that they’re jealous then of the fact that Villa who don’t carry the city’s name does get that recognition. Not the fact that they get the recognition because they are successful and Birmingham are not.

This also highlights the importance of the history of the local area, as the tension and claims go beyond a contemporary understanding of the layout of the city.

It has been discussed how the previously independent ancient parish of Aston only became partly included into the ever-expanding conurbation of the borough of Birmingham in 1838 (Cherry 1994) and officially part of the city of Birmingham in 1911 (Lerwill 2009), whereas the much smaller settlement of Bordesley has traditionally always been viewed as a part of Birmingham. Several fans have used this information in different ways to attempt to claim legitimacy and dominance over their rivals. For example, Birmingham City fans may claim “the City never was yours and never will be...you weren’t even from it in the first place” (post from a Blues fan taken from *Singing the Blues*, an online fan forum). This is a reference to Aston being separate from Birmingham until 1911, and has been

found to be a common theme amongst Blues fans when discussing the rivalry. In contrast, Villa fans have focused more on how Aston was a much larger conurbation than Birmingham until the boom of the Industrial Revolution. As Kenny (Villa IT12) stated:

For some of us older fans, we understand the history of the area, you see Aston used to be the big place in the area, not Birmingham, so Aston has always been really important. Just like our club, Aston as an area has the real history over the long term, and people would do well to remember that sometimes.

A similar account was also expressed by Blues fan Gary (Blues IT3), who identified that “people don’t realise that there was a time when Aston was a bigger part of this area than Birmingham was, you know, way back in its history. And I think that affects things”. This again highlights how territory can evolve over time, and therefore how territoriality is a constantly changing process (Sack 1986) – with value being added to various claims for legitimacy and dominance by different fan groups. These are long-term, historical processes that demonstrate how the past still affects the present in this football rivalry. Raymond Williams’ (1977) use of dominant-residual-emergent is useful here. It highlights the historical struggle for dominance, and, although Aston Villa may have been the historically dominant force that claimed to ‘own the city’, Birmingham City as the emergent force may at some point become dominant, with Aston Villa’s cultural dominance becoming residual. Nevertheless, Williams (1977) underlined the complexity of this cultural process, as emergent cultural forces take time to be recognised, acknowledged and then accepted, especially as the dominant forces shall resist this emergent force. They may in fact never achieve any of this. In this instance, Aston Villa fans would be dismissive of the emergent Birmingham City subculture and be disdainful of their claims for subcultural capital.

Gramsci (1971) outlined how the links between history and the on-going struggle (such as demonstrated above) are central to the concept of hegemony, and these aspects are undoubtedly evident within the struggle for territorial control and power within this football rivalry. The historical perceptions of the fans of the two teams’ footballing success appeared to influence the current discourse surrounding the territorial contestation. In this regard, fans from both sides acknowledged Villa’s dominance historically since the



beginning of the football league in 1888 (as discussed in chapter four), and this is interpreted here as Villa gaining hegemonic control over the city's territory in footballing terms. However, Villa fans also concede (to a lesser extent) small amounts of cultural capital to Birmingham City fans with regard to their club bearing the city's name, which represents some negotiation within the struggle for hegemonic control – with the subordinate group (in terms of claims over territory historically, this is the Blues fans) still gaining something (Hargreaves 1986). Nevertheless, this is just one small aspect of the broader territory theme, which means the importance of the historical success of the clubs in relation to territory contributes to and informs the on-going, complex negotiations and struggle to gain superiority between the rival groups.

This section addressed the emergent theme of the classification of boundaries of territory within Birmingham, with the aim of highlighting the complex struggle for territory and therefore dominance. It emerged that claims to control or own territory from both sides were often contradictory or inconsistent, which adds to the tensions and contestation between the groups – as both sets of fans wanted to increase their cultural capital, and therefore power. This is done by claiming what can be referred to here as 'territorial capital'. The following section shall focus on how these claims are communicated, as the emergent theme of the communication of boundaries is a central facet of territoriality (Sack 1986; Storey 2001) and also helps to further explore the struggle for dominance through the various methods of communication used by fans.

### **5.3 Communication of Boundaries**

The following discussion centres on how the fans communicate the boundaries of territory when it comes to this football rivalry. It is argued here that disagreements and failures to significantly influence the rivalry discourse leads to further tension and contestation.

Communication is imperative in terms of territoriality, as it is acknowledged that:

Conventional treatments of territory recognise that in order for it to 'work' – to do what is expected or intended – something has to be 'communicated'. At minimum some agent... has to communicate to relevant others that a territory exists or is being

claimed; that entry (or exit) is prohibited or conditional upon certain specifications; and that there are consequences to be expected if one disregards these claims.

(Delaney 2009: p.203)

Therefore, the following not only explores how fans communicate and what is communicated, but also provides an interpretation of the meanings behind these communications – in relation to territoriality and this fan rivalry. Hence, the subsequent section addresses how fans communicate the control of territory, which precedes an analysis of the rivalry discourse, before the discussion focuses on the specific communication surrounding the importance of ‘naming’ for the fans and also the more innovative ways fans attempt to communicate and influence the rivalry discourse.

### **5.3.1. Communicating Ownership of Territory**

Chanting is a very significant aspect of football fan culture (Charleston 2008). In particular, Clark (2006) highlighted the importance of chanting in football, the significance of certain chants during games, and the ways in which fans use chanting to establish and reinforce the internal-external dialectic between ‘them’ and ‘us’. However, there are underlying themes of these verbal expressions, and as Merkel (2007) noted, at a deeper level, chants are verbal expressions of dominance, superiority, courage and invincibility. There are numerous examples from both sets of fans when they sing different chants that basically allude to either their own superiority or the inferiority of their local rivals. There are examples of chants that both sets of fans use, but have their own versions of, for example:

“Shit on the City, shit on the City tonight” – sung by Villa fans.

“Shit on the Villa, shit on the Villa tonight” – sung by Blues fans.

Another example is the chant discussed previously:

“The City is Ours, the City is Ours, Fuck Off (Aston/Small Heath), the City is Ours”<sup>62</sup>

The significance of this song to the collective identity of both sets of fans was evident throughout the participant observation, as demonstrated by this extract from the field notes:

It seemed quite noticeable that when Villa did score the first and second goals, the first collective song that began, and promptly caught on, echoing around the ground amongst more than 40,000 fans, was ‘The City is ours, the City is ours, fuck off Small Heath, the City is ours’. This song refers to Villa’s local rivals Birmingham City and the fact the two teams come from the centre of the city of Birmingham and therefore both teams, it would appear from the games I have attended, want to claim some form of superiority or domination or legitimation of ‘owning’ the city or being the bigger, more successful team/club/imagined community. So it would seem, perhaps, that when the Villa imagined community are successful and things are going well, they appear to want to denigrate the Blues and show/claim they are the dominant team in Birmingham, and claim that the city is ‘theirs’, rather than sing their own praises in their own right – even in a game when they’re beating Man United! It may also be for other teams, in this case the Man Utd fans and the television viewers live and in highlight shows, for them to hear the Villa fans do this and associate the success on the pitch and the fans singing the city is ‘theirs’, and it may be possible to say that Villa fans are attempting to create a discourse of Villa being the dominant, more powerful team. Birmingham City fans attempt to do a similar thing in their own favour, as I have found in previous games and during the recent derby game at Villa Park. Even though Birmingham were not the opposition, and despite the favourable fact that Villa had gone 2-0 up against a great team like Man Utd, the rivalry with Birmingham City was still very much at the forefront of Villa fans’ minds as the Villa fans straight after the goals sang about the rivalry.

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<sup>62</sup> The Birmingham City fans sing “fuck off Aston...” and the Aston Villa fans sing “fuck off Small Heath...”, which is a reference to when Birmingham City were known as Small Heath FC. Using their old name is intended by Villa fans to be derogatory, but many Blues fans express openly how they are proud of that name.

There are other instances when fans use a chant sung by their rivals, and try to turn it around to mock them – a good example being a popular chant by Villa fans, simply a repetitive, collective chant of ‘Villa’ followed by clapping. Birmingham City fans often sing this back to the Villa fans but in a mocking, high-pitched tone – in an attempt to undermine their rivals (though this is certainly not a unique strategy used by fans in Birmingham).

The strong ‘them’ and ‘us’ theme is evident in many songs of both sets of fans, and are sung throughout matches, even when Villa and Blues are not playing each other. Football is said to provide “what is arguably the major focus for collective identification in modern Britain” for those involved (Bale 1993: p.55), and this collective identity is often clearly expressed through chanting. Even though fans would certainly not know each individual in their ‘imagined community’ of fellow fans (Giulianotti 1999), they are certain about who ‘they’ are and who ‘they are not’, as the “fear of a defined sociocultural ‘other’ is in many ways an integral part of fandom and the creation of loyalty to a chosen club” (Bairner and Shirlow 2001: p.46).

However, Delaney (2009) highlighted the importance of the meanings behind the ‘them’ and ‘us’ interplay, and how it is also complex, richer and more subtle than one might initially think. Even though there may be a strong ‘them’ and ‘us’ theme in a footballing sense, due to the close proximity of the two clubs in the centre of the city, rival fans are forced to interact when away from a football setting. An extract from field notes (AVBC1) is illustrative of firstly the animosity towards their rivals, but in a more subtle sense highlights one of the idiosyncratic cultural elements of this rivalry – the close proximity and the fact many rival fans interact in their everyday lives:

Villa fans then continue by singing “my old man said be a City fan, and I said bollocks you’re a cunt, ‘cuz we hate the Blues and we’re gonna show it, we hate the Blues and we fuckin’ know it. With Spinksy and Birchy, Alan McNally, they’re the boys who’re gonna do us fine, ‘cuz if you support the Blues you’re a blue nose bastard and you ain’t no friend of mine – all together now” and repeat. This song makes reference to the close links for some supporters, who due to the close proximity of the two clubs may have family members who support the ‘other’ team.

An extract from an interview with Archie (Villa IT7) is another example of this subtle disparity, in terms of the ‘them’ and ‘us’ interplay, and also serves to highlight the intensity and depth of the rivalry:

I remember another occasion, it was 1982 Boxing day at the “Sty”, oops I mean St Andrews. Villa were European champions, I was with my friend, we were with our girlfriends in the day up town before the game and we both went our separate ways to support our teams. I remember him asking me where I was meeting other people, I said I can’t remember the name of the pub, because I thought he would come with the Acocks Green crew to have a go. The pub was the Forge Tavern on Heath Mill Lane. The point here is although I know I would not have been attacked by my friend it just goes to show the mentality between the two sets of fans i.e. huge hatred then friends again afterwards. I still don’t get it after all these years.

This different behaviour and mentality of fans at various times can be explained using Goffman’s (1959) ‘front stage and back stage’ impression management. Individuals and groups are said to manage the way others view them (their impression). In front stage areas, people are actors who behave a certain way (perform) because they know they are in front of an audience, the aim being to pass on certain meanings to this audience (Goffman 1959). As, in the back stage area, there is no audience, it is here that actors prepare for their performances and seek to maintain the credibility of their role (Birrell and Donnelly 2004). A simple example of this could be a generic chant sung by fans all over the country (including different versions sung by Villa and Blues fans) – “we’re by far the greatest team, the world has ever seen...”. This is sung front stage in front of an audience - rival fans, TV cameras, radio mic’s, and so on - trying to assert their own dominance as ‘the greatest team in the world’. However, back stage<sup>63</sup> fans will openly acknowledge that

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<sup>63</sup> The researcher could interact with a group of fans or an individual in the back stage region, for instance, during an interview (away from rival fans or outside the stadium vicinity). However, it is acknowledged that, as the fan is aware of the researcher’s presence, this ‘performance’ may not be ‘pure’ back stage. This could be explained as a third region – in addition to the front and back regions – which Goffman (1959) referred to as the ‘outside region’, and those individuals that are outside of the front/back establishment are ‘outsiders’. So, if a researcher is considered to be an outsider, then “those who are outside will be persons for whom the performers actually or potentially put on a show, but a show different from, or all too similar to, the one in progress” (1959: p.135). Goffman outlined that if the performer(s) wishes to put on a different show for an outsider, then they must be able to segregate the outside region from the front/back stage regions. This may have been possible for fans to do during interviews, as the interviewee was alone with the researcher and could therefore put on a

they do not really feel their team is the best in the world, and will often instead discuss how poor their team was in the match. With regard to territory in Birmingham and this rivalry, it appears front stage – during matches in the stands, discussions with rival fans, on internet forums – the theme of ‘owning the city’ is important as outlined above, not least because of the sheer volume of discussions and how much this is mentioned. However, further probing and time spent amongst fans has demonstrated that back stage, when rival fans are not present (the audience), some fans have outlined that they do not feel quite as strongly about this theme, but they have to ‘keep up appearances’. Ricky (Blues IT10) further highlighted the differing behaviour by fans, as he stated “I probably wouldn’t say some of them things to someone’s face, especially if I knew them, but when you’re at the ground you just have to join in and sing some of those songs to let all them Villa lot know that we really don’t like them”.

A limitation of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model here is that it can structure an explanation of the differences in behaviour of the fans, but it can be descriptive when accounting for why differences exist. Bourdieu’s (1984) concepts (field, habitus and capital) can be valuable here, as it can be argued that within the cultural field of this football fan rivalry in Birmingham, the two groups of fans are attempting to gain greater levels of cultural capital in order to increase their power and influence over their rivals. If a certain group of fans perceive themselves to be at the wrong end of this power dynamic they may wish to attempt to increase their cultural capital by claiming something they themselves may not necessarily perceive to be true in order to gain more capital – for instance, the examples above of chanting about being the ‘greatest team in the world’ or ‘owning the city’. This highlights the agency that individuals have within the field. Bourdieu (1984; 1993) consistently placed agents/agency at the centre of the process of making and changing societies. However, it is important to remember that there is a

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‘different’ show from their ‘normal’ front or back stage behaviour. So, it is again acknowledged that it is not possible to claim with absolute certainty that the data collected during interviews was ‘pure’ back stage performance. However, the strength of the ethnographic approach meant that interview data was collected alongside data from participant observation, both at games and in pubs (where the researcher went largely unnoticed amongst large groups of people) and also collected from online fan sites, where anyone can browse comments anonymously, so the researcher’s presence would not have influenced the ‘virtual’ performance. In addition to this, as large amounts of data was collected (in the above ways) in the front stage region amongst the audience, the performers would not be able to segregate the outsider from the audience, therefore the outsider would witness the genuine front/back stage behaviour. As the data from the interviews aligned with data from observations and fan websites during the thematic analysis, it is considered to be valid and useful in gaining the partial interpretation of the rivalry that is the aim of this study.

constant interaction between habitus and the cultural field which may influence agency (Laberge and Kay 2002). For instance, changes within the cultural field of football (e.g., their team's promotion or relegation) may place limitations on the fans' agency to claim that their team is superior or the 'greatest team in the world'.

### 5.3.2. Rivalry Discourse

As discussed in the literature review, a cultural studies analysis may describe chanting as a signifying practice, a meaning-producing activity that involves the production and exchange of signs which generate meaning (Barthes 2007). The language used in chants by football fans may be explained by two systems of signification: *denotation* which is a descriptive and literal level of meaning shared by practically all elements of a culture; and *connotation* which involves meanings that are generated by connecting various signifiers to wider cultural concerns (Barker 2008). This can be applied to the 'city is ours' song, which as stated above is popular amongst both Blues and Villa supporters. The denotation of that chant is that this city/territory belongs to *us*. However, when analysed further, the connotations are that *we* are superior/powerful (in relation to our rivals); *they* are irrelevant. As Merkel (2007) suggested, there are deeper layers to the chant, based around dominance and superiority. This chant is dismissive of the team's rivals, whilst at the same time demonstrating that their rivals are needed in order for them to have someone to be dominant over. This highlights how, within this rivalry dynamic, power is relative. There is no single source of power that groups are resisting (such as, for example, a government). Instead, a Foucauldian interpretation of power is adopted here that specifies how power operates at all levels of social interaction and involves all people (Barker 2008), or as Bowe and Martin (2007) suggested, power is constructed through people interacting in a specific social context. As Foucault (1978: p.93) himself stated, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society".

Smith-Maguire (2002: p.296) highlighted how Foucault saw this 'complex strategical situation' as "strategic games, which can be played with more or less domination". The subtlety of Foucault's understanding of power within the 'game' highlights how the use of

chanting influences the rivalry discourse. This is because contemporary power is about trying to influence or *act upon the actions* of others, rather than trying to directly force them to do something by inflicting or threatening them with harm, as this becomes no longer a ‘game’ of power relations but purely a relation of violence (Smith-Maguire 2002). As discussed previously, and highlighted by Giulianotti (2005a), Bourdieu also viewed power relations as a kind of game (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Both highlight how power and domination is never complete, and also how those involved are interdependent – just like the game of football itself in which each side implements strategies in order to influence or act upon the actions of their opposition during a game, but neither team can ever become completely dominant. Bourdieu (1984; 1993) emphasised the importance of capital and habitus within the field, whereas an important aspect of the ‘game’ for Foucault is how it is *positive* and *productive*, especially in terms of providing the potential for resistance (Chase 2006). To borrow from Armstrong and Giulianotti’s (2001b) framework for rivalries, the ‘game’ of power relations provides an opportunity for the group that is on the wrong end of the power dynamic to become the ‘resistance identity’, or perhaps even to try to change their situation by becoming the ‘project identity’.

As Foucault (1977) viewed power as being *positive* and *productive*, rather than destructive, it is argued here that fans want the ‘game’ of power relations to continue in Birmingham. Without someone to exert some form of influence or control over, such as a rival group of fans, there can be no power relations and therefore no social power. On reflection, following the completion of data collection, it was recognised that whilst there was contempt for and often hatred towards their rivals, there was never any mention by fans of reconciliation or not wanting their rivals to exist. Therefore, the rivalry and power relations involved are seen as *productive* inasmuch as it appears that fans want to be involved in the ‘game’ and they gain enjoyment and excitement (and power) from the rivalry, it gives them something to discuss and engage with. As Ricky (Blues IT10) explained, “unless something happens in a cup, the derby games [against Aston Villa] are pretty much the biggest games of the season... we get well up for it, it’s a massive buzz beating them, then we make sure they bloody well know about it”. This highlights the importance of the rivalry to the fans and also how it is a significant part of their collective identity. Similarly, as none of the fans seemed to want an end to the rivalry, in addition to



possibly gaining excitement, power and influence from it, the rivalry can also be seen as *positive*, rather than negative or destructive, which is consistent with Foucault's thinking (Smith-Maguire 2002).

To continue the contextually specific focus on territory and discourse, engaging with chanting can be understood as an attempt to display some form of control or influence over rival groups. Fans incorporate culturally specific knowledge into chants that aim to either promote their own team or denigrate their rivals. Another example is Villa fans chanting "100 years and won fuck all", making reference to Birmingham City's relative lack of footballing success throughout their history. Here the Villa fans are singing a song during a match, directed towards their rivals in a denigrating manner, which also through implication aims to highlight their own team's footballing success. Within this specific context, Birmingham City's lack of success is perceived in relation to Villa's success. Yet, in the broader football context, Aston Villa are not as successful as many other clubs, so this claim to power remains locked within this specific cultural field. Developing the Foucauldian approach, claims to specific knowledge are also attempts to gain power (Barth 2008), and this is used to try to influence the discourse surrounding the rivalry by casting themselves as superior (legitimising identity) and their rivals as inferior (resistance identity). This link between knowledge and power within the rivalry discourse is also evident in some of the more specific examples individual fans have mentioned, as they use specific knowledge to gain some form of authority (power) which they can then use in their attempt to influence the broader discourse. An obvious, contemporary example of this is when fans attempt to communicate their control over certain territory using the internet.

### **5.3.3. Subcultural 'Facts' and The Importance of a Name**

During the fans' attempts to communicate (with each other but also, to a lesser and perhaps indirect extent, their rivals), it was discovered that the rival groups place emphasis on certain 'facts' (that favour their own team) and are dismissive of opposing 'claims' – in order to justify their perceived supremacy and ownership of the city. This leads to further frustration and tension, as neither group of fans consistently acknowledges the status or

cultural capital of their rival's claims to legitimacy. The extracts below are taken from a range of online fan forums<sup>64</sup> - some of them for Aston Villa fans and some for Birmingham City fans<sup>65</sup>. They have been arranged and included here as a form of cultural tapestry (Barker 2008) in order to begin to demonstrate the sort of communication by fans – focusing on territoriality between the two fan groups:

Blues: “Small Heath was always part of Birmingham”. [Aston only ‘absorbed’ in 1911]

Villa: “Aston was a larger conurbation up until the Industrial Revolution”.

Blues: “It’s only our team that carries the name of the city, that says it all”.

Villa: “Basically [Blues] carry the name of the city but Villa fly the flag for it – look at the trophies”.

Blues: “Not sure, but I think I've just sussed out why they dislike us so much - We are their biggest claim to fame! Being a part of Birmingham is their No.1 claim to fame, before having an Expressway and a Jacobean style house”.

Villa: “We have way more fans, we’re the biggest club... they can’t even fill their tiny shed of a stadium let alone own the city”.

This lack of a coherent consensus amongst fan groups is particularly evident with the more specific theme of the importance of the name of the city being in the name of Birmingham City FC but not in the name of Aston Villa FC. Fans of Blues see this as a signifier of Birmingham City’s social capital, whereas Villa fans do not appear to perceive this to be as important, as the following extracts aim to exemplify:

I think it’s important, it sets your identity. So for Birmingham fans you know, we are Birmingham we are Birmingham City, and we’ll quite happily throw it back that Aston Villa don’t have the city’s name at them, as an insult or a slight against them.

(Alan, Blues IT2)

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<sup>64</sup> The engagement of fans with football culture via the internet is increasing and, as stated by Gibbons and Dixon (2010), needs to be considered further and actually taken seriously by academics. This is another domain where fans interact to create and reinforce meanings (discourse) regarding the rivalry, which can elicit valuable data within the ethnographic approach.

<sup>65</sup> Quotes taken from a range of online fan forums, including: ‘Singing the Blues’; ‘Keep Right On’; ‘Heroes and Villains’; ‘Villatalk’; and ‘Small Heath Alliance.com’. The user names of contributors and dates have not been included in order to ensure online fans remain anonymous.

On the Birmingham side, the things you read on the internet, they would make a big deal out of it. Do I think it matters to the Villa fans? No, I don't, I don't think it matters a bit.

(Rod, Villa IT4)

I think it is actually, I think Blues fans are proud that they carry the name of the city, I guess most people around the country now have guessed where Aston Villa is from if you follow football, but it's probably, I'm thinking on my feet now, it's probably one of the only teams in certainly in the Premier League, that it's not immediately identifiable from the main geographic location is by the name of the team, they don't carry the name of the city or the town, it's a suburb isn't it.

(Dan, Blues IT1)

It doesn't matter does it? What does that even mean anyway, it's just a name? And they changed it to Birmingham anyway, they were originally Small Heath. Villa have always been Aston Villa. We don't need to change anything, we've got the history of our club to do all the talking for us.

(Kenny, Villa IT12)

The above examples from both online forums and interviews are indicative of the on-going struggle for hegemonic control, as both sets of fans vie for (sub)cultural capital (Thornton 1995) in an attempt to become the legitimising identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). This on-going contestation and communication regarding territoriality continues, and is sometimes expressed in innovative ways as fans continually attempt to claim territory and therefore power.

#### **5.3.4. Innovative Ways of Attempting to Communicate Boundaries**

Armstrong (2000) used the term bricolage or 'cultural baggage' to describe how fans draw upon a range of cultural observations, which enables them to differentiate between themselves and 'the other'. These cultural observations are often very subtle and take existing meanings and creatively adapt them in order to attempt to communicate territorial

dominance. For example, continuing the internet theme, fans of Aston Villa posted a picture on an online fan forum, which was then passed around various social networking sites. The image was of a generic 'Welcome to Birmingham' road sign on the edge of the city boundary (as you would find on your drive into any town or city). However, superimposed on the original image was an added message on the sign, so it read: 'Welcome to Birmingham – Property of Aston Villa'. The denotation is that the city is property of Aston Villa, with the further connotations being that this is another attempt to communicate the message that Villa have hegemonic control of that territory and that they 'own the city', and therefore Birmingham City do not.

Another example of this territorial one-up-manship is Blues fans adapting the previously discussed song 'The City is Ours'. After a successful run in the League Cup during the 2010/2011 football season (which included beating Aston Villa in the quarter-finals), Birmingham City reached the final of the cup, which was played at Wembley Stadium. Before the game in London, Blues fans had hung a large banner over the gates of Aston Villa's stadium which read: 'Whilst we're at Wembley the City is yours'. The significance here was that Birmingham City fans were going to be at Wembley in a major cup final, so Villa could have ownership of the city. The connotations were that Birmingham City had ownership of the city and were only temporarily passing it on to their rivals whilst they were away winning the trophy, and they would soon be back to reclaim 'their' city – as they claimed. Similarly, after winning the cup they were eligible to play in the Europa League (a European competition that only a select few teams from each European country enter each year) – so in order to mock their local rivals, they changed the words of the song to 'Whilst we're in Europe, the City is yours'. Again, as well as attempting to assert their dominance over the territory of Birmingham, Blues fans were mocking the Villa fans who would not be watching their team in Europe in the coming season.

Using Armstrong and Giulianotti's (2001b) framework for interpreting rivalries, the minority identity and local difference theme can be used to make sense of these innovative attempts to communicate territorial dominance. The minority identity and local difference theme highlights how within a local rivalry that may involve relatively homogenous groups of fans, there becomes a need for senses of difference to be constructed in more localised and practical ways. As the data and the demographic information in the literature

review suggest, there are very few demographic differences that can be identified between the areas that house the two football clubs within the city. As both sets of fans have access to football grounds and to fanzines and the internet, it becomes difficult to influence the discourse surrounding the rivalry, so it was found that fans use these innovative ways of communicating their dominance (or their rival's inferiority) to try to make an impact and get their version of the specific rivalry knowledge 'noticed'. Therefore, communicating their team's recent footballing success or the importance of bearing the city's name in an innovative manner becomes an important way of differentiating between 'them' and 'us', and to a further extent showing how 'we' are superior to 'them'<sup>66</sup> – though this superiority may only be short-lived due to the changing and unpredictable nature of football.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: Making Sense of Territory and Rivalry**

As outlined throughout this thesis, football fan rivalries all have their own unique and multifarious factors (Bairner and Shirlow 2001; Giulianotti 1999; Thompson 2001). This chapter has addressed one of the themes that emerged during data analysis as being central to the Aston Villa-Birmingham City rivalry – the socio-geographic factor of territoriality. The above emic and etic accounts aimed to highlight the importance to fans of territory within Birmingham, and to demonstrate that there are a number of diverse ways that fans attempt to express and communicate this.

Based on the data collected, it is argued that there is a substantial amount of disagreement in terms of classifying and communicating territorial boundaries. Therefore, the territoriality argument does not 'work' (Delaney 2009), and this leads to tension and contestation, which has been found to be a central factor in this football rivalry. More specifically, the section on the classification of boundaries demonstrated that both sets of fans attempt to claim territory as theirs in order to gain, or be perceived to have, more power. However, the claims made by fans are complex, inconsistent, and often contradictory. One specific theme that did emerge was that Aston Villa's historical footballing success is often linked to (perceived) control of territory in Birmingham, and in this respect is used to attempt to legitimise their hegemonic domination over their rivals

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<sup>66</sup> This theme shall be discussed in more depth in chapter six.

when considering territory. However, Villa fans also conceded small amounts of cultural capital to Birmingham City fans with regard to Birmingham City bearing the city's name, which represents a degree of negotiation within the struggle for hegemonic power. Thus, in terms of classification of boundaries of territory, due to the link that fans make between footballing success and territory, fans of Aston Villa are considered here to be the legitimising identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b), and Birmingham City's fans can be viewed as adopting a resistance identity.

With regard to the communication of boundaries, a Foucauldian interpretation of discourse is useful, as the importance of knowledge and how power is exerted through discourse during the strategic 'game' (Smith-Maguire 2002) has been highlighted. Access to discourse is said to be important (Barker 2008), and to summarise this section, it has been interpreted that no individuals or groups have any particular dominance in terms of communication, which leads to further tensions and contestation as fans continue to try to gain some authority or dominance. Access to communication (and therefore discourse) remains relatively equal. Both sets of fans have similar access to the internet and fan forums. They all have the ability to collectively chant at football matches. They can all talk in groups both on match days and during the rest of the week, and so on. Therefore, with no dominance or control of the discourse, in terms of communicating territoriality, it is suggested that neither set of fans is the legitimising identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). Instead, they both appeared to be adopting an on-going project identity in order to try to change their collective situation and become dominant in terms of communicating boundaries of territory. As identified in the review of literature, there are various complex factors which underpin and reinforce a football fan rivalry. There were further themes that emerged from the data analysis that underpin and influence the Birmingham football rivalry, specifically, themes relating to perceived class and socio-economic status and the history of the two clubs. The analysis of which shall form the second part of this discussion.

## **6. Discussion - Part Two: “The Other Side of the Tracks”: Rivalry, Footballing Success and (Perceived) Class Identities.**

Rivalries are influenced by multifarious factors and the power relations involved can be played out on different levels and in different settings (see chapter two). Chapter five on territory outlined how neither group of fans maintain a clear dominance of the city of Birmingham. However, the data also revealed other factors underpinning this rivalry, which depicted Aston Villa fans as the superior group. The presence of simultaneous power relations between the two fan groups is possible as the rivalry exists at multiple levels and is informed by multiple factors. It appears that this rivalry is based on the combination of the power relations played out on three main levels: geographic locations, the clubs’ past and present practices and the (perceived) socio-economic status of the fans. Therefore, in this chapter, after initially outlining the fans’ basic views regarding superiority-inferiority, the subsequent sections of the discussion focus specifically on the two latter themes that underpin the broader superiority-inferiority aspect of this rivalry.

### **6.1. Superiority/Inferiority Complex**

Interview data indicated that in many instances Aston Villa and their fans were viewed by both fan groups as superior or dominant. Villa fans often expressed that they felt superior to Blues fans, as the following extracts demonstrate:

We are better than them lot [Blues], I reckon we all feel that really as a group of supporters... We’re the top dogs in the area, no doubt for me. (Kevin, Villa IT11)

Villa fans have a superiority complex based on the fact that we have won more, have a bigger and better ground, a larger fan base, sign better players and continually finish higher than Blues. For these reasons they [Blues] have an inferiority complex.

(Darren, Villa IT6)

I believe it is one sided in the sense that I don't believe that Birmingham City fans feel superior to Villa fans, but I certainly believe a significant proportion of Villa fans have a superiority complex in themselves over the Birmingham City fans.

(Rod, Villa IT4)

Blues fans also viewed Villa as superior, though only reluctantly following further probing during interviews (as Blues fans were initially hesitant when it came to acknowledging their rival's success). Ricky's (Blues IT10) response was indicative of this:

The Villa do seem to think they're better than us, and they look down on us. That is a big part of it, the rivalry I mean, because that winds us up, makes us dislike them even more. I suppose, actually, that we feel sometimes like we're in their shadow and maybe we do think we're lower in a few ways. But not every way though, it just seems to be what everyone thinks.

Gary (Blues IT3) was particularly candid regarding his perception of the rivalry dynamic, and went as far as to say that Blues fans were jealous of Villa, and that this was a significant factor that caused tension and underpinned the rivalry:

Yeah, I would say Blues fans have an inferiority complex, really, they wouldn't admit it, they are envious. There's no doubt about it in my mind at all. They are very envious of the Villa, of the success they've had, of the publicity they've had, and so on – they would regard themselves as getting second best treatment in terms of publicity, local coverage and so on. And I think that they are jealous of the Villa for that reason. I think that Villa regard Blues as poor neighbours, really. The other side of the tracks, you know.

It is important to note here that the rivalry dynamic between Blues and Villa has at its core the close geographic location of the two clubs, as highlighted above by Gary and in the previous discussion of territory; if they were not near neighbours the jealousy and intensity of the rivalry would mostly likely be significantly diminished. There are many more successful clubs elsewhere in England, but the rivalry exists between Blues and Villa due to a range of real and perceived differentials, with geographic location at the heart of the



rivalry (which is why, for instance, there is not a strong rivalry between Blues and Manchester United). Building on the emergence of the general theme of Villa being perceived to be superior, further probing identified two sub-themes that underpinned these perceptions. These two sub-themes were neatly encapsulated by Jake (Blues IT5):

Villa fans definitely think they are superior, and Blues fans love to play the downtrodden underdog. It's a combination of two factors: the relative success on the pitch of Villa and lack of it by Blues, and the historical thought that Villa were the team of the middle classes and Blues of the working man.

The relative success of the teams and the perceived socio-economic status of the fans emerged as two central factors (in addition to the geographic proximity and the territoriality discussed previously) that reinforced the notion of Villa being perceived to be superior, and this in turn was felt by fans to underpin the intensity of the rivalry. Therefore, the following sections are an in-depth analysis of these two sub-themes – firstly the success of the teams and then the socio-economic status of the fans – the discussion of which aims to explore the specific facets that fans deem to be significant in developing both their perception of their rivals and also their own collective identity.

## **6.2. The Historical Footballing Success of Aston Villa and Birmingham City**

One way that the knowledge has been constructed throughout the rivalry is by implementing what Foucault (2000) called 'techniques of domination', which are essentially techniques that individuals/groups use to manipulate or manage other individuals/groups. One significant way domination is enforced is through managing discourse, as individuals/groups use events and developments throughout history to shape the discourse surrounding a social phenomenon. In this instance, the Villa fans employ the technique of highlighting and emphasising their historical success, which influences the rivalry discourse and enables Villa fans to be the dominant group in this respect.

### 6.2.1. The Success of Aston Villa

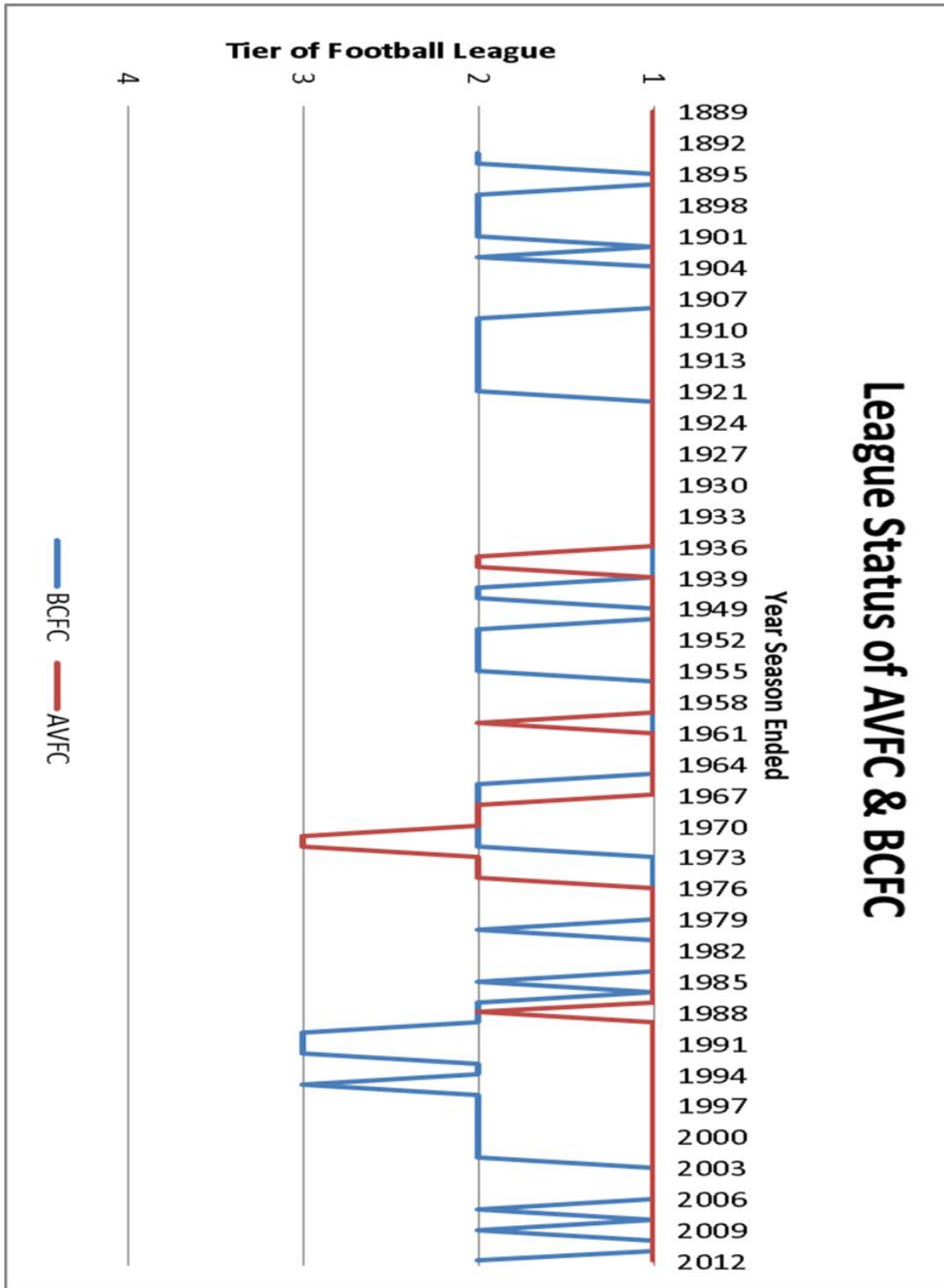
Fans from both sides highlighted the significance of the footballing history of the two clubs during the early stages of data collection. It emerged that fans often draw on their own club's history in an attempt to construct and legitimise their collective identity as a group. Villa fans perceive themselves as superior in relation to Blues, with the discourse surrounding their superiority often centring on their team winning numerous major league and cup titles (outlined in section 4.3.5), in addition to having spent 101 years in the top tier of English football since the beginning of the Football League in 1888 (see Figure 2), which is a record only bettered by Everton FC.

However, most significant of all for the fans was winning the European Cup (now the Champions League) in 1982 (outlined in section 4.3.5), as this was discussed frequently. Football success, as one would expect, is a source of pride and a significant part of Villa fans' collective identity, as outlined by Kevin (Villa IT11):

We're very proud of the history of the club and the fans, all those trophies and leagues and the European Cup. Only a handful of teams in the whole of England match our record, and certainly no other team in the Midlands – and definitely not the Blues.

It was evident at many Aston Villa matches that the Villa fans chanted "Have you won the European Cup?" in a mocking way towards opposing fans (including Blues fans, but also towards other teams that had not won the European Cup) as an attempt to assert their dominance as one of only five English teams to have achieved this. Within the footballing subculture in England this feat affords Villa high levels of cultural capital. As highlighted in chapter four, this is an important event during the history of the rivalry, as Villa fans incorporate their success into the rivalry discourse, as a technique of domination, in order to ensure their rivals know about their success and to attempt to create the discourse that they are the superior team and their team's success acts as evidence of this. Therefore, due to the communication by Villa fans (through chanting, books, word of mouth, fanzines, internet chat rooms, and so on), Birmingham City fans are also aware of Villa's successful history:

Figure 2. The Football League status of Aston Villa and Birmingham City (Note: Chart begins with Aston Villa as founder members of the Football League in 1888/89, Birmingham City's entry begins when they were founder members of the new Second Division of the Football League in 1892/93).



Source: Information compiled from Bishop and Holt (2010) and Matthews (2010).

I guess we all know what they've done in the past, not the details really but the general idea. Hard to argue with the triumphs they've had. (Ricky, Blues IT10)

I think they feel superior, and they want to stay superior. Because, to be fair to them, over the years they have been. (Gary, Blues IT3)

However, some Blues fans remained reluctant to give credit to their rivals, and whilst acknowledging Villa's footballing success they also sought to undermine it. This was demonstrated by Alan (Blues IT2):

Well, obviously the history is a major aspect. The histories are always used as the stick to beat the other team. Villa will have their 'how many cups and how many leagues?' and the European Cups and all that, and Blues fans will go round and say, well was your granddad alive when they last won the league or did you go to Rotterdam to see Villa win the European Cup?

Similar assertions are made in some of the pop-culture literature produced by fans, with Villa's success acknowledged but then undermined. For example, George (2006: p. 113), a Birmingham City supporter, explained:

Real Aston Villa supporters hate Birmingham City because they see Birmingham fans as scum and beneath them, with regards to the success they themselves achieved in the eighties, but since then, they have failed to live up to those glory days and are now worried and jealous that their arch rivals seem to be getting bigger and stronger each season.

A view also expressed by fans of Aston Villa:

We have always classed them as inferior to us and football-wise have never taken them seriously. They really have no argument so they resort to telling anyone who will listen that Villa have a crap firm, have never done this, never done that.

(Brown and Brittle 2006: p.232)

The differing approaches regarding Villa's success between the two sets of fans can be explained using Foucault's (1980) notion of strategies of power. Specific strategies are used by groups in an attempt to influence the power dynamic. The strategies employed are not formally agreed upon or led by specific individuals/fans. Instead, as Foucault (1978: p. 95) stated:

Power is characterised by tactics that are often quite explicit... the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them [there is] an implicit characteristic of the great anonymous, almost unspoken strategies which coordinate the loquacious tactics.

Here, the strategies employed by fans are not pre-set or formally arranged, instead they remain 'unspoken strategies' with the 'decipherable' aims of remaining/becoming the dominant force and undermining their rivals. In this instance, Villa fans use a 'technique of domination' by highlighting the success and the history of their club in order to legitimise the dominance of their imagined community, as they feel this will increase their cultural capital. Whereas Blues fans try to undermine this and highlight what they perceive to be flaws. Nevertheless, on reflection, the data suggests that the attempts to undermine Villa's footballing success by Blues fans actually does very little to diminish the levels of cultural capital afforded to Villa – as demonstrated above, both sets of fans acknowledged the significance of Villa's success, however reluctant they may have first appeared.

### **6.2.2. Birmingham City's Lack of Success**

Within the rivalry dynamic, Villa's success is viewed in direct relation to the perceived lack of success for Birmingham City. Birmingham City's major honours consist of winning the Football League Cup twice (in 1963 and 2011), and broadly speaking the club have 'only' spent 57 years in the top tier of English football (see Figure 2). Both sets of fans were clearly aware of Birmingham City's lack of success. For instance, Alan (Blues IT2) was quite open about his team's lack of achievement: "Villa fans are aware of what we've ever won, well not a lot really, you know, we grab what we can, we grab onto scraps of sort of football trivia almost. There's very little". During participant observation

at matches, it was evident that Villa fans were once again proactive in highlighting what they perceived to be Blues' lack of success, as described in the field notes from AVBC1:

Again the Villa fans sang "100 years and you've won fuck all, 100 years and you've won fuck all". The Villa fan next to me seemed to take great pleasure in explaining to me that this chant is a reference to Birmingham City having a lack of major trophies during their long history. So this chant aims to undermine Birmingham City fans, who may be proud of their long history (established 1875) and status as one of the founding members of the original Second Division of the Football League. Villa fans are alluding to the fact that the Blues may have been around all that time but they have never won anything of note – their highest league finish, I'm informed, is 6<sup>th</sup> in the top flight of English football, and their only major trophy is the League Cup. This seems like a significant aspect of the rivalry, the fact that although the teams have been around for basically as long as each other, over 130 years, Birmingham have not had anything like the success that Aston Villa have had.

Fans from both teams felt this disparity of footballing success reinforced the rivalry and was a source of hostility. Armstrong and Giulianotti's (2001b) theoretical framework for rivalries provides further explanation of this theme. Due to their perceived success in relation to Birmingham City, Aston Villa form the legitimising identity as their success affords them high levels of (sub)cultural capital. As the data suggests that Birmingham City are at the lower end of the social domination spectrum when focusing on historical success, their collective identity is the resistance identity. It is considered notable here that, when concentrating on football success, Blues fans more often looked to display a resistance to Villa's success by undermining them rather than seeking to highlight any success of their own. Whilst it is recognised that rivalries are fluid and can change over time (Thompson 2001), when specifically considering footballing success, the dynamic of Villa as legitimising and Blues as resistance appears to have long-standing historical roots.

It is argued here that Villa have maintained hegemonic control over their rivals due to both their success and their ability to communicate that success (as has been demonstrated through chanting, fanzines, books, chat rooms, and so on). The un-paralleled success of Aston Villa in the early decades of the football league (as discussed throughout chapter

four) meant they gained early initiative and could portray themselves as superior. By winning they were able to perpetuate the discourse surrounding their superiority. Villa fans were able to communicate their superiority and thus develop and maintain the discourse of them as dominant, which acted to further increase their power. Whereas, due to Birmingham City's relative lack of success they had very little to genuinely boast about within the subculture, so have seemingly been unable to challenge Villa's footballing superiority. Birmingham City fans were not subjected to this discourse by force, as hegemony is based on consent (to at least a small extent) on the part of the subordinate (Gramsci 1971). As stated above, Blues fans (begrudgingly) acknowledge Villa's success, and they have also always had the capability to communicate 'minor' successes or to resist and undermine Villa – but due to their lack of major footballing success they lacked the necessary cultural capital to overcome Villa's hegemonic control. When the successes and histories of the two clubs are framed in this way, it was felt pertinent to explore why the Blues fans would continue to support their team.

### **6.2.3. Supporting Birmingham City**

Even without the historical success of their rivals, the support of the Birmingham City fans for their team and their collective identity is still very strong. Rather than viewing their lack of success as a negative, data suggested that Blues fans view this positively as they find pride in following their team. As Jake (Blues IT5) reported:

For me I reckon that's just what makes us strong, you learn that it's good to be a City supporter because we battle on and because we're not the best, but we still support them. We go to away games and maybe we get beat but we're there supporting them and singing away and, you know, having a good time.

This is reinforced by participant observation data, as during an away match that Blues easily lost, the Blues fans appeared to enjoy themselves regardless of the score, and in the final minutes of the game were dancing a conga line around their away stand singing 'Let's all have a disco'. Similarly, because of their repeated promotions and relegations in

the past decade, Blues fans talked of how they have relegation parties, which they felt were often more of a celebration than some of the promotion parties.

There seems to be pride that comes from supporting a team that *hasn't* won very much. It appears that for Blues fans this is a form of pride and a very specific form of subcultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) as it could be argued that fans can accumulate this subcultural capital from 'still' proudly following a team that doesn't achieve. As Alan (Blues IT2) explained:

Birmingham fans almost take pride in the fact that we've always been pretty rubbish, but we still support them. We're not glory hunters, we don't support them because we've won things, we support them because that's who we are. So every time a Villa fan throws the fact that they have won ten FA Cups or whatever it is or that they won the European cup, for a lot of Birmingham City fans you know it just bounces off. So therefore we are better because we have never won that and yet we still support them....one of the chants at the game is 'Small Heath Alliance, by far the greatest team the world has ever seen', you know which is clearly ridiculous, we've never won anything and all of that – its taking the piss, we know we are rubbish, we don't care.

Alan continued:

It binds you together and I think that's part of what makes Birmingham City fans Birmingham City fans, you know, we're not united by success, we are united by failure and disappointment. And when we get the success, it means a lot but it doesn't really define us.

The pride felt by the Blues fans in this regard demonstrates some of the complexities of following a team, and that whilst success is important for fans, it is not the only factor that underpins their identity and explains their support. However, when it came to playing against their local rivals, Blues fans were much more competitive and were very much focussed on success. This could be explained by using Goffman's (1959) front and back regions. In the back region or 'backstage' the Blues fans openly discuss their lack of success and their failures and underdog status, but during the short periods of time when



they are 'front stage' during a match against Aston Villa they put on a performance of strength and competitiveness to show that their team is the equal or are superior to their rivals, and they focus on supporting their team to win. Goffman (1959) described this as the 'team' attempting to make a 'stand', and all the members of the team have to perform in-sync together or else their performance will not be believed, i.e., the Villa fans will see that there is not the collective unity, strength and confidence in their team, in which case Blues fans would lose subcultural capital. Away from the front stage, the Blues fans seem to return to the long standing identity of the underdog or the resistance identity in comparison to their rivals.

However, though the Blues fans reported that success was not necessarily that important to them, there are signs that this is not always the case. The long-term footballing dominance and hegemonic control of Villa over Blues feeds into the frustrations and emotions of Birmingham City fans, and it began to emerge from the data that there *was* actually some jealousy from Birmingham City fans of their neighbour's success:

I believe their rivalry towards Villa stems from the fact that they have always been in the shadows of Villa due to Villa's history of winning things and Blues not. Even when we won the European Cup in 1982. I think the majority of English football fans would have been pleased that Villa won it, as another English club, but not the Blues fans. They hated the fact Villa won the cup. (Archie Villa IT7)

It is argued that this highlights the intensity of this particular rivalry, as when the nation is involved in international games, or when English clubs play in European/International tournaments, fans often become 'national' rather than 'local', in a form of ordered segmentation (Giulianotti 1999), as they support whoever are the national representatives. However, this is not the case here. The hostilities and the feelings of antipathy are so strong between the fans of the two Birmingham clubs that they cannot stand to see their rivals do well in any context. Jimmy (Blues IT8) echoed this sentiment:

I think, basically, Blues are jealous of the Villa. Which I think largely explains the rivalry that way... Villa is the team that has had all the records all the successes over the years, they are *the* big club of the second city and Birmingham have always been

poor neighbours. So I can understand in a way Blues fans disliking the Villa because I think there is a strong element of envy there – they've had all the success... there's no such success for Birmingham.

This sustained focus on the 'local' rather than the 'national' by fans in Birmingham could arguably be equated to 'political particularism', whereby politicians (and therefore their policies) concentrate on their own career and interests rather than (and at the expense of) the wider interests of the country (Panizza 2001). The rivalry is so intense and so significant for the Villa and Blues fans that it takes precedence over any interest in the national team, or success of English clubs in Europe.

In terms of the success of the two clubs and the emotions and discourse surrounding the rivalry, several fans specifically identified the local media's role in shaping and reinforcing this discourse over the course of the rivalry's history.

#### **6.2.4. The Role of the Local Media**

Fans on both sides felt that the local media, and in particular the newspapers, played a significant role in increasing the 'hype' surrounding the rivalry; as the newspapers often attempt to raise tension levels and 'stir up' antagonisms ahead of local derbies. This is evident in recent years in three main ways. Firstly, the local newspapers appear to attempt to antagonise fans, in order to "hype up the match and get all the fans worked up into a bit of a frenzy" (Ricky Blues IT10), presumably in an attempt to evoke a reaction, increase interest and sell more newspapers. Examples from recent years have included the Birmingham Mail seemingly trying to provoke a response from Villa fans regarding the high ticket price they were being charged as away fans for the upcoming game at St Andrews, which included the quote from a Birmingham-born Villa player Lee Hendrie: "It's a ridiculous amount of money really - it's outrageous" (Howell 2005a: p.1). In a separate article ahead of the same derby match, the Birmingham Mail printed a story claiming that the then Villa manager David O'Leary felt Blues fans were "jealous of Villa's status" and their success (Howell 2005b: p.2). The theme of the media possibly influencing the jealousy of the Blues fans was also evident in the data collected from fans:

There is a strong element of envy there – they’ve had all the success. You pick up the local paper and its Villa are doing this and Villa are doing that and its grating after a while, because there’s no such success for Birmingham. (Gary Blues IT3)

I remember my old school friend who was a Blues supporter telling me that his grandfather always said even in the 30s and 40s Villa were always the club that attracted the media attention and were perceived to be the big club... Blues were mentioned [by the media] but not in the same context. (Archie Villa IT7)

Archive newspapers from the Birmingham area also support this, as Villa have predominantly been the first section in the “Football News” (for instance, Sporting Star 1899b; Sporting Mail 1907) sections of the local papers ahead of Birmingham City, and Villa have seemingly always had a larger report in the newspapers, which would be expected as the successful team in the city – which all reinforces both the perception of Villa being superior and arguably could also play a part in Blues fans becoming jealous of their rivals, which could further exacerbate the hostilities. This would also provide Villa with increased levels of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984), as they are continuously (re)presented as *the* top team in the city.

Secondly, the local newspapers involve the personal lives of players, especially players from either team from the local area. For instance, in 2010 it was highlighted how ‘local lad’ Craig Gardner had been a Villa player for a number of years and had claimed to be a long time Villa fan, but then following his move to Birmingham City he had subsequently ‘revealed’ that he had been a Birmingham City fan all along, which the newspaper implied would anger Villa fans, as they claimed that “Gardner is set to receive a hostile welcome from the Villa Park faithful after revealing his support of Villa’s fierce rivals upon crossing the Second City divide during the transfer window” (Montgomery 2010: p.1). In 2008 the Birmingham Post published an article (Tanner 2008: p.3) based on the thoughts of former Villa player and ‘huge Villa fan’ Ian Taylor, within which Taylor was quoted as saying about the local derby games: “It is a fantastic occasion and that is why we need Birmingham to stay up because it is good for the city. Besides, it is an easy six points for the Villa”, which would have angered fans of Birmingham City ahead of the game, not

only because it is a slur on their team but also because it paints a picture of Villa as the dominant team. On an even more personal level, in 2010 it was highlighted how the Birmingham-born Villa player Gabriel Agbonlahor was personally motivated to beat Blues due to the abuse he regularly received from Birmingham City fans, as Kendrick (2010a: p.1) wrote “Agbonlahor has used the Blues supporters’ vile chants about his estranged mother to motivate him to score three goals in his last three Second City successes”. A number of fans made reference to this sort of practice and how it reinforces the antagonisms between the two fan groups, as Kevin (Villa IT11) stated “that really angers me, when they sing abuse about one of our own, like with Gabby... when you hear about that it makes you mad”. The nature of the profit motive that drives the capitalist media is evident here (Giulianotti 2005a), as the conflict within this sub-culture is used and manipulated by the (local) media in order to provoke interest/a reaction, and therefore sell more newspapers.

Thirdly, the media make reference to the historical context of the rivalry or refer back to previous games, using emotive language like gaining “revenge” or “running scared” following previous defeats at the hands of their rivals (Howell 2008: p.2), or that the upcoming game is “the most crucial derb[y] between these two since hostilities began between Villa and the then Small Heath [127] years ago” (Howell 2006: p.3). There are even examples of using the “pain” from the “nightmare” of a defeat from more than twenty years ago to provoke a reaction from fans, as Tattum (2010: p.1) reminded/informed fans of a 5-0 League Cup win for Villa over Blues in 1988, the day before the two met in the League Cup again in 2010. However, the resultant 2010 League Cup game, like the majority of others between the two clubs in the past decade, led to tensions spilling over between sections of both fan groups, with numerous arrests and injuries (discussed further in section 7.5). The same newspapers that stir up emotions and increase tensions prior to the games between the two clubs, appear to then go on and condemn and criticise fans when things get out of hand. For instance, following violent clashes at derby games between Villa and Blues there have been comments in local newspapers such as “mindless thugs have shamed our city” (Ross 2007: p.55) and “supporters on both sides of the Second City could do without a reputation as second class citizens... let’s hope our football followers learn to behave themselves” (Kendrick 2010b: p.1). Focusing on the bad news in this way is perhaps not unsurprising, as bad news is

often preferred (Maynard 1997) and considered more ‘newsworthy’ than good news (as discussed in section 4.2.2) – for instance, a news report on football fans behaving and causing no trouble whatsoever may not be particularly eye-catching for potential readers. However, regardless of the exact motives of the local media, the data collected from fans suggested that the role that the media play in informing and reinforcing the rivalry is significant for fans and should be acknowledged, especially in the days leading up to and following a match between the two – as demonstrated by the above examples.

On the surface, it is argued that the media highlighting the tensions and hostility within the Birmingham rivalry seems to be in contrast with the media representation of other intra-city rivalries. For instance, from a distance it appears that the national media often highlight the ‘friendly rivalry’ between Liverpool and Everton (for example, Edwards 2012; or Holden 2012) and how rival fans can sit side by side at games (which participant observation demonstrated would not be possible at a Villa-Blues match, as it immediately instigates fan violence). Even one of Liverpool’s universities boasts that “sporting fans will enjoy the friendly rivalry between Liverpool FC and Everton FC” on their website in order to attract prospective students (Liverpool Hope University 2012: p.1). Whether this is actually the case in Liverpool is uncertain, but the discourse created and the emotions evoked by the media seem to be in stark contrast to those in Birmingham, though why this is the case remains unclear and could be the focus of future research. One thing that does appear to be evident is that, broadly speaking, as Villa have historically been relatively successful, the local media have performed a significant social function by communicating that success, and so it is likely that Blues fans who read the local newspapers will dislike reading about their rival’s achievements. Although the Birmingham City fans are not completely passive recipients, there is arguably a ‘hypodermic-syringe’ approach adopted by the media (Croteau et al. 2011), as information and an agenda dominated by Villa’s success is thrust upon the Blues fans. Whereas, from the perspective of the fans of Aston Villa, the local media could be interpreted as adopting the ‘needs and gratification’ approach (Berger 1995), of meeting the desires of the Villa fans in order to attempt to increase profit and readership. However, Villa’s success has not been uninterrupted or constant, and Birmingham City have challenged their dominance at various points throughout the history of the two clubs.

### **6.2.5. The Complexity of Power Dynamics when considering Footballing Success**

Whilst the data supports the interpretation of Villa being superior in footballing terms and Blues as the resistance identity, it would be an over-simplification to suggest that the power dynamics between the two rivals has simply remained that way consistently for more than 130 years. Foucault (1984) sought to dismiss the notion that history progresses in a linear fashion and highlighted the irregularity and inconsistency of truth, as the ‘knowledge’ of the rivalry is constituted and influenced by the techniques of domination that are employed by both groups of fans. The non-linear constitution of the knowledge is also evident here, as Villa have not permanently been the most successful team of the two. There have been periods of time when Birmingham City were higher in the football league than their near rivals. As Gary (Blues IT3) discussed:

There’s been very few times when Birmingham have been level and still less when they’ve been above the Villa in any division. I mean there was a time when Villa went down to the third division [in 1970], and I think Blues were in the second, or they might even have been in the first, but they were certainly one division above Villa for a season or so. Then I think they were pretty pleased about that. I remember I was working at the Birmingham Post at the time, and a friend of mine that also worked at the Birmingham Post produced this little card, like the sort of cards that they issue at graveyards when people were in mourning, and you used to have a little tribute or a message of condolence on that said something like – departed after much suffering to the third division, Aston Villa – [Gary laughs] and this was just one of those jokes that went round at the time, because there was a lot of a feeling of smugness about the Blues, for once the Villa were well below us in terms of their position in the league.

Foucault (1978) expressed how the relations of power-knowledge are not static, they are fluid and contextual, and therefore we should seek to explore the pattern of the constant modifications and continual shifts. The above is one such example that demonstrates how the rivalry dynamic was modified, albeit for a short period of time, as Birmingham City became the team that could claim higher levels of cultural capital by being in a higher league than their rivals. Whether this was enough in 1970 to offset Villa’s past historical

success is unclear. What is considered important is that the rivalry can fluctuate, or certainly at least the social context that contains and influences the rivalry can fluctuate, leading to further tensions as the struggle for power continues.

Tensions are increased when conflicting systems of knowledge clash (Foucault 1980), and this is certainly the case within this rivalry. For instance, more recently, during the participant observation period, Blues won a quarter-final cup match against Villa and went on to win the League Cup – so for the short term at least, Blues resistance identity had gained cultural capital through their footballing success and Blues fans attempted to challenge (if not temporarily overthrow) Villa as the dominant, legitimising identity. The previously held ‘knowledge’ of Villa as the legitimising identity had been challenged, which increased tensions as both groups struggled for power. However, less than three months later Birmingham City were relegated from the Premier League, whilst Villa remained in the top tier of the English game, which, coupled with their strong history, could arguably have restored the perception of their dominant footballing status. This leads to further frustrations for Birmingham City fans, and increases their ill feeling towards their rivals:

That sums us [Blues] up really. The one time we were better than the Villa, probably in my lifetime, we win the only proper cup I’ve seen us win and it was brilliant. Then what do we do? We go and get relegated... we can’t really say we’re the pride of Birmingham when they’re still up at the top table and we’re back to languishing in the Championship [second tier of English football] again. (Ricky Blues IT10)

This unpredictability and fluctuation of football means the power balance of the rivalry does not remain static. Despite Villa being perceived to be the dominant group over the broad course of history, there are times when this is challenged, and as the struggle for power and to maintain hegemonic control is on-going, Villa fans will continue to feel antipathy towards their rivals. From the data, there are two further factors to consider when exploring the threat to Villa’s perceived superiority.

Firstly, there was a feeling amongst a small number of fans that contemporary events are more significant to the rivalry, rather than the past. Some fans felt that Villa’s history was

slightly overstated and that their past success does not count for much in today's Premier League. As Rod (Villa IT4) discussed:

I'd say from the Blues fans that I know and what I read on the internet is that they sometimes think the Villa fans are living on past glories, and you can't really argue with that too much nowadays, the vast majority of Villa success was an awfully long time ago.

Alan (Blues IT2) also alluded to this as he suggested that "Blues fans are sort of laughing at [Villa] and saying how deluded they are that they think they are up there with these mega rich clubs [in the Premier League]". However, whilst Villa may not be the footballing power they once were in the context of English football, within the specific Birmingham-Villa rivalry recent events could also be interpreted as supporting their claim for superiority rather than undermining it. For instance, following Birmingham City's relegation in 2011, their manager Alex McLeish quit Birmingham City and became manager of Aston Villa. As this relatively unprecedented and complex series of events occurred towards the end of the research period, several fans debated this matter whilst discussing the theme of footballing superiority. There were differing opinions, however one sub-theme that did emerge was that, as Kenny (Villa IT12) put it, "Villa were too big a club for a manager of Alex McLeish's standing" – essentially positioning Villa as a bigger and better club than Birmingham City – even though McLeish did move to Villa. This was echoed by Blues fans also:

I suppose like players, managers like to have the best they can, and it would certainly be seen as an upwards move to move from Birmingham to the Villa as a manager – just as it would from Birmingham to Villa as a player. (Gary Blues IT3)

Again it is evident that fans employ different 'strategies of power' (Foucault 1980) in order to improve their collective position within the power relations struggle. The manager's move could be perceived as reinforcing Villa's dominant position, as Villa fans could employ techniques of domination by emphasising and communicating claims that the manager moved from the 'smaller' club to the 'bigger' and 'more successful' club. Whereas Blues fans could attempt to employ a strategy that sought to undermine Villa's



position by comparing their success with that of other Premier League sides in order to shape or diminish the discourse surrounding Villa's footballing dominance.

The second aspect to briefly consider here is the broader notion of rivalries – that they are multi-causal not mono-causal. It is pertinent to remember that the footballing success of the clubs is only one of the factors that underpin this rivalry. The rivalry is more complex than just Blues being jealous of Villa's success – though that is a factor – as the other themes identified must also be considered in order to gain a more substantial interpretation of the rivalry. The subsequent section addresses the final theme of the perceived socio-economic status of the fans.

### **6.3. (Perceived) Socio-Economic Status of the Two Fans Groups**

Football rivalries have been found to provide “a metaphorical space within which frustrations, hatreds, cultural contestation and fears which are non-sporting in origin are reworked and played out” (Bairner and Shirlow 2001: p.45). Social class has been found to be one such factor that underpins football rivalries, the examples provided in the literature review of teams in South Africa (Burnett 2002) and in Sheffield (Armstrong 1998) are illustrative. The teams perceived to be of a higher socio-economic status are viewed as dominant, whereas their rivals strongly define themselves in resistance to that club – seemingly on the basis of envy, inverted snobbery and/or simply as a desire to create a distinction between relatively homogenous groups. These class tensions and struggles for power reinforce rivalries. The differing socio-economic status of the two fan groups emerged as being significant here.

As outlined in the socio-historical overview of Birmingham in chapter four, the demographics of the two wards where the two clubs are located (Aston and Bordesley Green) are somewhat similar – there are no obvious differences in terms of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status – though as discussed in the territory section, fans of each club are not necessarily only drawn from the immediate vicinity of the stadium, as they may have been historically. However, it emerged from the data that there was a theme involving the differences between the rival groups in terms of socio-economic status.

Generally, it was reported by fans that Villa were perceived to be more middle class whereas Blues were considered to be more working class:

My perception of my fellow Blues fans is generally there is a lot of them of a lower socio-economic status than the norm shall we say, whatever the norm is? And it's really odd in perception terms - I have a general perception, generally speaking the Villa fans are perhaps higher on a socio-economic scale than the Blues fans. That is a perception really probably not founded in reality or in evidence; it's my personal view on things. And I guess a number of the Villa fans that I know... generally seem to be higher on that scale I suppose. (Dan Blues IT1)

Blues fans are reckoned to be and I don't know what this is based on, but they're reckoned to be more working class, as a body. Obviously I wouldn't count myself now as working class, although I was born into the working class, so there are some amongst the Blues fans that are middle class. But I would say the bulk of their following is very much working class. I don't know what the Villa fan base is, but I suspect it is a little bit less working class dominated than I think Blues is. And that might make a difference in perception between the two, you know, if Blues as working class people, with the envy they have got at the club anyway because of the success, might be envying the toffs at the Villa as it were. And whether the Villa fans look down on the Blues as being sort of working class jobs, you know, I don't know, but I suspect there maybe something in that, because I have heard from more than one source that Blues are very much regarded as a working class supported club. (Gary Blues IT3)

Yeah, I reckon that is an understanding amongst us, that we're more well off than them down the road [Blues]. If you ask them I bet they wouldn't admit it, but I reckon they all think that too... that as a group the Blues are not as well off as us, or we're better off than them, one or the other I guess. (Kevin Villa IT11)

The fans' perceptions of both themselves and their rivals is constituted and informed by both groups' habitus, as the habitus is said to be "the basis from which lifestyles are generated" (Bourdieu 1978: p.833). The habitus is the partly unconscious 'taking in' of

social rules, values and attitudinal and bodily dispositions which develop networks or schemes of perception (Bourdieu 1993). As the habitus is a partly *unconscious* ‘taking in’ of schemes of perception, it is “beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will” because it functions “below the level of consciousness and language” (Bourdieu 1984: p.466). This is significant as it ‘unconsciously’ informs the ‘knowledge’ surrounding the fan groups and the rivalry. Bourdieu (1984: p.466) considers this to provide a form of social orientation, as social agents (fans) develop “a sense of one’s place, guiding the occupants of a given social space towards the social position adjusted to their properties and the practices which befit the occupants of that position”.

Within the power relations found in a specific cultural field, these schemes or networks of perception become engrained and the opposition between two groups can become increasingly apparent. As Bourdieu (1984: p.468) observed:

All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice. The network of oppositions [develop] between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low, modest).

In this case it is the ‘high’ of the Villa fans perceived in opposition to the ‘low’ of the Blues fans, as each group continues to “derive their ideological strength from the fact they refer back... to the most fundamental oppositions within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated” (Bourdieu 1984: p.469).

However, this is not to suggest that individuals (fans) are merely subject to their habitus within the cultural field, as Bourdieu is against adopting an approach that is overly structural and therefore negates individual agency. Instead, Bourdieu’s approach seeks to combine structuralist and subjectivist thinking by using the related concepts of field, habitus and capital, and by highlighting the relational nature of everything in society (Bourdieu 1993). As Bourdieu (1984: p.467) outlined:

All knowledge of the social world is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, and between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who... respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped to produce.

Fans have the agency to influence the discourse and 'knowledge' of the rival groups (as discussed in the section on territory), which, in turn, can influence the habitus of current/future fans of each respective fan group. Put simply, the fans help to constitute the habitus (along with the context of the surrounding field), which in turn informs and socialises fans into certain schemes of perception – such as Villa fans having a higher socio-economic status than Blues fans.

One way the fans can influence the knowledge concerning the two fan groups, and then more broadly the fans' habitus, is through the collective chanting at games, which was observed during participant observation and recorded in the field notes:

In terms of socio-economic perceptions of Villa fans towards Blues fans, there were repeated renditions of the song 'We pay your benefits, we pay your benefits'. The group of fans I'm at the game with inform me that this is in reference to the perception many Villa fans hold that Blues fans are poorer than Villa fans and therefore implying Blues fans are 'so poor' that they are on benefits, whereas Villa fans are all employed and therefore pay tax and in turn consequently contribute to the benefits that support 'poorer' Birmingham fans. It is (obviously) a very large generalisation because clearly there is a broad range of supporters from various socio-economic backgrounds. But, more significantly, Villa dislike Blues and look down on them for being of a lower economic status and Blues dislike Villa for being of a higher economic status. (Taken from BCAV1)

Bourdieu (1984) viewed society as being based on social stratifications which were informed by dispositions of taste and practice, and informed by various levels of capital (including cultural, economic, symbolic and educational). In this study, each fan group's practice of supporting a club can be perceived by fans as an indicator of their taste and is therefore used to classify and establish differences between individuals and groups as it

acts as a ‘distinguishable function’ (Bourdieu 1978) – or put simply, its used to gain distinction. Bourdieu argued that how individuals and groups present themselves within the field shall form the classification of their social status in relation to others, especially in relation to others who they perceive to belong to lower class groups. Social actors (fans) are heavily invested into the meanings and classifications they make, and gaining distinction from another group is important as:

It is 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 the exclusions and inclusions they perform among the characteristics produced by the common classificatory system.

(Bourdieu 1984: p.478)

Therefore, individuals and groups attempt to increase and shape their social status and their levels of capital in order to create or gain ‘distinction’ between themselves and those ‘below’ them. So, using Bourdieu’s (1984) four categories of cultural groups (see section 2.1.1), the dominating fraction of the bourgeoisie look to gain distinction over the dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie (perhaps on the basis of economic capital or the pursuit of expensive works of art); the dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie will seek to gain distinction over the petite bourgeoisie (possibly through their appreciation and knowledge of an acquired taste); and the petite bourgeoisie may in turn pursue gains in distinction over the working classes (possibly through levels of economic capital or their recognition of ‘legitimate’ culture).

The above chanting (“we pay your benefits”) is an example of the Villa fans attempting to achieve distinction from the group they perceive to be below them, as the petite bourgeoisie (Villa) are making a distinction between themselves and the working/lower classes (Blues) based on perceived economic capital. This can be viewed as being a “profitable strateg[y] of distinction” (Bourdieu 1984: p.282), which frames Villa fans as higher in the class hierarchy therefore aiding their attempts to assert their power and dominance within the rivalry dynamic. It was evident from data collection that this chanting was not well-received by the Blues fans, as they were clearly aggravated – they responded by shouting obscenities and making offensive gestures back in the direction of

the Villa fans, though there was no coherent or clear repost. This demonstrates that Blues fans were well aware of the point that the Villa fans were trying to make, by attempting to classify Blues fans as below Villa fans in the economic hierarchy. Specifically, this type of strategy used by Villa fans can be regarded as a ‘condescension strategy’, as this strategy “presuppose[s] both in the author of the strategy and in the victims a practical knowledge of the gap between the place really occupied and the place fictitiously indicated by the behaviour adopted” (Bourdieu 1984: p.472). The more this strategy is used by Villa fans en-masse (for instance, like chanting at matches) the more it influences the habitus of both groups of fans, as the ‘sense of one’s place’ becomes reinforced, which could partly help to explain the perception of Villa being of a higher class.

Based on these perceptions, and using Bourdieu’s (1993) understanding of economic capital, those that are perceived to have higher levels of economic capital within a cultural field will have more power and influence in relation to those with less economic capital. So Villa fans would be perceived to have more power and status than Blues fans, which would influence the rivalry. The theme of socio-economic status of fan groups would once again suggest that Aston Villa fans adopt the legitimising identity, as they are perceived to be higher class and of a higher socio-economic status whereas Birmingham City fans would be the resistance identity and be perceived to be the lower class with lower status. This interpretation would align with theme one of Armstrong and Giulianotti’s (2001b) framework, as this could be viewed as the ‘basic’ legitimising identity, which is opposed to the resistance identity. It can also be understood in terms of theme two of the framework, which was referred to as ‘the drama of power inequalities’, as Villa, through their footballing success and broad fan base (see territory section in chapter five), have long-standing, established economic power in relation to Blues. So Blues’ resistance against this would be strongly ingrained within their collective identity, as power dynamics become organised around polar positions within a cultural field (Bourdieu 1984) – the ‘wealthy’ club versus the ‘lowly’ working class club.

### **6.3.1. The Influence of Habitus upon Perceptions**

Upon probing the fans further during interviews regarding their interpretations of class (of Villa fans being a higher class), many fans were unable to identify exactly what these polar-positional class perceptions were based on:

Yes, I do believe the Villa fans perceive the Blues to be, and I'm stereotyping here they're not my beliefs, that they are people on the dole, people without jobs, young chavs, I think that is the perception. The stereotypes bear no relation to actual facts, but the stereotype is there, definitely, there is the perception that the Birmingham City fans are low-income, potentially no-income, members of society I think is the perception. (Rod Villa IT4)

I think they are all extremely similar, they are all from the same city, from a work environment, to factories, to match environments, to being out on the social point of view in Birmingham city centre - there is no difference between the two. Both clubs have fans in the city centre, both clubs have fans in the outer city areas that travel. I believe there is very little difference between the two sets of fans so I think the fans have these perceived impressions of the other side. For me I don't believe there are any actual massive socio-economic differences between the two sets of fans... but it is a strongly held view I think generally. (Jimmy Blues IT8)

However, there are some statistics available that could arguably support the perceptions of fans. Though it was outlined in the discussion of territory section that there is a lack of clear classification of exactly which areas are Villa fan territories and which are Blues, there were a small number of specific locations that both sets of fans identified as being predominantly Villa or Blues. From this information it is possible to compare the figures for estimated average weekly household income for these specific areas, from the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2012) which were calculated in 2008 (the most recent data available).

The two specific neighbourhoods where the two football clubs are located are both in the lowest of the five income brackets indicated, with Small Heath's total estimated average weekly household income being £380 and Aston's being £390. Here there is a clear but very minimal difference. However, when comparing more of the specific areas identified

by fans as being Blues and Villa territory there is a difference. Some of the areas in the south-east and south-central regions of Birmingham that are considered 'Blues areas' have the following estimated weekly household incomes: Sparkbrook £370; Deritend £410; Highgate £410; Acocks Green £550; Yardley Wood £480; Yardley North £470; and Stechford £480. The average for these seven 'Blues areas' plus Small Heath is £443.65. Some of the places in the north-west and west of the city that are 'Villa areas' have the following weekly incomes: Handsworth Wood £610; Perry Barr £580; Kingstanding £560; Sutton Vesey £720; Sutton Coldfield £890; Harborne £780; and Edgbaston £630. The average for these seven 'Villa areas' plus Aston is £645.00, which is £201.35 more than the estimated average for 'Blues areas'. It is acknowledged that this information is far from conclusive, as the areas highlighted by fans are not necessarily predominantly Villa or Blues, and even if they were it is unknown how the incomes of football fans compare to these estimated figures. Nevertheless, these statistics do act as an indicator and could explain the basis for the fans' perceptions regarding Villa's higher socio-economic status.

Whether fans are aware of such statistics is unlikely, but they do have an understanding of the areas of the city being discussed. What is key is that the perception exists in the lived experiences of the fans. The representations that groups engage in within their practice is part and parcel of their social reality, as a class is defined as much by its *perceived being* as by its being (Bourdieu 1984). The fans' classifications and judgements are based on the 'schemes of perception' within the habitus that all individuals have (as they are constitutive parts of their habitus), which form their understanding of the social order (Bourdieu 1984). Within the habitus these perceptions of different groups can become "inscribed in people's minds" (1984: p.471) and help to organise the 'distinction' between one group and another so individuals can organise and distinguish between 'us' and the 'other' – whether that is based on different perceptions of class or supporting a different football club. Within the fans' habitus, constructing these distinctions is important, as opposition and rivalry are the very nature of football (Giulianotti 1999), therefore these "social divisions become principles of division, organising the image of the social world" (Bourdieu 1984: p.471) for each group of fans. Additional probing demonstrated that these perceptions (of Villa as middle class and Blues as working class) were based on a wider range of influences – but two factors in particular were mentioned quite frequently by fans – which were: the football clubs and 'famous'/'posh' fans.



### 6.3.2. Posh Club with Posh Fans

When questioned about the basis for the class based perceptions, fans from both sides drew on the association between the football club's economic position and the fan community. The finances of the club were essentially often projected onto the club's supporters, which in turn influenced the schemes of perception within the fans' habitus. The following responses were indicative:

[Villa fans are] more middle class in nature, rightly or wrongly. There may be some truth in it, and there is no doubt that Blues seem to have a higher than proportionate lower-working class or thuggish element within their fans. You just get the impression there's loads of money around them and their club and the people they've had as owners. Whereas we [Blues] have to be more careful as a club, you know, money wise. (Jake Blues IT5)

Factors such as crowd size, quality of the ground and the wealth of owners all matter. Also being an established Premier League side for 20 years, that gets you plenty of money and you can buy big name players for lots of money, which adds to it. I guess as the club is viewed as having lots of money, or at least lots more than Blues, then people might think that all us fans have money too. (Darren Villa IT6)

I also think that Villa were the rich club attracting the F.A. Cup semi-finals every year and also in 1966 staging group games for the World Cup, all this I believe is contributing factors to the rivalry between the two clubs, although I hasten to add more from Birmingham City's point of view casting a very envious eye over to Aston. (Archie Villa IT7)

The connection between the club and the fans demonstrates how fans perceive the club and the fans to be part of the same imagined community, or as an extension of each other, as the clubs' economic status is projected onto the fans. However, it could also be argued that the blurring of the boundaries between the attributes of a football club and the

attributes of fans could lead to misconceptions or the stereotyping of fans to develop, which could consequently lead to further tensions and antagonisms developing within a rivalry.

Similarly, when questioned on the source of the perceptions of social class, several fans of both teams mentioned ‘famous’ or ‘celebrity’ fans of the teams, which they felt influenced their overall perception of the fan community. Alan’s (Blues IT2) response is illustrative here:

There’s definitely the perception that Villa are the more middle class team and fans, and that is obviously helped by things like David Cameron being a Villa fan, Prince William being a Villa fan, you know, [Mervyn] King, the head of the Bank of England being a Villa fan. What Blues fans are there? We’ve got the bloke out The Streets [Mike Skinner, a musician] and we’ve got Jasper Carrott [a comedian] and that’s about it – no one that overly makes you think we are middle class. So, I suppose there is certainly that sort of perception – that Villa is of a higher socio-economic class – and its real, whether it is true or not, there’s definitely a perception amongst fans.

Villa appear to be associated with members of the middle or upper classes, or the economically and politically powerful, whether that be contemporary figures (David Cameron, Prince William, Mervyn King) or those in the past (William McGregor, founder and president of the Football League in 1888 and director of Aston Villa). Fans suggested that Birmingham City have no such apparent links, and are therefore considered to be more working class. This aligns well with Armstrong and Giulianotti’s (2001b) theme of rivalries being based on ‘the drama of power inequalities’, as the dominant, legitimising identity are associated with politically or economically powerful elites. Even if this link is very tenuous, it is significant because the fans perceive the link to exist. This association to economically and politically powerful individuals not only reinforces the perception of Villa fans as being more affluent or middle class, but the status of the individuals (for instance, the Prime minister and the person second in line to the throne) also provides the Villa fans with a form of symbolic capital. This association is made as the group perceived to be dominant, situated in this social space, attempt to associate themselves with values

and attributes recognised as highest/strongest/superior (Bourdieu 1984) – as fans reported there were perceptions of Villa as: higher class, more successful team, richer club, larger and grander stadium, richer chairman, and so on. These associated aspects distinguish Aston Villa fans as being a higher class than their rivals. The perception of Villa being middle class or petite bourgeois feeds into the ‘product’ of Aston Villa FC as middle-brow culture, which then continually feeds back into the fans’ habitus to reinforce the identity of the Villa fans as middle class – as the petite-bourgeois legitimates “whatever he touches” due to his position in the social space (Bourdieu 1984: p.327). In addition to this, more footballing success often translates to financial success, which in contemporary football can often portray a certain social image that in turn could attract fans of a higher socio-economic standing. The data did not suggest that Birmingham City were associated with any politically or economically powerful fans, although this could build into their strong working class/resistance identity, and could be viewed as a positive and therefore afford them some cultural capital.

These polarised class positions appear to be a strong element of the collective identities of both fan groups. So much so that individual fans may adopt the collective class identity of their fellow fan group within a football environment, as Alan (Blues IT2) discussed:

Both sides will play up to it, whether they are part of that class or not, you know – if you were a middle class Blues fan you will still take on that sort of Blues thing of being the working class fan, and a working class Villa fan will take on the airs and graces of the upper-middle class when talking to a Blues fan. I think there is definitely that sort of aspect of it.

This can be explained by Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of field. Within the field of the Birmingham football (sub)culture an individual may act as part of the Blues fans’ collective working class identity, however when outside this field they may consider themselves or be considered middle class due to, for instance, their occupation and the area they live in. Kelly (2007) found similar behaviour amongst football fans in Scotland, as fans from different teams emphasised different aspects of their identity in different settings. Kelly found that within Edinburgh there was a strong rivalry between fans of Hearts FC and Hibernian FC, however due to the complexity of the political and religious

identities involved within these spaces of sport, when their local Edinburgh rivals play one of the ‘Old Firm’ teams from Glasgow, then the Hearts and Hibernian fans suggested that they would rather see their local rival do well against the Glasgow teams. Hearts fans and Hibernian fans emphasised certain aspects of their collective identity within the Edinburgh rivalry, but when the space of sport was expanded to include the two Glasgow clubs they then emphasised different aspects of identity as they had a different audience or ‘other’ to consider. This is described as ‘audience segregation’, which is a form of impression management (Goffman 1959), as fans put on a different show to various audiences. To continue with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor, ‘actors’ are said to have a wide repertoire of roles to choose from, in order for them to put on a creditable and idealised performance for the specific situation (Birrell and Donnelly 2004). In the above example, the Blues fan may put on a ‘working class performance’ when in the Birmingham football cultural field in order to fit in as part of the broader collective identity, but may perform a more ‘middle class’ role at home or in the workplace depending on the context.

### **6.3.3. Perceived Class Struggle Underpinning the Rivalry**

A rivalry does not necessarily have to be based on major differences between two groups, a rivalry can exist between extremely similar groups of fans, referred to as the “narcissism of minor differences” (Hills 2002: p.61). Rivalries are triggered by legitimating one’s own cultural practices against imagined others whose very cultural and geographical proximity threatens the attempts of imagined communities to achieve distinction. In many respects, this can be said to apply to this rivalry – as fans suggested that there is very little concrete evidence that explains the (perceived) class differences discussed (though it has been highlighted here how the estimated weekly income (ONS 2012) of certain areas of the city can act as an indicator).

Due to their similarity, it is felt that the fan groups look to gain distinction from their rivals. This cannot be achieved through consumption of a product within the field (Bourdieu 1984), as the economic product they each consume is relatively homogenous – it is roughly the same price, they watch their teams often play in the same league and even play each other, in shared locations – so it is difficult to achieve distinction from their

rivals. Though it is acknowledged that whilst the price of the product is similar, the market value of Aston Villa might be higher. Therefore, based on the data it is argued here that the class perceptions of the two groups are emphasised and exaggerated in order to gain distinction amongst two (relatively) homogenous groups within essentially the same location.

When a rivalry involves similar groups of fans, Bale (1993) stressed the significance of place consciousness rather than class consciousness within the power relations of the rivalry:

The collective identification engendered by football is one where the football-city nexus is interpreted in terms of power and hegemony. Contrary to superficial impressions, it is argued that through major team sports the concept of community is promoted at the expense of economic or social class. Team sports can be viewed as promoting allegiance to place rather than allegiance to class. The emphasis on inter-place competition is obvious to any casual observer of inter-terrace chanting at any Football League game. ... Opposition between clubs (representing places), runs the hegemonic argument, brings similar groups of working class people into conflict and hence serves to obfuscate class tension, replacing it with place tension. (1993: p.58)

However, within the Birmingham dynamic, as demonstrated in the territory section, fans essentially come from in and around the same city, so it is difficult to create a clear demarcation of, and thus allegiance to, place. Therefore, the fans within this rivalry do not simply replace class tension with place tension, rather, both class and place are important, distinct factors that underpin the rivalry. In addition to the struggle over place tension (see chapter five), the Villa and Blues fans also engage with (perceived) class tensions to play out and distinguish themselves from their rivals. Blues accumulate gains in distinction by emphasising the difference between themselves and the 'middle class' Villa fans, whereas Villa accrue gains in distinction by distancing themselves from the 'rough, working class' Blues who they perceive to be below them. Consequently, the two groups of fans play up to the polar positions of their two collective class identities, which leads to a struggle for power based on class relations – which then influences and reinforces the rivalry.

#### **6.4. Conclusion: Footballing Success and Perceived Class**

This chapter explored the multifarious social and cultural factors that underpin this rivalry. It was outlined how the fans' perception of Aston Villa being superior and Birmingham City being inferior emerged. However, there was a great deal of complexity to this power dynamic, and the fans' perceptions of superiority/inferiority were influenced by two central factors: the historical success of the football clubs and the perceived class of the fan groups.

It was discussed how the relative success of the two football clubs, and in turn how the fans then used this status to (re)construct their own collective identities and influence the surrounding rivalry discourse. Data demonstrated that fans perceived Villa to have had significantly more footballing success during their history, which in turn afforded their collective identity higher levels of cultural capital, which meant that both sets of fans viewed them as the superior, legitimising identity. In resistance to that is Birmingham City, who are perceived to have a lack of footballing success. It was highlighted how fans employ different strategies of power (Foucault 1980) during the on-going struggle within the rivalry dynamic. Villa fans employed 'techniques of domination', by influencing and manipulating those within the rivalry dynamic, which is done specifically by highlighting and emphasising their success in order to legitimise their perceived superiority and ensure the 'knowledge' of Villa's superiority is constituted and reinforced by their historical success. Whereas, as the resistance identity, Blues fans employ the strategy of seeking to undermine Villa's success, rather than attempting to highlight any success of their own. It also emerged that Blues fans were jealous of Villa's success, which further underpinned the rivalry. However, it was underlined how the struggle for power is on-going and how there have been various times when Villa were perhaps not simply considered superior, for instance following their relegation to the third tier of English football in 1970 or more recently following Blues' League Cup triumph. This demonstrated that the rivalry is dynamic not static or linear, it is constantly developing, which further feeds the tensions of the rivalry.

Villa's perceived superiority was also based on supposed class tensions. Fans perceived Villa's collective identity to be more middle class, and Blues' to be more working class. This reinforced their positions within Armstrong and Giulianotti's (2001b) framework as the legitimising and resistance identities respectively, as the 'drama of power inequalities' is said to be built on the power struggle between the community perceived to be 'wealthy' and the community viewed as the 'poor relations'. These perceptions were strongly held and influenced the fans construction of their collective identities and in turn influenced the rivalry. It emerged that, as the fan groups were actually relatively homogenous in terms of their demographics and their location, both groups emphasised and exaggerated the perceived class relations in order to gain some distinction from their rivals. This perceived class struggle also then built into the perception of Villa's superiority, though it remains a complex and on-going struggle for dominance.

## **7. Conclusion**

This final chapter summarises the thesis. Following a brief review of the aims, the first section offers an overview of the key findings of the data analysis. The thesis is then situated within the broader academic context, simultaneously highlighting the study's contribution to knowledge in this field. There is then a discussion on combining cultural studies and ethnography, before a reflection on representation and some of the challenges of the ethnographic study. Finally, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study and some recommendations for future research.

The gradually increasing body of literature in this area has demonstrated that rivalries are unique and complex, and must be studied individually and in-depth (Giulianotti 1999; Thompson 2001). Therefore, the aim of this study was to provide a 'partial interpretation' (Klein 1993) of the football fan subculture in Birmingham, which focuses specifically on the rivalry between the two sets of fans and the social, historical and cultural factors that underpin this fan rivalry.

### **7.1 Summary of Key Findings**

As stated, rivalries are complex and multifarious, and are based on numerous factors – but three central themes emerged clearly from the data – territory, historical success of the clubs and perceived class of the rival fan groups. These themes have been explored in the two discussion chapters. The themes are not hermitically sealed entities, rather they are inter-related factors that underpin and reinforce the rivalry between the two fan groups.

Contesting the territory in and around Birmingham was a prominent theme throughout the participant observation, and during interviews participants expressed just how significant they felt territoriality was in terms of underpinning the rivalry. There were two key elements here, the classifying of certain areas as being owned or controlled by one group of fans or another, and then also the communicating of territorial boundaries. Fans from both groups attempted to claim territory as their own, in order to gain, or be perceived to have, more power, but these claims were repeatedly found to be complex, inconsistent,



and often contradictory. This confusion and lack of agreement leads to tension and contestation between the fan groups, which was found to be a central factor in this football rivalry.

In terms of the communication of boundaries, a Foucauldian interpretation of discourse (Foucault 1980) was useful. This highlighted the importance of knowledge and how power is exerted through discourse during the strategic 'game' of power relations (Smith-Maguire 2002). Access to discourse was said to be important, but neither fan group was found to have any particular dominance in terms of communication (both groups can attempt to communicate in many different ways), which leads to further tension and contestation as fans continue to try to gain some authority or dominance. Therefore, with no dominance or control of the discourse, in terms of communicating territoriality, it is suggested that neither set of fans is the legitimising identity (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001b). Rather, where territoriality is concerned, they both adopt an on-going project identity, attempting to change their collective situation and become dominant. Within the broader academic context, this focus on territoriality when exploring rivalries is significant, as it appears from existing literature that territory is only ever discussed in a very casual or brief manner. For instance, in a number of the case studies presented in Armstrong and Giulianotti's (2001) edited collection, there is mention of teams being 'local rivals' without adequate discussion and engagement with just how significant the socio-geographic aspect of each rivalry is, and how territoriality is manifested within each rivalry context. Therefore, the discussion here of such factors in chapter five may be instructive for future research on fan rivalries.

The two remaining central themes both essentially framed Villa as the legitimising, dominant identity within the rivalry dynamic. It was discussed how the relative success of the two football clubs, and in turn how the fans then used this status to (re)construct their own collective identities and influence the surrounding rivalry discourse. Data demonstrated that fans perceived Villa to have had significantly more footballing success during their history, affording their collective identity higher levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), which meant that both sets of fans viewed them as the superior, legitimising identity. In resistance to that is Birmingham City, who are perceived to have a lack of footballing success. Fans employ different strategies of power (Foucault 1980)

during the on-going struggle within the rivalry dynamic. Villa fans employed ‘techniques of domination’, which is done specifically by highlighting and emphasising their success in order to legitimise their perceived superiority. As the resistance identity, Blues fans employ the strategy of seeking to undermine Villa’s success. However, it was underlined how the struggle for power is on-going and how there have been various times when Villa were perhaps not simply considered superior, which again highlights the need for historical sensibilities in order to develop our understanding of the connections between past and contemporary (sporting) cultures (Mills 1959). This demonstrated that the rivalry is dynamic, not static or linear, as it is constantly developing, which further feeds the tensions of the rivalry.

Villa’s perceived superiority was also based on supposed class tensions. Fans perceived Villa’s collective identity to be more middle class, and Blues’ to be more working class. These perceptions were strongly held and influenced the fans construction of their collective identities and in turn influenced the rivalry. It emerged that, as the fan groups were actually relatively homogenous in terms of their demographics and their location, both groups emphasised and exaggerated the perceived class relations in order to gain some distinction (Bourdieu 1984) from their rivals. This perceived class struggle also then built into the perception of Villa’s superiority, though it remains a complex and on-going struggle for dominance.

To provide a brief overall summary of the three central themes discussed, it is useful to return to Armstrong and Giulianotti’s (2001b) framework for rivalry identities. The themes of the clubs’ historical success and the perceived class of the fan groups both demonstrated how Villa’s imagined community were positioned as the dominant/legitimising identity, with the Blues’ imagined community in resistance to this, at the wrong end of the power dynamic. Whereas, the discussion of territory suggested that neither group had any genuine claim to dominance in this respect, therefore both imagined communities adopt project identities, attempting to change their situation and become the legitimising identity when considering territory. The differences between the themes highlight the complexity of the rivalry, as when focusing on some themes Villa are the dominant identity, but when considering other aspects they are not. This not only provides justification for exploring this complex phenomenon in great depth, but can also offer an

explanation for why there is such intensity and passion involved in these power relations between the fan groups, as the power appears to be “up for grabs” (Kevin, Villa IT11) as both groups of fans engage in this on-going, dynamic contestation in order to help their imagined community become dominant.

There were no other major factors that emerged to underpin the rivalry, with the possible exception being the frequency of the matches between the two clubs, which related to the intensity of the rivalry. Some fans did indicate that they felt that the rivalry might not have the same intensity and passion if the teams went long periods without playing each other. The ‘dispute-density’ model (Geller 1993; Goertz and Diehl 1993) could be useful here, as it focuses on the number of incidents between two groups over certain periods of time, and whether the ‘density’ or frequency of incidents constitutes a rivalry. As there just happened to be a number of games between Blues and Villa during this research period, it could be argued that the rivalry was more concentrated and in the forefront of the fans’ minds, whereas if the teams went several years without playing each other then the rivalry dynamic might alter in some way. This highlights the complex nature of rivalries, and how essential it is to adopt a historical sensibility (Mills 1959), as changes over time may be particularly significant when seeking to analyse a rivalry. It could be beneficial for future work on this rivalry to consider this factor if indeed these teams did not play against each other again at all for many years.

It is also worth mentioning that Birmingham’s population has a wide ethnic variety and immigration has been at the heart of the city’s development for over a century (see Chapter five). However, though these are relevant factors in terms of the social milieu of the city and the social context within which the rivalry is located, these were not found to be factors that underpinned the football rivalry itself. Fans were questioned on the potential connections between ethnicity and the Aston Villa – Birmingham City rivalry both formally during interviews and informally during participant observation, but issues around ethnicity, religion and immigration were not deemed to be relevant by the fans. That is, unlike the examples of the rivalries in Belfast (Bairner 2002) or Calcutta (Majumdar 2008) that do have strong elements of ethno-sectarianism and contestation between immigrant groups, Birmingham represents a different case. Given that Birmingham is such an ethnic melting-pot (Moran 2010), it could also be surmised that the

fact that ethnicity, religion and immigration were *not* found to be significant factors underpinning this rivalry could arguably be a key finding in itself. However, it is to be noted that none of the participants interviewed were from an ethnic minority. Due to the constructivist approach to research adopted here, it is considered possible that interviewing participants from a broader ethnic and religious spectrum (as suggested by Burdsey 2009) could have provided further insight into the rivalry under investigation. However, as these topics did not emerge during the extensive participant observation, or during the engagement with fan literature and online forums, it was not pursued further in this instance.

## **7.2 Situating the Thesis within the Literature & the Contribution to Knowledge**

Generally, previous academic literature on football has often referenced football rivalries only in a very casual manner. However, there is a limited but growing academic focus on football rivalries. This study adds to this growing body of literature concentrating specifically on football fan rivalries, and more broadly contributes to the focus on the ‘everyday and ordinary’ fans (rather than hooligans), due in part to the influence of cultural studies upon the study of fandom. This thesis has also contributed to the existing literature by further demonstrating that there are complex social and cultural factors at play in fan rivalries, which highlights the importance of adopting a multi-causal approach to fully understand the idiosyncratic combination of social properties underpinning each individual rivalry. This research has also promoted the use of ethnography, by highlighting the benefits of this approach in order to elicit rich data that provides the depth and insight necessary for a reality congruent interpretation of the imagined communities of rival football fans.

The analysis of the data sought to both compliment the reviewed literature and also to further the boundaries of knowledge. This has been achieved in a number of ways. Primarily, this study provided a ‘partial interpretation’ of the football fan subculture in Birmingham, which focused specifically on the rivalry between the two sets of fans. As each rivalry is unique, it was not previously known which factors underpinned this particular rivalry – or how the fans engaged with each other and interacted within the

social milieu of Birmingham. Details were provided for the first time of how, for instance, fans in Birmingham express their team identification (e.g., through specific chanting about their team's success and their rival's perceived shortcomings); how they employ condescension strategies (Bourdieu 1984) in order to influence the habitus of both groups of fans and therefore create 'distinction' (see section 6.3); how a number of complex factors inform the perceived class identities of each group of fans, and the influence that these perceptions then have on the broader rivalry; or, how central the territorial struggle is to the rival fans and how they employ innovative strategies in attempts to influence the 'discourse' within the 'game' (Foucault 1980) of power relations across the city. It was also not previously known just how significant the history of the two football clubs is for the fans and their collective identities, and, in terms of the rivalry, how significant Aston Villa's footballing success (especially in comparison to Birmingham City's lack of success) is in terms of underpinning the rivalry and contributing to the collective identities of the fans.

Secondly, this thesis both highlighted and sought to address the methodological concerns that have emerged from previous work in this area – specifically, regarding the lack of detailed accounts of research methodologies when studying football rivalries, and the challenges of conducting ethnography more generally. In addition to the extensive discussion and justification of the research methodology, there are reflections provided throughout this study (specifically in sections 7.4 and 7.5) that aim to both consider the challenges of this research and also potentially offer guidance to future researchers. The value of providing fellow researchers with some assistance is felt to be particularly pertinent, as it was the words of previous researchers and supervisors that was so beneficial to me. Especially, the notion of confidence in the field during the early stages was vital. Reflections on challenges by previous researchers helped me to realise that I was not alone in feeling anxious about exactly how to go about conducting participant observation (e.g., similar views expressed by Venkatesh 2008).

Thirdly, although not the primary focus of the study, a sustained account that addressed the socio-historical development of football in Birmingham was also provided, which is significant as during the research process it emerged that there is an extremely limited amount of literature focusing on football in Birmingham, despite it being the second

largest city in the country, with a long-standing culture of football. Therefore, this thesis, and particularly chapter four, aimed to draw together information and literature on Birmingham's footballing history to order to address this gap in the literature – though it remains an area that requires attention in the future. Additionally, a cultural studies approach was critically discussed and then used throughout the thesis, which has contributed to the theoretical discussion surrounding the analysis of football fan rivalries. A further discussion of the influence and use of cultural studies within this ethnographic process shall form the basis of the following section.

### **7.3 Cultural Studies and Ethnography**

The parameters of the study were not only set by broad (and subjective) research questions (that were informed by previous literature) and methodical procedures, but also subjectively by the theoretical approach adopted, or as Guba (1990) stated, this interpretation of reality is seen through a 'theory window'. Theory does provide a certain framework for research, however, the flexibility of ethnography enables a study to extend the boundaries and limitations where necessary, as opposed to alternate approaches that may have much tighter boundaries and a more rigid framework that remains focused on the hypothesis (Cresswell 2007).

The influence of cultural studies upon this study is acknowledged in a number of ways. Firstly, in terms of the focus on the more 'ordinary' and 'everyday' fans and their perceptions and experiences – which is very much in the tradition of cultural studies, following the classic works of the likes of Hoggart (1958) and Williams (1958; 1974). More specifically, and in relation to ethnography, immersion in the field for long periods of time meant that I was able to explore the everyday and 'taken for granted' aspects of the fans' lived experiences and cultural processes, which Turner (2003) argued are central to a cultural studies approach. For example, the flexibility of the ethnographic study meant that in addition to the interviews I was able to observe and explore a range of cultural practices, such as the fan interaction on online fan forums, fanzines and pop-fandom literature, and (with the help of many fans) examine the meanings behind the chanting at games.

Further engagement and development with a cultural studies approach as the study continued was beneficial. From reflecting on Foucault's understanding of relational power, and Bourdieu's appreciation of the 'game' that social actors play relating to their habitus and capital endowment (see chapter five), I was increasingly able to recognise how fans were employing strategic 'techniques' of framing their own imagined community in certain ways, or attempts to undermine their rivals. I had begun to feel that data gathered from informal discussions with fans during the participation and also some of the early semi-structured interviews was perhaps not always synonymous with my broader interpretations of the rivalry. For instance, I was perhaps initially naïve in thinking that when I spoke with fans that they would be forthcoming with me and answer in a way that genuinely reflected how they felt, rather than a fan continuing to employ 'techniques' in order to position or frame their collective group in an overly positive light, or undermine their rivals. For example, some Blues fans were initially dismissive of Villa's footballing success (see section 5.2.5). However, as the study progressed and the interplay between theory and the data collection continued – including both participant observation and also the history of the two football clubs - I was slowly able to recognise these 'techniques', and therefore I would probe further and I found that they would 'admit' to feeling a different way, which was more in line with data gathered from participant observation and from the history of the two clubs. As discussed, many fans employed impression management in different regions (Goffman 1959) – in the front region (at matches or in other social situations) they maintained the impression that their team was superior and dominant in many regards. However, in the back regions, and following gentle probing in interviews, a different view was offered that was more in line with the broader data collection. Although it must also be acknowledged that during an interview with a researcher, fans may also be putting on a 'performance' for an outsider, so it could be difficult to know with any certainty whether the interview data can be considered front or back region (or as Goffman (1959) suggested, perhaps a third 'outside region' – see section 5.3.1).

A further strength of combining cultural studies and ethnography was the flexibility that was afforded in terms of a theoretical framework. A range of relevant theories and concepts were able to be combined to aid the analysis of some of the complex themes that

emerged. For instance, I was able to benefit from Elias' (2000) civilising process to analyse some of the socio-historical changes in Birmingham in chapter four. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony was used to explore how Villa fans attempted to claim dominance over territory in chapter five. Aspects of Goffman's (1959) symbolic interactionism were used in both discussion chapters, in order to offer explanations and understand why fans might behave differently when comparing front and back regions. Both Bourdieu (1978; 1984; 1993) and Foucault (1977; 1978; 1980; 1984) were integral to many parts of the on-going analysis, helping to elucidate the power relations and the struggle for dominance within the rivalry dynamic, which is demonstrated throughout chapters five and six. The flexibility of ethnography that enabled the theory-evidence interplay is seen as a strength of this approach, as adopting a more rigid theoretical framework may have resulted in limiting the scope of the analysis and therefore the overall scope of the 'partial interpretation'.

#### **7.4 Representation and Reflexivity**

Prior to entering the field, a central question prompted by the existing literature was regarding representation and the position of the researcher. With hindsight, it was beneficial to ascertain my own position that was conducive to my constructivist philosophical assumptions before engaging with data collection. Whilst the advantages of being a 'relative insider' (Giulianotti 1995) or a 'social impressionist' (Sugden and Tomlinson 2002) were considered (discussed in chapter three), the role of 'partial interpreter' (Klein 1993) was deemed to be most suitable. This was due to the relativist approach of providing a 'partial' account of the subculture and the subjectivist notion of the individual experience of the researcher being incorporated.

To borrow from Sugden and Tomlinson's (2002) analogy of the painting created by the researcher – this partial interpreter approach to ethnography may produce a very similar or even identical 'painting', but a key difference would be that the social impressionist (positioned more towards the realist end of the continuum) would claim this painting to be a 'shared truth'. Whereas the partial interpreter (more towards the constructivist end of the continuum) would acknowledge the distinction that this painting is compiled as an earnest



and individually experienced activity (Van Loon 2001), based on the interpretation of emic and etic accounts – but is one of numerous possible social constructions, highlighting the subjective nature of this approach to ethnography. As the study progressed, this distinction, and the partial interpreter approach generally, became increasingly clear. This made producing the overall ‘painting’ a slightly easier task as I had developed an understanding of what I was seeking to achieve. Also, as the partial interpreter does not necessarily look to provide a ‘complete’ account of a culture or phenomenon (Klein 1993), it suited the study as there remained a clear focus on the rivalry, rather than potentially becoming lost by trying to explore and interpret the whole Birmingham football culture.

The constructivist approach rejects the objectivism of the positivist paradigm, instead the interactivity between researcher and researched should be recognised, utilised and explored as part of the initial and final research processes and products (Lincoln 1990). One area to reflect on in this regard is the researcher’s personal experiences in relation to the subculture under investigation. Whilst engaging with others, one question that academics very often asked was “so which team do you support?”. As an Aston Villa supporter, in the early stages I felt this was a significant ethical issue to consider. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of team allegiance, and following the guidance from experienced researchers to be open and up front about my research (Sugden 1996; Bourgois 2002), I had chosen to answer truthfully if I was asked which team I supported and, if I was not asked, I would not mention it. However, despite it being a seemingly obvious question for fellow academics to ask, this never came up in the field. There was not a single time that a fan asked which team I supported. Whilst this was something of a concern initially, I soon felt comfortable enough to realise I could talk quite openly, as these sorts of questions/concerns regarding affiliation were never raised. The lack of questioning from fans on this matter could be due to fans viewing me as an outsider; a researcher entering a ‘foreign’ culture and would therefore be unlikely to support either team. I began to interpret this as the fans simply considering me to be a researcher who ‘quite liked football’, but had no particular affiliations.

This perhaps highlights how, although I may have been able to be a participant observer – in the sense that I felt I could participate as a fan amongst either group of fans – when it came to the interviews fans certainly seemed to perceive me to be very much a researcher,

not 'one of them'. In other words, not what Giulianotti (1995) described as a relative insider. This remained the case despite me observing and interacting with some of the participants before I eventually ended up interviewing them. It seemed to be the case that up until the point they were informed of my researcher status they perceived me to be a fan (within the field), but from then on (when I met them to conduct interviews) I was only considered to be a researcher who had an interest in football in Birmingham. What was most important here, however, was that during the ethics approval process, I had been encouraged to think about many possible concerns or situations like this – so had prepared myself and was conscious of the challenges I might face. There was some uncertainty during the initial research period when I was unsure of how fans might react to a researcher – especially if the issue of team affiliation did arise – however, the fans I interacted with in the field were friendly and seemed to me to genuinely enjoy sharing their thoughts and answering some informal questions, which put me at ease and gave me confidence. My own personal football affiliations soon became something that I did not have to be concerned about whilst actually being in the field. It is worth reiterating that the philosophical assumptions that underpin this study not only allow for subjectivity but *value it* (Guba 1990), so there is no requirement for the researcher to attempt to achieve a completely objective view – though possible researcher bias was taken into consideration.

As an Aston Villa supporter, it was important for me to remain reflexive and ensure that there was no significant bias that might in some way compromise the data analysis. However, this may be a difficult thing to achieve, which is often regarded as either the politics or the crisis of representation (Murphy and Dingwall 2001). This has been discussed frequently by ethnographers when they face problems like: a researcher coming from a different ethnic background (Venkatesh 2008) or different educational and class background (Bourgois 2002) to the population under investigation, i.e., issues around ethnocentrism or class bias. Whereas Venkatesh and Bourgois made their respective backgrounds known quite explicitly, due to the nature and practicalities of my research I chose, as explained previously, to keep my affiliations to myself unless asked. Therefore, although it was not necessarily the aim for fans to remain unaware of my affiliation, as it transpired that this was the case, there are no issues concerning the data they then provided in terms of perceiving me in overly favourable/negative ways (depending on which team they supported). In addition to this 'safeguard', I attempted to remain reflexive regarding

this matter. This was achieved by reading through data repeatedly, and by asking questions of myself as suggested by Crang and Cook (2007) and Cresswell (2007). For instance: ‘how have I responded to observations and incidents within the field?’; ‘how have I made links between what individuals say and the broader social milieu and historical/economic/political context?’; and, with regard to the issues of affiliation, I considered ‘how might a fan of Birmingham City have interpreted that incident?’, or ‘am I asking questions during interviews in the same manner with both Villa and Blues fans?’. However, as stated in the methodology chapter, being reflexive is not about following a rigid, prescriptive framework, rather it is a fluid process that is based on the researcher’s judgements and intuition (Etherington 2004). In addition to these ethical concerns regarding representation, there were also more practical ethical dilemmas to contemplate.

### **7.5 ‘Perils of Ethnography’**

A further advantage of being reflexive is how it exposes and makes explicit many of the moral dilemmas that are there but go unnoticed in non-reflexive research (Etherington 2004). Previous candid accounts based on fieldwork by Klein (1993), Sugden (1996), Bourgois (2002) and Venkatesh (2008) have discussed not only the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography, but also the formal and informal practical aspects of actual self-immersion in a subculture, especially some of the dangers. This ethnographic project may not have been based in US ghettos with high rates of crime (like several of the above studies), but there was certainly an ample amount of ‘getting fingers dirty’ in some of the less desirable parts of Birmingham – and personal safety was a genuine concern on several occasions.

One night in particular stands out, when Blues hosted Villa in a League Cup quarter final at St Andrews (the following is taken from excerpts of the field notes BCAV1).

Due to fan violence in the preceding years, all league matches between the two clubs are played at midday on Sundays, in order to discourage drinking (and, apparently, therefore violence)... As this was a League Cup match it had to be played during the week so was an evening kick-off, at the start of December, which meant drinking and

a lively atmosphere... Tomorrow they are deciding who will host the World Cup in 2018, and the authorities are worried that trouble at this match will damage England's bid – so the police are out in force... Despite the police presence, there were clashes between rival fans in the city centre before and after the game, as well as in and around the ground... But it was at the final whistle that things really became dangerous; as hundreds of Birmingham City fans ran onto the pitch towards the Villa supporters. With only a line of police between the fan groups, there was a fifteen minute spell when missiles, seats and flares were thrown between the fans... Due to being given a complimentary ticket at late notice, I was in the 'away' end amongst the Villa fans (when the two teams play each other I usually just buy a ticket in whichever part of the ground is cheapest). I chose to stay back away from the pitch, as I had already been hit by a coin thrown earlier in the evening, and the police were not allowing any of the Villa fans to leave in order to 'maintain safety'. The irony was that many fans *were* being injured, and also the police between the fans were in danger... Due to the seating allocation in the stadium, there were also Birmingham City fans located in the tier above the Villa fans – which meant that they were also throwing things down onto the away supporters – myself included. A large advertising board landed a matter of feet from me, in addition to a glass tomato ketchup bottle (presumably smuggled into the ground from catering vans outside) landing 'safely' in the aisle...

Eventually the police relented and let the away supporters out... only for us to find that the police had created a holding area by parking police riot vans close together just outside the away section of the ground. So I was being held amongst hundreds of other Villa fans, whilst the rival fans continued to throw things at each other – rocks, bottles and even a mop bucket... In the gaps between the riot vans some rival fans could 'get at' each other, and were quite clearly trading punches, despite the police being in close proximity. One Villa fan was even being pulled back by a police officer holding his left arm, whilst punching a Birmingham City fan with his right arm, before being dragged away and presumably arrested... I asked one of the police officers (who was standing back away from the vans) 'what is the plan, how are we going to get out of here', and he replied that he had 'no idea, there's been silence on the radios for a while now'. The police clearly weren't in control, and I was very

much concerned about my well-being, so I followed some other fans through a small hole in a fence, scrambling through some mud and then jogging through a housing estate back towards the city centre. Participant observation was important, but given the opportunity I'd have happily left the ground early and watched the trouble on the news later at home... As it turned out, I did get a little bit dirty and a little bit bloody tonight, but that was from squeezing through a fence trying to get away!

Being in a situation that was potentially dangerous was something that was anticipated and accepted prior to entering the field. However, witnessing illegal acts on the scale that I did was not envisaged – certainly not in such close proximity. To follow Sugden's (1996: p.207) advise, the ethical rule of thumb I obeyed here was that "although I witnessed an illegal event, I did not take part in it and, as such, my presence in the field did not contribute to that act". Also, the incidents and confrontations would certainly have occurred without me being in the vicinity. In addition, as I felt that there were ample numbers of police in the vicinity (a fact that did not seem to bother those fans that were fighting), and no doubt CCTV, the authorities would not have benefitted from my assistance. Several people were hospitalised, numerous arrests were made (Kendrick 2010b), and on reflection I didn't feel I could have identified those involved. I was also helpless to do anything at another match between Blues and Villa, as missiles were again thrown between rival fans. Unfortunately, a young girl (probably around 13 years old) sitting two seats away from me was hit in the face by a coin; as the stewards were busy attempting to prevent trouble they weren't able to assist with first aid. The girl's eye was bleeding as her father carried her down the steps and out of the stadium. I did not have any way to find out if the girl made a full recovery, and during the course of the participant observation this was the incident that I found most distressing. Though this event was ethically problematic, there was no way to envisage that this would have happened, especially, again, with me being in such close proximity.

It is also acknowledged that the (more practical) problems with adopting an ethnographic approach that are usually highlighted (see Bryman 2008; Smith and Caddick 2012) were certainly evident during this study. Firstly, as anticipated, the data collection and analysis was time-consuming. Secondly, though access to participants was not necessarily an issue, actually getting them to take part in an interview was far more difficult than expected; as it

was (naively) considered that with so many thousands of fans it would be a straightforward task. In retrospect, I delayed organising participants to interview during the early stages of data collection, as I thought that I had a great deal of time and many potential participants, and that people would willingly give up their time to be interviewed. This meant it was more difficult to arrange interviews when the time came. In future I shall endeavour to identify possible participants and build a rapport earlier in the research process. Thirdly, financial costs also inhibited the progress made at various points – both in terms of buying tickets in order to attend matches for participant observation and also in terms of travel. Therefore, Saturdays (often match-day in Birmingham) were utilised to the fullest extent to avoid excess travel costs, as I would arrive at the Birmingham Central Library early in the morning to continue researching, before heading to the game and then later writing up field-notes before returning home. Whilst these issues may not have necessarily altered the study, they certainly resulted in many challenges and headaches, and a few small, personal sacrifices had to be made along the way. Therefore, though these factors were anticipated to some degree, in future they will be given more respect and consideration – as lessons have been learned that when previous researchers and supervisors inform you that this type of data collection will be very time-consuming and challenging, that advice must be fully taken on-board and time allocation must be more generous and flexible.

## **7.6 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Due to the (constructivist) methodology of this study, it has not been the aim to provide the ‘one true reality’ that a more positivist approach might seek. Rather, it is a partial interpretation of this football fan rivalry based on empirical data and built on a clear methodological framework. The themes identified cannot be generalised to other football fan rivalries, as each rivalry is distinct and underpinned by unique factors – instead, this study can be viewed as *one way* of conducting research of this nature. In addition to the data collected through participant observation, the study also centred on the data collected through semi-structured interviews with a small sample of football fans that supported either Aston Villa or Birmingham City. Whilst these in-depth interviews provided rich data, the relatively small sample meant there could be limitations in terms of the data

being 'generalised', as, for instance, there were no female participants interviewed and there was also a limited mix of ethnic backgrounds involved in the sample. Arrangements were made to interview female fans on two separate occasions, but one interview was cancelled in advance by the first participant and the second participant did not attend the scheduled timeslot (on both occasions correspondence was then ceased by participants for unknown reasons). Engaging with more female fans and also a broader mix of ethnicities in terms of participants could be areas to address in future research in this area, as previous literature (see Burdsey 2009; Mewett and Toffoletti 2012) has argued that both remain under-represented groups within sociological research.

Focusing on the specific categories that formed the discussion chapters could be perceived to be a limitation of the study, as concentrating on the three central themes that were found to underpin this rivalry meant that as the study developed there was not scope to fully explore and discuss other related or minor themes further. For instance, although it was not perceived to be a factor or theme that actually underpinned the rivalry, the use of websites and interaction of fans online – particularly on fan forums – was an area that emerged as being increasingly significant for contemporary football fans. One of the interviewees manages one of several online fan forums for Birmingham City fans, and explained how the site gets in excess of three million views each month. It was evident that the discourse surrounding the rivalry is informed by the online interaction of fans (discussed in chapter five), particularly with fans debating various topics with rival fans (who can often also contribute to rival fan forums, but not always) leading up to a derby match – as fans use information, historical statistics, pictures and videos to inform and support their 'claims' for their team's dominance and their rival's inadequacy. However, this ethnographic study only engaged with online fan interactions on what might be described as a supplementary or auxiliary level – to help gather data and identify themes – there was not a sustained focus on the 'virtual' fan world, as the primary methods of data collection remained 'live' participant observation and interviews. As 'virtual' ethnography is becoming increasingly prevalent (see Boellstorff et al. 2012), future ethnographic research could potentially concentrate on exploring the inner workings of the 'virtual' rivalry between Aston Villa and Birmingham City fans to ascertain whether or not it can be viewed as synonymous with the interpretation provided here.

A further limitation of the study was highlighted during the methodology chapter, and it concerns the socio-historical chapter of the thesis (chapter four). Though the chapter is a mix of primary and secondary sources, it does rely more on secondary sources. Whilst this is acknowledged as not ideal, this is justified by the fact that the socio-historical account of football in Birmingham is included in order to assist in the overall analysis by informing the discussion and providing context, as the thesis is primarily sociological and based on primary data collected from participant observation and interviews.

In addition to future research seeking to further explore the socio-historical development of football in Birmingham, there are a number of recommendations that can be made. Broadly speaking, future research can continue the (cultural studies inspired) focus on the 'everyday and ordinary' football fans, which can provide a breadth and depth to our understanding of football fans, rather than the previous attention given to exceptional fans (hooligans). As highlighted above, more academic attention is also required for female football fans and also fans from ethnic minorities – both within the Birmingham football culture and within football fandom literature generally. More specifically, as each football rivalry has its own unique and idiosyncratic underpinning factors, there is scope to follow the theoretical and methodological framework used here to explore and interpret any football rivalry. As each rivalry is dynamic and always evolving, there is the opportunity for future work to further explore this Birmingham football rivalry. It is conceivable for the three central, dominant themes outlined here to change or be influenced by other factors over time, or for new factors to emerge. For instance, Birmingham City were relegated from the Premier League towards the end of the research period, so the rival teams have not played each other since 16<sup>th</sup> January 2011. If this lack of footballing contact continues then the struggle for power and dominance between the two imagined communities may slowly alter, in turn impacting the dynamics of the rivalry and the collective identities of the fans.

In terms of predicting the future development of the rivalry, the potential lack of matches between the clubs in the future could be a factor. As briefly discussed above, adherence to the 'dispute-density' model (Geller 1993; Goertz and Diehl 1993) might suggest that a lack of matches or 'incidents' involving the two clubs and sets of fans may decrease the intensity of the rivalry, if it were to remain over a lengthy period of time. This could also



be linked to the relationship between the fans and the (local) media, as with no focal point (derby matches) the media may not have a rationale for writing about the rivalry very often, if at all. Without matches and without the media stirring up feelings and tensions, the rivalry could lose some of its current intensity over a long period of time. This is certainly not to suggest that fans are passive cultural dopes, or that the media can directly influence what fans think, but fans indicated that the media can influence what they *think about*. For instance, as discussed in chapter six, the media articles about jealousy between the rival fans (Howell 2005b) or re-counting significant previous meetings between them (Tattum 2010) can influence the fans thoughts – if only to ‘remind’ them of certain factors.

However, the history of the rivalry can be informative here. As outlined in chapter four, the two Birmingham clubs went almost sixteen years without playing each other in the league between 1987 and 2002 (Bishop and Holt 2010), although there were some infrequent cup matches during this period. Rather than this period without regular matches decreasing the intensity, it appeared that it remained and when Birmingham City were promoted into the Premier League in 2002 the passion and the animosity was very much still present, as the games at both St Andrews and Villa Park that season saw ‘violent skirmishes in the stands’, pitch invasions, players on the pitch sent off and many arrests and injuries (Glendenning 2002; Fifield 2003). A further factor to add here is that informal discussions with fans towards the end of the research period revealed that fans were not seeking reconciliation, or for a decrease in the intensity of the rivalry. This would support the perspective that, although tensions may sometimes ‘boil-over’, for the majority of the time they can perform positive social functions – such as increasing competition, improving group solidarity and collective identity (Lee 1985), and also provide entertainment and excitement for huge numbers of individuals, as “the non-violent expression of hot rivalry and opposition enlivens the football spectacle” (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001a: p.2).

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1. List of Football Matches attended during Participant Observation.**

#### **Matches between Aston Villa and Birmingham City:**

##### **Aston Villa v Birmingham City (AVBC1).**

Villa Park – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2010. Premier League – Kick-off 12pm.

##### **Birmingham City v Aston Villa (BCAV1).**

St Andrews – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010. League Cup – Kick-off 7.45pm.

##### **Birmingham City v Aston Villa (BCAV2).**

St Andrews – 16<sup>th</sup> January 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 12pm.

#### **Matches involving Aston Villa:**

##### **Stoke City v Aston Villa (AV1).**

Britannia Stadium – 13<sup>th</sup> September 2010. Premier League – Kick-off 8pm.

##### **Aston Villa v Manchester United (AV2).**

Villa Park – 13<sup>th</sup> November 2010. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

##### **Aston Villa v Blackburn Rovers (AV3).**

Villa Park – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

##### **Aston Villa v Wolverhampton Wanderers (AV4).**

Villa Park – 19<sup>th</sup> March 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

##### **Aston Villa v Newcastle United (AV5).**

Villa Park – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.



Aston Villa v Stoke City (AV6).

Villa Park – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

Aston Villa v Wigan Athletic (AV7).

Villa Park – 7<sup>th</sup> May 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

Aston Villa v Liverpool (AV8).

Villa Park – 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 4pm.

Aston Villa v Wolverhampton Wanderers (AV9).

Villa Park – 27<sup>th</sup> August 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 12.45pm.

**Matches involving Birmingham City:**

Birmingham City v Wigan Athletic (BC1).

St Andrews – 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

Birmingham City v Blackpool (BC2).

St Andrews – 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2010. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

Birmingham City v Bolton Wanderers (BC3).

St Andrews – 12<sup>th</sup> March 2011. FA Cup – Kick-off 12.45pm.

Birmingham City v Sunderland (BC4).

St Andrews – 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 3pm.

Birmingham City v Wolverhampton Wanderers (BC5).

St Andrews – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 12pm.

Birmingham City v Fulham (BC6).

St Andrews – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011. Premier League – Kick-off 4pm.

Birmingham City v Braga (BC7).

St Andrews – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011. Europa League – Kick-off 7.45pm.

## **Appendix 2.      Record of Interviews Conducted**

Aston Villa Supporters:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Location</b>
Rod (IT4)	14 <sup>th</sup> July 2011 – 5pm	Rose and Crown, Halesowen
Darren (IT6)	9 <sup>th</sup> August 2011 – 5.15pm	Costa Coffee, Birmingham
Archie (IT7)	16 <sup>th</sup> August 2011 – 1pm	Archie's House, Handsworth
Phil (IT9)	16 <sup>th</sup> August 2011 – 4.45pm	Wetherspoon's Bar, Birmingham
Kevin (IT11)	9 <sup>th</sup> October 2011 – 2pm	Wetherspoon's Bar, Birmingham
Kenny (IT12)	5 <sup>th</sup> November 2011 – 1pm	Central Library, Birmingham

Birmingham City Supporters:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Location</b>
Dan (IT1)	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2011 - 9.30am	WMFS HQ, Birmingham
Alan (IT2)	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2011 – 11am	Wetherspoon's Bar, Birmingham
Gary (IT3)	27 <sup>th</sup> July 2011 – 4.15pm	Gary's Lounge, Birmingham
Jake (IT5)	9 <sup>th</sup> August 2011 – 3pm	Costa Coffee, Birmingham
Jimmy (IT8)	29 <sup>th</sup> August 2011 – 7.30pm	Bar Room Bar, Mailbox
Ricky (IT10)	8 <sup>th</sup> October 2011 – 6pm	Hennessey's Bar, Digbeth

### **Appendix 3.**

## **INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Project title:**

**Rivalry and Identity involving the Fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City Football Clubs.**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read all the information in this leaflet carefully. Then please consider whether you wish to take part in this project. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this form. If you decide that you do not wish to participate, then please appropriately discard this leaflet or hand it back to the researcher. Regardless of your decision, I thank you for your time.

### **What are the aims of the project?**

The main aims of the project are:

- The aim of the study is to explore and interpret the experiences of some of the fans of (insert: Aston Villa FC or Birmingham City FC), focusing on football fan rivalry.

### **What will you be asked to do?**

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to be interviewed for around one hour.

This project involves asking you some questions. The exact questions are not set in advance. If you feel uncomfortable about any questions, remember that you do not have to answer them. Also remember that you can stop taking part at any time without any disadvantage to you.

#### **Risks and discomfort**

If you experience any degree of discomfort at any stage of the completion of the interview then you can withdraw from the study without any future consequence.

#### **Safety**

As the chief researcher I must consider your social and psychological wellbeing. If you feel that these are at risk and you wish to withdraw from the study then you can

do that anytime without explaining your reasons to the chief investigator (Adam Benkwitz).

## **Injury**

It is unlikely that you would get physically injured during this study as it does not require you to do anything physical. However if you feel uncomfortable with completing or being part of the interview you can withdraw anytime without explaining your reasons.

## **Benefits**

The benefits that you will gain by taking part in this study is an understanding of why and how people get their perceptions about sport. Also, by taking part, you will help us to increase knowledge of the area being studied.

## **Can I withdraw from this study?**

You can change your mind and decide not to take part any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you do not have to give any reason for your decision, and you will not be disadvantaged in any way.

## **What information will be collected, and how will it be used?**

The data collected from the interviews will be predominantly qualitative in nature (your thoughts and feelings) and will be compared to other views. These data will then be analysed, interpreted and be written up as part of a PhD Thesis.

The findings of this project may be published, but the information will not be linked to any specific person. Your anonymity is carefully guarded and I promise full confidentiality. A copy of the results and/or your interview transcript may be given to you upon request. The raw data will be discarded after the completion of studies.

Should you require further information please do not hesitate to contact the Chief Investigator, Adam Benkwitz, at any of the interview sessions or via e-mail [a.benkwitz@worc.ac.uk](mailto:a.benkwitz@worc.ac.uk), or Dr Gyozo Molnar, academic supervisor, at [g.molnar@worc.ac.uk](mailto:g.molnar@worc.ac.uk).

## **Statement by participant**

- I have volunteered to take part in this project
  - I know I can withdraw at any time without being disadvantaged
  - I am satisfied that the results will be stored securely
  - I know that the results may be published, but they will not be linked to me
  - I am aware of any possible risks and discomfort
  - I agree to inform the researcher immediately if I feel uncomfortable

- I have had the chance to ask questions regarding the study
- I know that I will not receive any money for taking part

If you have concerns about any aspect of this study you should ask to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. However, if you have further concerns and wish to complain formally about any aspect of or about the way you have been treated during the study, you may contact Dr John-Paul Wilson on (01905) 54 2196.

I have read and understood this form it. I agree to take part in the project entitled: **Rivalry and Identity involving the Fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City Football Clubs.**

**Signed (Participant):**

**Date:**

**Signed (Witness):**

**Date:**

## **Appendix 4      Example Interview Transcript**

### **Alan Blues, IT2.**

Transcript of Interview 2 with Alan, a Birmingham City fan.

16<sup>th</sup> July 2011, Central Birmingham, 11am, Wetherspoons Bar, Centenary Square, Birmingham.

### **Summary of Current Themes Identified:**

General Villa-Blues Rivalry underlined throughout.

**Rivalry Relating to Class on pages:** 2, 10, 13, 14.

**Rivalry & Territory on pages:** 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10.

**Rivalry & Triumphs of football clubs on pages:** 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12.

**Superior/Inferior Identities on pages:** 6, 12.

**History of Rival Clubs on pages:** 4, 5, 7, 11, 12.

**General Football Fandom on pages:** 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

**Emerging/New Theme to Explore on pages:** 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15.

Adam: Ok, interview with Andy a Birmingham City fan. So, to begin with Andy could you tell me roughly how long have you been a fan, and how did you start supporting your team?

Alan: (pause) I suppose I started following Birmingham when I was sort of 12 or 13, that was when I first sort of become aware, it had never been a part of my family, my dad was never particularly into football and things like that. So it was only when I became old enough to become aware myself, I just started following, and I first started to go to games when I could afford to take myself so, probably when I was 16, 17. My first game that I remember going to was a friendly with the school, which was Birmingham City against Villa, I think it was a friendly, I was too young really to know. I do distinctly remember at that point having to decide whether I was going to be a villa fan or a Blues fan [oh really – A] at that time, cuz as I say when you were at school it was a case of who the other people at school supported and other things like that. I went to school in Kings Heath, so tended to, which is in south

Birmingham, so it was a fairly split, and so I tended to dislike Villa fans slightly, a bit more from school. So I think it ended up at that instance I decided to follow Blues. I've always been, I think I was always more Blues orientated. I was born and brought up in Small Heath, so within spitting distance of the ground [St Andrews] and so... I always had that sort of very slight allegiance where I grew older obviously that allegiance became more ... and I became more aware of it as I got older. I didn't know at the time, but my father.. there was never any, he didn't follow football as I was aware, at a later age I discovered that he did used to go to Birmingham City, and I know my grandfather actually went to the 1931 [FA] Cup Final at Wembley with Birmingham [really? – A]. but I didn't know this at the time, so I have actually got history of being Birmingham fans, but I didn't know this when I chose to [support them], it sort of came to light – especially in terms of my grandfather- it only came to light after he died. And I inherited some Birmingham City memorabilia, which I didn't even know existed. And that was it, and I first started going when I was 16, 17 when I could afford to pay for it myself, and I could go out without asking parent's permission and so on and all that. So that was about... 92/93 I just started going to games.

Adam: Has it been quite regular since then?

Alan: Well, the first few years it was quite occasional, I would go to the games I could afford, that tended to be the cheaper games, things like that, and the very occasional game. When I first, or when I went more often was when I went off to university, I went to London for university, and although I'd started going sort of the six months or so before university, when I started to go more regularly, then when I went to university that became almost part of my university identity, being from Birmingham, being a Birmingham City fan, it sort of became more of a part of my identity more at that point, sort of going to games in and around London, going to the away games where you sort of quite a different experience to home games. And so, probably for the first year of university I was going to more away games, and then from... probably from the second half of the first year through to the second year I started going back to Birmingham for weekends, partly to see parents but also going to see football at the same time. I then, I was doing a sandwich course, so I then moved back to Birmingham, half way through the second year, and was in Kidderminster, so at that point, I think it was at that point, I got a season ticket then. If it was a season ticket I was going virtually all the time. And so that when I became a serious fan I suppose, as opposed to an occasional fan or a follower. And I suppose also at that point, that was 94-95, that was also when the internet started to appear in universities, so you could sort of keep in touch with back home, so it became another way of keeping in touch with Birmingham.

Adam: Shall we hold it there just while you have some food. [brief pause while Alan has something to eat and I pop to the toilet].

Adam: Ok, so to what extent would you say supporting your team impacts your life, especially in terms of time during the week, on average?



Alan: Well, obviously I help run a Birmingham City supporters website, so that I suppose increases the amount of time I spend. I'm quite often online watching it reading it, participating, and then during the season I'm obviously going to games and things like that. Occasional pre-season friendlies and things like that, so... you know, in terms of online I sort of probably spend a few hours a day, monitoring keeping up to date with what's happening, everything else that's happening – and then every other weekend its based around the game. I don't go to as many away games as I used to, finances mainly, but I recently got married so I need to spend time, but yeah, it's a large amount of my spare time, would be dedicated to it, you know it is I suppose my main hobby, if you can call it a hobby. It's... the wife thinks it's too much time.

Adam: Fair enough. So it's difficult to say for someone who has such an involvement as you, are you one of these people who once the game has finished are you one of those who, perhaps if it is a really bad game can let it go or do you feel it ...

Alan: Yeah, I tend to let it go, I try to be quite dispassionate about things. Obviously when I'm in the game it's quite an emotional release, as it's what it's all about being part of a crowd, and all of that. But then I don't try and let it affect me too much. Obviously sometimes you get quite or angry if something particularly controversial has happened, it can, you can get quite emotional about it, but I try and be dispassionate about it. However, I would say I'm quite, I would say I'm interested in all aspects of it as well, obviously it's not just the game, there's what is going on in the background of the club and the rest of it. Being involved with the website and things like that you do get to hear lots of sort of rumours inside the club and what's happening and everything else and how that affects it, you know. So it's not just about the 90 minutes of football, although obviously that can significantly affect, that affects everything else.

Adam: Ok. So moving on to the rivalry side, to what extent would you say there is a rivalry between Aston Villa and Birmingham City?

Alan: I think there's a great rivalry there, I mean, you know, ask any Birmingham fan and you know, you are always looking out for how Villa are doing, hoping they have done something stupid or embarrassing or whatever, and ... You know you almost take as much pleasure in them losing as you do in you succeeding... And you know, you have that with all clubs, you've always got, you know all football fans have an opinion, on other football clubs. So you'll always have, you know, you'll know without even thinking whether you like a club or dislike a club. So for example you'll hate Villa you'll hate Wolves, at Birmingham over

the last five years there's been a hatred of West Ham has come on, because of the owners and we've had sort of quite a few key games involving West Ham sort of thing, and they have become you know, a target of yours then I suppose?

Adam: So you think then in the West Ham case the actual number of games in a certain period can help establish a rivalry?

Alan: Yeah absolutely, and you know its key games. I remember my first recollection of having any animosity towards West Ham was when we played them, I don't know, about five years ago or something like that, and at the end of the season and I think we either relegated or consigned them to relegation, at that time. And I think that since then there has been a bit of bad blood and I think then obviously with the owners going to West Ham and having West Ham connections I think there was always that little bit of rivalry built up. Obviously that's not... that's also enhanced by the fact that you know, there's the hooligan aspect of it as well where Birmingham you've got the Zulu's at Birmingham and you've got the hooligans at west ham, so you know obviously that in the background sort of creates a rivalry. And when there is actual things going on either in the football or in the background of the club, obviously that brings in the fans at the same time.

Adam: So in terms of Villa-Blues, you sort of alluded to it earlier, but how long were you aware of the rivalry do you think?

Alan: Well you sort of, you can't grow up in the city and not be aware of it, you are Villa or Blues, you know, It's like being in Northern Ireland you either protestant or catholic, you might be a Jew, but you're a protestant or a catholic Jew. You know, and the same in Birmingham, you are Villa or Blues even if you don't like football. You know, if you don't profess to one or the other, people will at you strangely and not quite understand. And I suppose, in sort of west Birmingham you get Baggies [West Bromwich] fans, and everyone goes and looks at them a bit funny cuz it's like why aren't you Villa or Blues?

Adam: Is part of that, do you think an aspect of that is support your local team do you think? Or is that you think Villa and Blues were the more popular clubs?

Alan: I don't know, Albion fans will always claim that Villa and Albion are the main rivalry in the city, and that, but you would be hard pushed to find many Villa fans that agree. Unless they sort of live sort of in Albion territory themselves, and I suppose they might then see that,

you won't see many fans from Sutton Coldfield or wherever saying that Albion are their main rivals. You know, we've been rivals [Villa and Blues] since we were created 120 years ago. Its always been there, as far as I can tell. I think the partisanship of it and the animosity of it has probably built up since the seventies, and the times of the segregation from what I imagine, because obviously it is very difficult to shout obscenities to someone standing next to you, but if they are in a pen on the other side of the ground with a fence separating you then it is very easy.

Adam: So you think that was a big change then?

Alan: I think that was a big contribution, you know you always hear of the stories of people who would go to Villa one week and Blues the other, follow both teams – you know, you'd be hard pushed to find anyone who did that now. Not just because of the cost, but because it would be unthinkable. Why would you, why would you wanna watch both teams? Support both teams?

Adam: Ok, how do you think or how do you perceive your fellow Birmingham fans, how do you think you and your fellow fans perceive the Aston Villa fans and their collective? Any stereotypes?

Alan: Well I can't speak for everyone, but you know, I've lived in Birmingham most of my life. I lived in London for ten years, but when I lived in London, actually most of that time I was flat sharing with an ex-classmate from university and he was a Villa fan. So I've sort of lived in a Villa-Blues house, I can honestly say I have never... I don't know... I've never knowingly known a Villa season ticket holder, and not because of avoiding it, but all the Villa fans I've ever met or had any reasonable relationship with have been fairly lapsed or fairly occasional fans. So there is a view amongst, of Villa fans by Birmingham fans, of being, of not being proper fans, they don't go that often, from what I can make out. And you also get the general impression that, you know, you think of Villa fans and you think of Sutton Coldfield and you think of Tamworth, Lichfield, the surrounding areas, there's not, you know, you don't think of many Villa fans as being from the city itself. Now obviously there are, and obviously some fans are, you know you've got places like Erdington which are mainly Villa, and I imagine there are places in south Birmingham that are, but the general opinion of Blues fans is that there's not that many Villa fans in and around the city. And I'd say judging by the fact that I don't know actually any Villa season ticket holders living and working in the city I would say that my experience would almost bear that out.

Adam: And do you think that, is that something Villa fans would acknowledge do you think?

Alan: ... I don't know, I mean obviously, I suppose, Villa fans... it depends where they come from, if a Villa fan is from the inner city then they will think that obviously it's load of rubbish, but the Villa fans who are from Sutton Coldfield, Tamworth, Lichfield, what would they think, well would they really see themselves as being a proper Villa fan or not being from Birmingham, I don't know you'd have to ask them. I imagine you always justify things to yourself, so they would probably just laugh it off, or you know, but they would come back and say well Birmingham City fans are from chavvy areas and whatever, and you know, you know, you've got the main areas of east Birmingham – Stechford, Yardley, Sheldon, Kings Heath and Northfield and places like that which I suppose are strong Blues areas, and they are all, most of them, are fairly working class lower class areas. Where as I suppose most of the Villa areas are seen to be a bit more leafy and green. So they will turn it back and say well it's a good thing that they are not from those other areas. And you do certainly through the internet, those are arguments that are thrown around quite often.

Adam: So even if it's not actually the case, it is perceived or it's the stereotype?

Alan: It's a perception and it's a stereotype and its 'the truth' whether it's true is another matter. It is a truth of the matter, Villa fans aren't from Birmingham.

Adam: Do you think that almost, with not being from Birmingham, with Birmingham being the established side and Villa being perceived to be the outsiders – would you say that might underpin the rivalry to some extent?

Alan: I think so, I think there's the – obviously Birmingham take the city's name, Villa don't. You've got the... that's turned around by the fact you've got Villa are the ones who've got historically the greater success. So Villa will hold on to their league wins and their FA cup wins and things like that, and their European cup wins, and turn it round and use that and the Birmingham fans will turn round and say well we're from Birmingham and we've got the city's name and the rest of that, so you know, each side argues it's own argument and doesn't really pay much attention to the other side's. I wouldn't say that Villa would particularly argue that they are all from Birmingham, or they are necessarily the pride of Birmingham. They might do, but I would say that's to wind up Birmingham [City] fans.

Adam: Ok, that leads quite nicely into the next area then; to what extent is the rivalry influenced by the ownership of the city? Especially I think through my research, like you said both fans singing the song 'the city is ours' or 'we're the pride of Birmingham'?

Alan: I mean “the city is ours” is quite an interesting song. I mean the Villa fans have always sung that, when Blues started singing it, it was sung a little bit but not that much. But it’s only been sung for the last... well I reckon anyway, it’s only been sung for the last three quarters of the season or the last half of the season, and it only really took off when we played in them in the league cup, and the Birmingham fans weren’t actually singing the city is ours, we were singing – ‘the city is yours, the city is yours, when we are at Wembley, the city is yours’. To turn it back to say, it is such a ridiculous notion that the city belongs to Villa, that we’ll joke and we’ll laugh and we’ll turn it round. We know the city is ours, we don’t need to sing songs to prove it, it’s in the name, you don’t see an awful lot of Villa shirts around the city centre, or you don’t tend to I suppose, unless they are doing well, I suppose would be a genuine claim. Whereas there are a lot of Birmingham shirts all around – we’re closer to the city centre, a little bit, so I suppose there’s a little bit of that, and also I suppose, most of the time we are beneath Villa or less successful than Villa – even if we had the same amount of shirts in the city centre – the fact that we’d had less success is a source of pride, we are actually showing our pride.

Adam: To what extent do you think the name of Aston – Birmingham is important to the fans do you think?

Alan: I think it’s important, it sets your identity. **So for Birmingham fans you know, we are Birmingham we are Birmingham City, and we’ll quite happily throw it back that Aston Villa don’t have the city’s name at them, as an insult or a slight against them, and they will call us Small Heath Alliance after our original name, as an insult, as an insult back to us. You know, I think both sets of fans are proud of their heritage for different reasons** – you know, Villa fans are proud because back in the 1890s they won the league nine times, back when their great grandparents were mere kids, whereas Birmingham fans almost take pride in the fact that we’ve always been pretty rubbish, but we still support them. You know, we’re not glory hunters, we don’t support them because we’ve won things, we support them because that’s who we are. So every time a Villa fan throws the fact that they have won ten FA Cups or whatever it is or that they won the European cup, for a lot of Birmingham City fans you know it just bounces off. So therefore we are better because we have never won that and yet we still support them.

Adam: Ok, so you think there is a stronger identification with the team because there is not the glory hunting aspect?

Alan: Absolutely, but going back to that, you throw the name backwards and forwards and we will say Villa- Aston and all that, and then they’ll come back and say Small Heath, you

know... so I don't know... but by my website which is called Small Heath Alliance.com you know we don't actually take that as an insult, so there's no shame in that. **There's a growing level of, one of the chants at the game is 'Small Heath Alliance, Small Heath Alliance, Small Heath Alliance, by far the greatest team the world has ever seen', you know which is clearly ridiculous, we've never won anything and all of that – its taking the piss, we know we are rubbish, we don't care. And so whenever Villa use that as an insult, or use it to say we are small time, or whatever, it bounces off us – but at the same time it reinforces the rivalry and it reinforces stereotypes.**

Adam: Speaking of stereotypes then, going back to turn an earlier question round, how do you think your rivals perceive the Birmingham collective?

Alan: Well, obviously, it's difficult to tell looking in, but you tend to ... I think... you say all Villa fans see us as, you know, they will concentrate on the negative aspects of Birmingham City. There is the hooligan issue, the lack of success or... you know ... or less salubrious location you know, **the quality of our owners over the years**, you know, they will just use anything they can to put us down and insult us to you know, make themselves feel better than us. Obviously, we tend to turn that around and use all that as a positive, you know, as I say it all where ethnic minorities or blacks or Asians or whatever take the words or insults used against them and self-identify, you know, we tend to do the same, you know. When something, when someone like a Villa fan say or use something against us we will turn that round and say use it as a positive identifier, as a positive trait as fans, because obviously, **the club might not be successful, the owners may be in prison, we may be going bankrupt**, but us fans are still there, so... we are part of the club, but we are not the club. If the club has done something wrong as long as the fans are doing something right then we can sort of stand above it and say well you can take the piss out the players and you can take the piss out the owners, but so can we, and you know we are different.

Adam: So, more pride is taken from perhaps the fan aspect of the whole Birmingham City collective rather than sometimes the success of the club?

Alan: **Absolutely, you know we have not had a lot of success to actually work out what to do with. You know, we won the cup in March, was it March or February? And you know... the overwhelming feeling was, from what I could make out, was shock, we didn't know quite what to do, we've never actually won anything, so how do you celebrate when you do?** You know ... whereas other teams know how to win, we don't really know how to win. You know, winning promotion is normally as much as you can get. And that's normally followed the year after by knowing that you are going to be whipping boys. And it is going to be a long hard year, so promotion parties are strange things, whereas relegation parties are fantastic events almost, you know, after you get relegated it's the relief, the seasons over you don't

have to worry about it anymore, let's have a blowout, have a fantastic time at relegation parties – although promotion parties are good, you're looking forward to what's going to happen next, you know it like you get promotion from the championship to premiership and you are like, god it's going to be difficult next year, who are we going to buy and all this. when we won the cup, you know, for a few hours it was oh my god we won we won we won, then it slowly sinks in – oh, we're in Europe next year, ... winning always leads onto something. **Whereas when you get relegated you are sort of, slate clean fresh, it binds you together and I think that's part of what makes Birmingham City fans Birmingham City fans**, you know, **we're not united by success, we are you know, united by failure and disappointment. And when we get the success, it means, it means a lot but it doesn't really define us.**

Adam: Ok, so are there actual relegation parties then?

Alan: Oh you know, you'll get, especially last home game you'll come out the ground and all the pubs around Digbeth will fill up and you'll drink until 4o'clock in the morning you know, they are not organised they just happen, because everyone needs to, everyone wants to relax, or moan about what's just happened or work out who is to blame or anything like that. And that takes a couple of hours and once that's over its like 'oh well never mind, lets get on with it'. I suppose it's like a wake isn't it, you have a wake and it turns into a massive party.

Adam: Ok, moving on slightly, to what extent do you think the dynamics of the rivalry are influenced by the close proximity of the two clubs?

Alan: Well... it makes, you know, it was a clear... it was a clear demarcation line almost, you know, we were like 4 miles away – the same side of the city, sort of north east type situation, **so you know it's very clear or it was very clear, how there are Blues areas and Villa areas – obviously with immigration with the main inner-city areas** now being **mainly Asian**, there isn't a great deal of local interest in local football, they'll watch it on TV, they'll wear Liverpool shirts they'll wear Man Utd shirts, they're not really interested in Blues or Villa. So, that sort of filtered out fans in terms of that, and its made it a bit more difficult to know where the areas are, **but with the close proximity will increase it, ... because either team will claim that they wholly own the city is gonna be wrong, you can't be three or four miles away from each other and have 100 per cent of the support. You know ... I've walked, I live in Small Heath, you know, half a mile from the ground, and I've walked to Villa games, I've walked to away games and back. So they've both been walkable distance, so you can't justify yourself on the area, you can't justify yourself on the area, its slightly more than that. So, you then get other areas, you know you then get other areas of the city that identify as mainly areas of Blues or mainly areas of Villa, ... and so, as you say its...**

Adam: Do you think then that there are perhaps perceived claims on certain areas or territory, whereas realistically they might not be...

Alan: Oh yeah there are claims, but obviously there's always exceptions, there is always... but the claims they change and they move and they, you know, the east of Birmingham so you know Sheldon, Stechford, Chelmsley Wood, all that you would say they are definite Blues areas, that then as is sort of Erdington is the Villa area, you'd say is definitely a Villa area, you then get the areas between, so sort of Castle Bromwich, Castle Vale, sort of where the two lots collide, and that is a bit difficult to say which is which for those ones there, and then south Birmingham is a bit of a mish-mash because they are probably equidistant from both, you know, some bits of areas will be mainly Blues, some bits of areas will be mainly villa, and you know I think – and I think it's all perception, and I think it's also as I said earlier where Villa fans you tend to see being slightly more middle class than Blues fans... would be the perception, so therefore you would say that even areas such as Kings Heath where you get fairly poor parts of Kings Heath and you get more affluent parts. You would probably say that the more affluent parts are more likely to be Villa fans.

Adam: Ok, that kind of answers the next question actually, the higher socio-economic status – whether it's actually real or just a perception – so you would say there certainly a perception?

Alan: There's definitely a perception, whether it's real or not, especially living in Birmingham, because obviously living in Birmingham – people think of Tamworth and Lichfield and people think –you know- they live in detached houses on their estate with their big gardens and everything else and you see they are clearly a higher socio-economic class or whatever, in reality are they? Or have they just moved out to satellite towns and they are actually the same as just live and have got nicer houses, and there's definitely the perception that Villa are the more middle class team, and that is obviously helped by things like, that's helped by things like David Cameron being a Villa fan, Prince William being a Villa fan, you know, King, the head of the bank of England being a Villa fan, you know, what Blues fans are there, you know we've got the bloke out The Streets [Mike Skinner] and we've got Jasper Carrott, and that about our – not overly of which makes you think we are middle class. So, I suppose there is certainly that sort of perception – that Villa is of a higher socio-economic class – and its real, whether it I say again, whether it is true or not, those are the surveys, fan surveys that measure wealth and all the rest, there's definitely a perception amongst fans...

Adam: And you would say that is something that influences the rivalry and something that all the fans are aware of this perception?



Alan: Absolutely, absolutely, and both sides will play up to it, whether they are part of that class or not, you know – if you were a middle class Blues fan you will still take on that sort of Blues thing of being the working class fan, and a working class Villa fan will take on the airs and graces of the upper-middle class when talking to a Blues fan. I think there is definitely that sort of aspect of it.

Adam: Ok, that's good. Another area you touched on briefly before – how important do you feel the history is for the rivalry and how aware do you think contemporary fans are of, like you said, the long histories of both clubs?

Alan: Well, obviously the history is a major.. the histories are always used as the stick to beat the other team, Villa will have their 'how many cups and how many leagues' and the European cups and all that, and Blues fans will go round and say, well was your granddad alive when they last won the league or did you go to Rotterdam to see Villa win the European cup? So you know, it's there and everyone knows the history, but as I say, both sides will take out of it what they want. You know, we'll say that Villa fans are living in the past, they have delusions of grandeur, you know, they've got no current rights to you know, we, they, there is the common perception that they think they should be challenging for Europe every year and everything like that and we as Blues fans are sort of laughing at that and saying how deluded they are that they think they are up there with these mega rich clubs, and that... you know, that obviously affects ... that obviously affects everything. And Villa fans are aware of what have we ever won, well not a lot really, you know, we grab what we can, we grab onto scraps of sort of football trivia almost, you know, we were the first English club team in Europe, we were the first English club team to get to a European cup final, we were the first team to win at the San Siro in a competitive match, and the only team for 42 years ever to do so, you know, things like that. We beat Villa in the league cup back in ... nineteen sixty two or whatever it was, [sixty three] and so we stick to that, and you know we beat Villa in the final and you know and the fact that not many teams entered doesn't really matter, so we grasp onto that. But then we also grasp onto our glorious failures as well, you know, we, you know, we managed to lose an FA Cup final against a team with a keeper who had a broken neck, you know 'only at Blues'.

Adam: So is that part of the Blues identity as well then, that glorious failure then?

Alan: Absolutely, we are defined by our failures. You know, you ask any Blues fan over a certain age what their biggest heart break is and every single one will say the Fulham semi-

final in 74 or 75, and you know, so we are defined by our failures. We are defined by our near misses.

Adam: So, season by season, not necessarily just last year, but for the fans, in terms of the rivalry, what do you think is most important, is it the games against each other or perhaps is it where they finish in the league?

Alan: I think for the fans, I think it is mainly where ... you measure yourself against how you do better, so if you finish above the other team, you measure yourself in league position, if you win the local derbies you'll measure yourself in the local derbies. If you lose both, you'll measure yourself in whose got better fans, you know. If you look at recent... you know, when we first got promoted into the premiership in 2002, we went on a run of not losing to Villa for an awful long time, so that became incredibly important, you know. When they started beating us, obviously less so. This last season it was mixed, you know we had the cup game where, you know, we beat them and so that became incredibly important – and you can see how important it was for what happened after the game with the pitch invasion and everything else, and that was almost a.. from where I was sitting, from the Blues fans side, it wasn't a violent 'lets go get the Villa fans', or at least it didn't start out like that, whether it ended up like that is another matter. But it almost started out like oh my god we've won haha, stick that we're going on to Wembley type thing, and a taunting. And so you'll grab on to whatever you think makes you better than the other team, you'll use that.

Adam: Ok, so I was gonna ask you a question about whether either sets of fans have inferiority or superiority complexes, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you kind of alluded to almost that the Villa fans and the collective have to feel that they are the dominant team in many respects?

Alan: Yeah, I think that's true, I think, I think we play our parts, we make ourselves, we give ourselves an inferiority complex, to say we're not as good as Villa and we don't care, but we're better in so many ways as fans, and Villa sort of do the opposite, but whether there is a superiority complex or an inferiority complex, its not that simple because the club, the team might be inferior but our fans are superior – Blues fans will see themselves as better fans. The club might be shit, but the fans are better.

Adam: So in terms of, if we were talking about the power relations of the two collectives, whereas perhaps recently Villa might have the edge in terms of socio-economic status you've

said, their position in the league, but then Birmingham are kind of a resistance to that – we’ve got the better fans and we’ve won the cup.

Alan: Absolutely, we both think we are better than the other, and you know probably, if you ask a Villa fan he’ll say the same thing, so, they’ll say they’re better than us, and ive got no idea what their claims would be to that, but, you know, we took great pleasure, you know when McLeish left to go to Villa, we took great pleasure in it. You know, we were’nt bothered that our manager resigned, we tended to be, you know, most people they seemed to like the bloke, he seemed fairly decent, obviously as soon as he jumped ship that thing of ‘hes a decent bloke’ disappears, suddenly you’re left with well what’s his record, well he’s got us relegated twice, so Villa are welcome to him [“ok” – Adam]. the villa fans then go on their protests against him, and stick their bed-sheet against him, up on Villa park and graffiti their own training ground, and obviously we look at that and say ‘what shit fans’ are they, you know, what sort of fans would graffiti their own club?

Adam: Ok, so that builds into the idea that the fans are a better group of fans...

Alan: Yeah, I suppose, but looking at it dispassionately, when we went down last time, not this time but when we went down last time we had fans on the pitch, breaking down our goalposts. So both fans are capable of doing the same thing, but obviously you look at the events and use them to reinforce your own stereotypes of the opposite fans.

Adam: I mean, can you remember anything like this situation, in terms of the manager swapping to the team...

Alan: No, I mean its unprecedented, the whole of what’s happened to Villa and Blues has been pretty unprecedented – I mean, the one thing McLeish did, McLeish bought in a lot of players from Villa, when he first started bringing in those players there was a fair amount of resistance – there wasn’t protests there wasn’t anything else, but there was a lot of grumbles about you know why are we signing this Villa player for, and why we signing him, and you know we just sort of make it a big grumble, we kept it to ourselves, we didn’t actually particularly voice it. But... I think with Blues fans, the last sort of five years we have been sort of ground down as fans by the last set of owners, clearly lacking any interest and lacking any vision, you know, they made poor support of Bruce and McLeish, so a lot of the fans, a lot of our passion was almost sort of beaten out of us, and with things like Rover going under and things like that, a lot of the older more working class fans could no longer come, so you’ve lost a score of your support,... where I think I heard we lost a third of our season

ticket holders overnight when Rover shut down, [“oh really” – Adam] I don’t know how true those figures are, but that is what ive heard. And so, you know, the club has lacked and the fans have lacked a bit of heart over the last five years, to mount any serious protests or any sort of resistance – I mean we’ll sit there and we’ll grumble and whatever, but we’ll ... I suppose the last year or so we’ve got a little bit of that back, you know, the new owners, although it seems to be going a bit wrong at the moment. They started to treat the fans better, and we you know, started to have a bit of success. That cheered people up – followed by our obvious, typical Blues throwing it away by getting relegated. ... but .... I forgot where I was going, hahaha...

Adam: Just to pick up on one point then, in the kind of broader, you know the English football fan being priced out the game and so on, where would you position, I mean is there a feeling at Birmingham that that’s something that’s happened?

Alan: Its happened in the past, I think there’s less so now. If you look at it dispassionately, our prices are quite good. It’s still expensive, but you know, I think my season ticket is about 16 pounds a game or something like that, which is pretty reasonable. You’re not really gonna get cheaper than that. But, the people who would pay that... that has come down over the last few years, you know, it was a lot more expensive, I think it’s come down again. I think the people who were priced out and who have gone on to other things may still think they have been priced out, even though the price they were paying now is still less than before, when they might of sort of re-evaluate it, you know, their conditions might have changed, or their perception of the value has changed, whereas before they would have been happy to pay 20 pounds to go to a game, they now wouldn’t pay 16 pounds a game.

Adam: Is that perhaps due to the initial being in the premier league and playing the top clubs from 2002 onwards and then they got used to that and ...

Alan: Well, when we first went up the prices were good, I can’t remember exactly.. but before we got promoted the season ticket was just under 400 pounds we got promoted and I think it went up to about 500 or 550 pounds, so instantly a whole bunch of people were suddenly priced out. You know you’ve got your season ticket, it comes to May and suddenly you’ve got to have an extra 200 quid to pay for it – well not too many people can find an extra 200 pound, pay cash in a month or a month and a half, especially if you’ve got a family going and you’ve got to find 500 quid, that’s your summer holiday gone. So a lot of people found themselves priced out at that point. And I think that carried on I think then.... Prices have started falling again, back to a reasonable level, and as well as prices falling, they are, we now have an interest free debit scheme, where you can pay for a season ticket over eight

months, so I pay I think about 50 pounds a month for eight months for my season ticket, which most people could afford if they wanted to ... I think very few people couldn't not be able to afford that. But whether they are aware it's available, or whether they just see the headline price and see well that 400 pound, well that is a holiday, well you know, if you go to your wife and say you can't afford a holiday love, but here, I'm buying my season ticket next year. Can you justify that, when you still say well we'll still go to the occasional game and we'll pay 25 pounds a ticket, or we'll wait for the cheap games to come along and we'll go to them. There is a certain amount of pricing out, how real it is for us at the moment... for us, for me it's the cheapest it's been for 15 years probably, yeah, I'm sure I was paying 18, 19 pounds a ticket back in the 1990s, and I'm now paying... I'm still paying a season ticket but it's still 16 pounds a game.

Adam: Ok, that's interesting. Ok, just before we briefly touch on the online fan forums, are there any kind of social, cultural factors that might underpin the rivalry, anything like gender, or race or religion or anything else?

Alan: Erm... not religion, I don't think there's any really sectarian issues in terms of religion. Gender, well no not really, it's a man's sport, women seem to be tolerated you know, but there's not, it's hardly a female friendly environment. I suppose race, it could be I suppose going back to the 80s and the sort of hooligans, you know, the Zulus always seemed to be sort of a mixed race firm, whereas... the Villa fans had, the Villa hooligans had links to combat 18 and the sort of fascist tendencies - so I suppose there is a perception of Blues being a bit more black friendly I would say whether Asian, whether that includes Asians I'm not entirely sure, but again nowadays, is there any difference? Probably not. There's black Blues fans, there's black Villa fans, there's Asian Villa fans, there's Asian Blues fans. I don't really see that there's much of a difference any more.

Adam: Ok, fair enough. Anything else, any other factors?

Alan: I don't think so, I don't, not that I can think...

Adam: That's good, that means I must be roughly in the right areas... So, in terms of the online aspect, firstly, broadly speaking, it might be a difficult question to answer, but how important do you think the online forums are for the fans nowadays?

Alan: It depends on the type of fan. I mean, I'm heavily involved in it, so I might be prone to over estimating it, but if you're living away from Birmingham it's a lot of people's links back. It's their only link to the club, it's their only link with the city. There's people on my forum living in Dubai, America, Australia, Russia, you know, so, for fans, you know London, wales, Ireland, so people who live away from Birmingham I would say it can be incredibly important, people who live in the city, less so because they have other sources of information, they have got other people they can talk to about things, they'll go down the pub and talk about football or they will read the evening mail or they will whatever. So a lot of people within the city they don't need it, some people still do. I mean in terms of I would say that people who spend a lot of time online on these forums tend to be better informed about what's going on, they will know, you know rumours come out a lot earlier on line than they do in the press. So they get, there is also a perceived, there's people who go on line, because there are different forums they will tend to align themselves with ones that match their own beliefs, so there are sort of perceived facts, that may or may not be true, so whether.. you know, are we spending enough, are we not spending enough, did Carson Yeung promise he would spend 80 million pounds when he turned up or not, you know, if you read what he said he didn't, but there's still a general view. If you talk to someone in the pub, they'll say he hasn't spent the 80 million pounds he promised, and you say well he never actually said that, read the quotes, well where are they gonna read the quotes? Unless they go online. You know, it's not in the newspapers, and newspapers will distort things anyway to sell stories. So unless you go online you won't actually be able to do that, to get that knowledge for yourself, so I think people who are better generally informed are likely – obviously you can always find information to support your own beliefs.

Adam: Ok, again this might be a difficult question, pardon my ignorance, but in your perception is there a reason why fans go on there more than others, is it perhaps to vent frustration or is it just to socialise or is it just for information?

Alan: Its all of them to be honest, and it depends on the person. I mean some people go on there to socialise, some people go on there because work is crap and they want something to do, some people go to wind people up, some people go to vent some people go to ask questions you know, to find out some gossip that you might not be able to get elsewhere, argue with Villa fans argue with Blues fans, you know, it's a complete mix, you know. I mean my website has got probably about 500 regular users a month and it gets 3 million page views a month, ["really?" – Adam]. So that's 500 people contributing and there's probably 10,000 people reading it – so only about 5 per cent of people or about 10 per cent of people are actually contributing, most are just reading just getting information.

Adam: So do you think there is a general trend that it is increasing and there is gonna be more fans using forums?

Alan: Yeah, I think the forums have only got busier over the years, more and more people use the internet. Everyone's got internet on their phones now, so people will always use that, you know, my numbers are steadily increasing and they are ... they tend to jump as well. So you'll tend to get a group of people who are fairly static in numbers, and then something big will happen, say McLeish going to Villa and in a fast moving situation like that, the Evening Mail [newspaper] can't keep up, they only have one edition a day. TV news aren't interested, so the only platform you find information at anywhere near the real time is online. And so, when you get events like that happening, you get surges of people coming online to find out information. And some of those start taking part and hang around later, so that builds you up further more and people start to appreciate what its therefore and you start to use it more. Like before they'll use it to go back to the pubs and whatever. And then something else will happen in six months' time or twelve months' time and you'll get a whole bunch more, and it just grows and grows like that. You know, my site started with ten people on it ten years ago, and now it's so many more.

Adam: Got all those views. Again, pardon my ignorance, but how much does your club or other clubs get involved with forums, does it try to keep a distance or do they try to interact?

Alan: I don't know about other clubs, but I know for example that my forum, loads of people inside the club read it, for various reasons. You know sometimes they'll want to crack down on any false gossip or what's going around, so they'll be able to correct you know, they are always monitoring their customers' perception, feeding back, fixing things. But they also read it to find out what's happening at the club, you know, if you're working in the ticket office you don't necessarily know what's going on upstairs. And so, things like that. Over... since the last board left, the club have been very friendly towards the different fans websites, and they've tried to bring us on board, you know, we've had... we're now classified as an official supporters club, and we go to meetings and we take on ideas and take on our suggestions and will act on them. The club are, to their benefit are they using it for what it's good for, and it's a very hands off approach, they don't want to make it, they don't want to have any official contact because they know if you want to hear what your customers do you can't really moderate them too much. And by having an independent website, people can pretty much say what they want. Within the realms of decency and within libel laws. So it's very useful to the club. Just to know what fans are thinking.

Adam: Do you think then that fans perceive it to be almost kind of give them as a fan group a little bit of power a little bit of say within the club?

Alan: A little bit, yeah, and you get certain individuals that take part get over inflated sense of importance. They see themselves as the big man on the block, trying to exert power, trying to exert their opinion over everyone else. Which is no different to the loud mouth in the pub. But obviously, when 10,000 people read it, they think... they get these sense of ego. But, at the same time, they can have an influence, you know, some people on my website objected to when Lee Bowyer was first sounded out about signing for us, but, and when he eventually didn't sign for us, he went to West Ham eventually, and they saw that as reinforcing their sense of importance. Whether it was anything to do with those protests, who knows. But that sort of issue is hugely divisive, because some fans will be well we don't mind, he's a good player and all that, whereas some fans will be he's terrible and all this and we don't want him at our club.

Adam: So it's actually almost, not just a perceived sense of power, they actually might be able to make a difference?

Alan: They have an influence, whether that influence is fair and whether that influence is correct, but it does, there is definitely there are load-mouths who will get themselves known, get themselves interviewed on TV get themselves interviewed on radio, based on the fact they are online and on websites.

A: They are seen as a super fan or ...

Alan: Yeah, they *see* themselves as a super fan, and other will resent that and say who are you to talk for me you internet geek.

Adam: The recent example again, whether it's actually true, but when Aston Villa were looking at Steve McClaren there was a big swell of almost internet hate for him, so that influenced the decision of the board apparently – we don't know whether that's true, but apparently that sort of means that the fans get that sense of 'well we've made a difference'.

Alan: Well you do, but that's a great case in point, because is that influence real, because they campaigned against McLaren, oh we don't want McClaren, and all that, and what do they do, they don't go for McClaren, they go for McLeish. And all these protests which have been completely ignored, so did they actually ignore the initial one or was it just a coincidence? So I think you've got to be careful in measuring what real influence is. However, they do have some influence, because my website now counts as an official supporters club, so I've been



invited to meetings with the club, so I've taken suggestions from my members of things that could be done, and they've been acted on. So obviously there is some influence there, you know, they've taken on board ideas about marketing ideas and ticketing ideas, you know, can you get the toilets fixed at the back of the Kop. And they've been taken on board and they've been acted on. So there is definitely some influence, so if you're just sitting in your pub in Northfield or wherever moaning, there is less influence than someone who has passed the suggestion to me that has then been passed to the club which has then been acted on.

Adam: Right, well that's basically all my areas I would like to focus on, is there anything else you feel you want to add or feel you want to clarify?

Alan: No, I don't think so. No.

Adam: Ok, very good, we'll leave it there then, thank you.