Journal of Global History (2013), **8**, pp. 342–364 © London School of Economics and Political Science 2013
doi:10.1017/S1740022813000259

Playing to the 'imaginary grandstand': sport, the 'British world', and an Australian colonial identity

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Abstract

This article argues for the importance of an exploration of sporting interactions in the British world. In addition, it presents the case for the adaptation of borderlands theory to the British world framework. Such study of British world borderlands is capable of more accurately capturing the spatial and regional variety of this British world and, in particular, the nascent national identities of dominions such as Australia. Sport is a particularly apt vehicle for the examination of such issues in an Australian context, since playing to the 'imaginary grandstand' of international spectators has always occupied a central role in the construction of an Australian national identity. This article uses three brief case studies – cricket, swimming, and Australian Rules football – to explore these theoretical claims.

Keywords Australian Rules football, borderlands, British world, cricket, swimming

The relatively recent 'British world' approach to British imperial history has seen a number of topics receive the British world treatment: social welfare, women's movements, consumerism, criminal justice, reading habits, academia.[1] But not, as yet, sport. This is somewhat surprising given the substantial existing body of research that has traditionally been devoted to examining the imperial function of sports and games in the British empire.[2]

1 Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and globalisation: networks of people, goods and capital in the British world, c. 1850–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 24–5.

2 This body of research is too extensive to list here but some notable examples include John Bale and Mike Cronin, *Sport and postcolonialism*, Oxford: Berg, 2003; Malcolm MacLean, 'Ambiguity within the boundary: re-reading C.L.R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*', *Journal of Sport History*, 37, 1, 2010, pp. 99–117; J. A. Mangan, ed., *The cultural bond: sport, empire, society*, London: Frank Cass, 1992; J. A. Mangan, *The games ethic and imperialism: aspects of the diffusion of an ideal*, London: Frank Cass, 1998; Patrick F. McDevitt, *May the best man win: sport, masculinity, and nationalism in Great Britain and the empire, 1880–1935*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Katharine Moore, '"The warmth of comradeship": the first British empire games and imperial solidarity', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6, 2, 1989, pp. 242–51; John Nauright, 'Sport and the image of colonial manhood in the British mind: British physical deterioration debates and colonial sporting tours, 1878–1906', *Canadian*

This article will demonstrate how an examination of sporting interactions in the British world can contribute to a greater understanding of the construction and transmission of settler colonial cultures and identities. It will do so by adapting borderlands theory to the British world, thereby offering a critique of the British world framework *per se*. Furthermore, it will show how such an adaptation of borderlands theory to the British world can contribute to the ongoing historiographical debate about the nature and function of an early Australian national identity. Finally, three exemplary sporting case studies are discussed: cricket, swimming, and Australian Rules football.

The British world

The 'British world' approach to British imperial history was conceived and developed over the course of a series of conferences held between 1998 and 2007 and through the edited collections that proceeded from these.[3] This approach took its cue from J. G. A. Pocock's 1973 call for a 'new British history' that would bring into closer propinquity the hitherto largely separate histories of the British dominions and the wider British empire. Thus the chief remit of this form of history was to 'bring the old Dominions back into the mainstream of imperial history and to examine their connections to the United Kingdom and with each other'.[4] By encompassing Britain and the dominions within the same frame of reference, the British world approach aimed to transcend the parochial nationalist histories that had tended to dominate the historiographies of settler colonies such as Australia. The British world framework was (and is) concerned with exploring the networks and flows of people, goods, and ideas that connected these various settler colonial spaces and places, as it was contended that such a networked or webbed approach more accurately described and explained this British world.[5]

The adoption of such an explicitly transnational perspective fulfils two functions. First, it sets the terms of reference beyond the parameters of the nation-state. A settler colony such as Australia is not therefore viewed in terms of a nation-state-in-waiting (as has frequently been the case in Australian historiography) but rather as one of many 'nodes' dotted around the British world web. In this conceptualization, the significance of the node is found not so much within its singularity but more through its relation to other nodes in the web. These nodes could operate as regional centres to their immediate hinterland or periphery while simultaneously occupying a peripheral status to other centres, the most obvious and

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Journal of History of Sport, 23, 2, 1992, pp. 54–72; Brian Stoddart and Keith A. P. Sandiford, eds., *The imperial game: cricket, culture and society*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

3 Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British world: diaspora, culture and identity*, London: Frank Cass, 2003; Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British world*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005; Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *Britishness abroad: transnational movements and imperial cultures*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007.

4 Buckner and Francis, 'Introduction', in *Rediscovering the British world*, p. 18.

5 Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and race: Aryanism in the British empire*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; A. G. Hopkins, 'Back to the future: from national history to imperial history', *Past and Present*, 164, 1999, pp. 198–243; Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond sovereignty: Britain, empire and transnationalism, c.1880–1950*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 1–15; Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*.

dominant centre being Britain or, even more specifically, London.[6] It is perhaps not surprising then that such a decentred, 'multi-nodal' approach has led to an emphasis on networks as a mode of analysis. As Alan Lester has stated, a networked conception of empire allows for colonial relations to be 'stretched in contingent and non-deterministic ways, across space'. In other words, a network-based approach seeks to privilege *neither* metropolitan *nor* colonial spaces but, rather, to reconfigure both spaces through the act of connecting them.[7] Thus the study of the networks or webs that connected these various imperial spaces seems a more appropriate means for analysing the multi-local and circulative nature of the British world.[8]

The British world framework contends that Britishness, at least for the settler colonies, was central to these complicated transactions. Indeed, it has been argued that 'in the settler-colonial world [it was] Britishness [that] lubricated the process of migration, mutual connections, and loyalties'.[9] However, as British people moved around these transnational networks, webs, or systems, Britishness itself shifted and moved. In other words, 'the transnational dimensions of Britishness required something like perpetual motion, in which the movements across time and space orchestrated a reordering of the given properties of Britishness itself'.[10] This inevitably raises the issue of identity. As Simon Potter has argued, the different spatial interactions that made up the British world witnessed 'local, national and imperial identities coexist[ing] and compet[ing], in patterns that changed over time according to complex rhythms'.[11] In this transnational milieu it was commonplace for people to feel no incongruity about inhabiting two (or more) identities that often merged or overlapped. We can see this plurality of identity in the articulations of a number of Australian British world contemporaries. For example, the statesman Henry Parkes suggested in 1884 that the Australian colonies should be renamed the 'British States of Australia', for 'In this designation the British feeling and the Australian feeling would habitually and perpetually blend … [and] the sentiments of British pride and Australian patriotism would commingle in

6 Alan Lester, 'Imperial circuits and networks: geographies of the British empire', *History Compass*, 4, 1, 2006, p. 133.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 131. See also Tony Ballantyne, 'Rereading the archive and opening up the nation-state: colonial knowledge in South Asia (and beyond)', in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the imperial turn: thinking with and through the nation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 102–24.

8 Buckner and Francis, *Rediscovering the British world*, p. 16; Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*, pp. 15–21 and *passim*. For examples of studies of specific networks, see John Griffiths, 'Were there municipal networks in the British world, c.1890–1939?', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 4, 2009, pp. 575–97; Alan Lester, *Imperial networks: creating identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain*, London: Routledge, 2001; Tamson Pietsch, 'Wandering scholars? Academic mobility and the British world, 1850–1940', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 36, 2010, pp. 377–87; Eliza Reid, 'Women, gender, and the promotion of empire: the Victoria League, 1901–1914', *Historical Journal*, 45, 2002, pp. 569–99. For a useful discussion of the analytical applicability of 'networks' and 'systems' in relation to the British empire, see Simon J. Potter, 'Webs, networks and systems: globalization and the mass media in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century British empire', *Journal of British Studies*, 46, 3, 2007, pp. 621–46.

9 Round table discussion of Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*, in *British Scholar*, 3, 1, 2010, p. 142.

10 Bill Schwarz, '"Shivering in the noonday sun": the British world and the dynamics of "nativisation"', in Darian-Smith, Grimshaw, and Macintyre, *Britishness abroad*, p. 21. See also the other contributions in this collection.

11 Potter, 'Webs, networks, and systems', p. 646. See also Bridge and Fedorowich, *British world*, p. 6.

one glow of loyalty.'[12] Similarly, the Australian historian Keith Hancock asserted in 1930 that it was 'not impossible for Australians, nourished by a glorious literature and haunted by old memories, to be in love with two soils'. Hancock underscored this duality of identity by dubbing his compatriots as 'independent Australian Britons'.[13]

Thus a British world framework seeks to undercut the importance of national boundaries and national(ist) histories and widen the perspective to focus on the broader transnational relationships between Britain and, chiefly, its settler colonies. In doing so, it also seeks to move beyond a metropole/colony binary structure of the British empire, rather viewing the British world as a matrix of intersecting and overlapping networks, webs, or systems. The acceleration in the movement of people, goods, capital, institutions, and ideas around these often very expansive networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries effected a kind of Victorian globalization. Key to much British world work is the role played by Britishness in lubricating and ameliorating the interactions between the distinct and distant regions of the British world. But maybe it is best left to a contemporary to explicate the essence of the British world. Writing in 1890, the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, propounded that:

> the world has grown much smaller since the electric telegraph was discovered and side by side with the shrinkage of this planet under the influence of steam and electricity there has come a sense of brotherhood and a consciousness of community of interest … In Australia the emigrant finds himself among men and women of the same habits, the same language, and in fact the same people … The constant travelling of the colonists backwards and forwards to England makes it absurd to speak of the colonies as if they were a foreign land. They are simply pieces of Britain distributed about the world.[14]

The debate over Australian nationalism

The nature and significance of Australian nationalism in settler colonial society has been the topic of an enduring historiographical debate. It has had its 'radical nationalist' exponents who looked at Australia's colonial past in search of signs of latent or nascent expressions of nationalist feeling or sentiment but whose ensuing narrative was often one of a perennially thwarted nationalism.[15] These scholars were able to identify a number of early champions of Australian nationalism in politics or the arts, but all too often such proto-nationalist voices were found to be trumped or drowned out by various manifestations of Britishness: the perceived need for British military protection; a conservative and frustratingly prevalent

12 Henry Parkes, 'Our growing Australian empire', *Nineteenth Century*, 15, 83, 1884, p. 147.

13 W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, London: Ernest Benn, 1930, pp. 47, 58.

14 General William Booth, *In darkest England and the way out*, 1890, p. 127.

15 For examples, see Stephen Alomes, *A nation at last? The changing character of Australian nationalism, 1880–1988*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988; Manning Clark, *A history of Australia*, 6 vols., Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962–1987, vols. 4, 5, 6; David Day, *The great betrayal*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988; David Day, *The reluctant nation: Australia and the allied defeat of Japan, 1942–1945*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992; Russel Ward, *A nation for a continent: the history of Australia, 1901–1975*, Melbourne: Heinemann, 1977.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000259 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'Anglo-Australianness'; and, associated with the latter, a nagging inferiority complex or 'cultural cringe'. Hence, in these radical nationalist histories, Britishness and Australianness were framed as mutually exclusive, or even conflicting, with the British identity often trumping any distinctively endemic Australian identity.

Historians since the 1970s have been increasingly amenable to this central importance of Britishness in Australian society and culture in the period up to at least the Second World War.[16] Rather than thwarted, Australian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constituted a kind of localized Britishness. During this time, Australians were often observed as possessing two identities, Australian *and* British. These identities interacted at different times and in different ways in response to shifting national and international imperatives but, rather than being antagonistic, they were ambivalent or intermingling, or even mutually reinforcing.[17] We can see this sort of thing clearly illustrated in the quote from Henry Parkes above. Although there is still some debate about when we should start to date the emergence of a distinctive, endemic, non-British Australian nationalism – the Second World War, the 'new nationalism' of the 1960s and 1970s, or as late as 1986[18] – there seems little disagreement about the inherent Britishness of Australian society and culture in the era of Federation.

It is no surprise, then, to find that some historians see in the British world framework a more fruitful way of rendering Australia's national story.[19] In particular, in its aim to transcend parochial nationalist histories, the British world framework appears to offer a more accurate description of Australian society and culture for the British world period (1850s–1940s) at least. The significance placed on Britishness as the lubricant of the British world resonates with the manifestations of Britishness in Australian society that the radical nationalist historians found so frustratingly persistent and prevalent. Indeed, for that early sojourner of the British world Charles Dilke, Australia represented the prime example of what he termed 'Greater Britain'.[20] Magee and Thompson have shown that 'living in,

16 For examples, see Douglas Cole, '"The crimson thread of kinship": ethnic ideas in Australia, 1870–1910', *Historical Studies*, 14, 56, 1971, pp. 511–25; Douglas Cole, 'The problem of "nationalism" and "imperialism" in British settlement colonies', *Journal of British Studies*, 10, 2, 1971, pp. 160–82; Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian identity: the problem of nationalism in Australian history and historiography', *Australian Historical Studies*, 32, 116, 2001, pp. 76–90; Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British embrace*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001; Kosmas Tsokhas, *Making a nation state: cultural identity, economic nationalism and sexuality in Australian history*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001.

17 For an instructive study that examines the role of Britishness in the evolution of a dominion society (South Africa in this instance), see Saul Dubow, 'How British was the British world? The case of South Africa', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 1, 2009, pp. 1–27.

18 W. J. Hudson and M. P. Sharp, *Australian independence: colony to reluctant kingdom*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988; Deborah Gare, 'Dating Australia's independence: national sovereignty and the 1986 Australia Acts', *Australian Historical Studies*, 30, 1999, pp. 251–66; James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The unknown nation: Australia after empire*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010. See also the March 2013 issue of the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* for a number of articles discussing 'post-imperial' Australia.

19 See Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australia: some reflections', in Bridge and Fedorowich, *British world*, pp. 120–34; Stuart Ward, 'The "new nationalism" in Australia, Canada and New Zealand: civic culture in the wake of the British world', in Darian-Smith, Grimshaw, and Macintyre, *Britishness abroad*, pp. 231–63.

20 Charles Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan, 1890, vol. 1, p. 414; Dubow, 'How British?', p. 5.

thinking about and identifying with more than one country at once became a defining way of life for many inhabitants of this British world'.[21] This appears to be an apt description of the Anglo-Australianness evident in the words of contemporaries such as Parkes and Hancock quoted above.

Despite some promising recent offerings, however, the full analytical potential of the British world framework vis-à-vis Australia (and, by extension, other settler colonies) still remains to be realized. To begin with, Australia's role and position within the transnational contours of the British world – and the ramifications of this transnationalism for the development of an Australian national identity – have not been fully assayed. Although a number of studies have elucidated the importance of Britishness in Australian society and culture – and by doing so have implicitly gestured towards the transnational condition of Britishness – none have explicitly surveyed the impact that the transnational oscillations of British people, goods, and ideas had upon the formation and evolution of an Australian identity and culture. Thus a fuller examination of the transmission of 'cultural traffic' between the metropole (Britain) and the hinterland (Australia) has the potential to ascertain more accurately the functioning of Australia as a 'nation-in-empire'.[22]

The borderlands of the British world

One approach that might be useful for analysing the significance of settler colonies such as Australia as nations-in-empire is the adaptation of borderlands theory to the British world framework. Borderlands theory has traditionally been most commonly associated with the regions surrounding the US-Mexican border. It originated as a critique of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of the American frontier as the crucible for the creation of modern America and Americans. In Turner's view, settlers who journeyed to the American frontier were transformed and, essentially, 'Americanized' by the experience. Thus it was the frontier that created the distinctive American character and way of life. For Turner, the significance of the frontier ended with national consolidation and the establishment of the nation-state; the United States now extended from coast to coast, literally and figuratively.[23]

Forty years later, Herbert Eugene Bolton critiqued this national(ist) narrative by replacing the frontier with the borderlands.[24] Bolton's borderlands were coterminous with Turner's frontier but presented a variant picture. If, for Turner, frontiers were the places that produced the American grand narrative, under Bolton's gaze they became the borderlands where those narratives unravelled. So, while both Turner and Bolton emphasized the

21 Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*, 24.

22 I have borrowed the phrase 'nation-in-empire' from Darian-Smith, Grimshaw, and Macintyre, *Britishness abroad*, p. 10. For more on 'cultural traffic', see Bernard Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850: a study in the history of art and ideas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960; Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific: in the wake of the Cook voyages*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992.

23 Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The significance of the frontier in American history', *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893*, Washington, 1894, pp. 197–227; See also Ramon A. Gutiérrez and Elliot Young, 'Transnationalizing borderlands history', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 41, 2010, p. 29.

24 Herbert Eugene Bolton, 'Defensive Spanish expansion and the significance of the borderlands', in *Wider horizons of American history*, New York: Appleton-Century, 1939, pp. 55–106.

dynamism and agency of the periphery, they did so for different reasons. Put simply, the Turnerian periphery (frontier) was the crucible of the national story of American exceptionalism, while the Boltonian periphery (borderlands) was where this national story was challenged and became entangled. In further contrast to Turner's frontier, the borderlands did not disappear with the consummation of the nation-state but persisted as the regions between the newly formed United States and its Hispanic neighbours to the south. These borderlands existed between and encompassed if not rival then at least divergent cultures and peoples; most obviously Anglo-American and Hispanic but also, frequently, indigenous cultures. In this way, rather than telling distinct national(ist) stories, these borderlands described liminal places of hybridization and transculturation that existed at the margins of the nation-state. Since Bolton's writing, borderlands theory has spread out from these American roots to be applied to myriad places and historical periods.[25] Thus borderlands are now often represented in a more generalized and open-ended way, as 'ambiguous and often unstable realms where boundaries are also crossroads, peripheries are also central places, homelands are also passing-through places, *and the end points of empire are also forks in the road*'.[26]

By focusing on the periphery of empires and nation-states in this way, a defining imperative of borderlands theory is the testing and resisting of the centripetal force of metropolitanism. Borderlands studies critique the linear flow of power (political, economic, cultural) from the centre to the hinterland and, instead, demonstrate the agency and autonomy of hinterland regions and peoples. Viewed through a borderlands lens, hinterlands or peripheries are not passive emulators of the metropole but dynamic and distinctive centres in their own right. These regions develop a society and culture that is at once akin to but also significantly different from the related yet removed metropolitan version. So while there are often cohering ties of commonality between the centre and the hinterland – be they cultural, political, or economic – there are also important skeins of difference that are often a consequence of the hinterland locale or mise-en-scène. Seen from this perspective, the interactions and connections between hinterland and centre that take place are much more complex and dialogic than a simple metropolitan-based centripetal model suggests. As Howell and Leeworthy have argued, by 'rejecting uni-directional analyses of power, social conflict and identity-construction, borderlands scholars are … more sensitive to the dialectical and ambiguous relationship between metropolitan centres and hinterland regions'.[27] Moreover, these dialectical interactions – this rubbing up against each other of metropolitan and hinterland versions of a common culture – often brings into relief the subtle (or not so subtle) variants present in the hinterland version. Thus, while acknowledging similarities and areas of congruence between centre and hinterland, borderlands theory is also sensitive to and cognisant of dissimilarities and disjunctures.

25 For example, Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial boundaries: Cossack communities and empire-building in the age of Peter the Great*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal borderland: beyond state and nation in South Asia*, London: Anthem Press, 2004; I. William Zartman, ed., *Understanding life in the borderlands: boundaries in depth and motion*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

26 Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, 'On borderlands', *Journal of American History*, 98, 2, 2011, p. 338 (emphasis added).

27 Colin Howell and Daryl Leeworthy, 'Borderlands', in S. W. Pope and John Nauright, eds., *Routledge companion to sports history*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 72.

So what relevance does all this talk of frontiers and borderlands have for the British world and, by extension, Australia? As noted above, Hämäläinen and Truett have indicated that one of the ways in which borderlands can be represented is as areas where 'the end points of empire are also forks in the road'. It is in this quite specific sense that the adaptation of a borderlands analysis to the British world possesses the analytical purchase for capturing aspects of the British world missing from many studies. Such an application would render the colonies as the hinterland/borderlands of the British world, with Britain as the centre/metropole. The superimposing of a borderlands template like this would offer the opportunity to explore in a much more explicit way the regional and spatial diversity of the British world, for, as one British world contemporary astutely observed in 1903, 'it makes quite a difference to stand at the circumference and to stand at the centre when you are considering a question of Empire'.[28]

This emphasis on the agency of the periphery has obvious affinities with postcolonial theory, but I would suggest that borderlands theory is a better fit for the British world for two reasons. First, postcolonial theory, heavily influenced as it is by Said's *Orientalism*, is most often concerned with those areas of the British empire in which there was a clear clash or contestation between Britishness and various 'other' cultures or societies. The British world, at least in regards to its settler colonial iterations, seeks to explicate a cultural landscape in which there is a common metropolitan culture – Britishness – with local or regional derivatives. Settler colonies such as Australia saw themselves as avowedly and self-consciously British; indeed, in some instances, as more British than the British.[29] At the same time, there were certain inescapable differences about being and living as British at the 'end points of empire'. And this is why borderlands theory, concerned as it is with the nature and characteristics of a hinterland version of a broadly shared metropolitan society or culture, can impart significant analytical heft apropos settler colonies of the British world such as Australia. It allows for an examination of the formation and evolution of a hinterland culture as it interacted with, or rubbed up against, the metropolitan culture.

Anglo-Australian sporting relations in the British world

Sport appears a particularly apt vehicle for the exploration of these issues. As Graeme Davison has shown through the deployment of the metaphor of the 'imaginary grandstand', the nexus between sport and national identity has been a particularly close one for Australia.[30] Davison contends that 'When Australians seek to describe their national identity they are often playing to the imaginary grandstand [of international spectators]'.[31] Richard Cashman has also argued that 'sport is central to the business of being Australian, that most (though not all) Australians are passionate about sport and that sport dominates the cultural

28 Quoted in Tamson Pietsch, 'Rethinking the British world', *Journal of British Studies*, forthcoming 2013, p. 21 (I am grateful to Tamson for furnishing me with a draft of this article).

29 James Belich, *Replenishing the earth: the settler revolution and the rise of the Anglo-world, 1783–1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 466–7; Neville Meaney, '"In history's page": identity and myth', in Deryck M. Schreuder, ed., *Australia's empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 369–73.

30 Graeme Davison, 'The imaginary grandstand', *Meanjin*, 61, 3, 2002, pp. 4–18.

31 *Ibid*., pp. 5–6.

and physical landscape. Sport, as much as any institution, seems to define the Australian nation'.[32] Even in 1882 the journalist Richard Twopenny was claiming that Australia was the most sports-obsessed nation in the world.[33] Most importantly for our purposes, Davison also contends that sport was the means through which colonial Australia first rehearsed its identity. In other words, sport and sporting relations with Britain were fundamental to the formation, or 'rehearsal', of a colonial national identity.

That said, the precise nature of this colonial sporting culture – and hence national identity – has been a more contested topic. It is interesting to note that, to a large extent, Australian sports historiography has mirrored the historiographical shifts outlined above in the debate over Australian nationalism more broadly. The radical nationalist perspective was most conspicuously represented in the 1973 W. F. Mandle essay 'Cricket and Australian nationalism in the nineteenth century'. This seminal piece argued that the triumph of Australian cricket sides over the 'mother country' in the late nineteenth century coincided with and, indeed, helped to foster a newly emergent and strident nationalism. Mandle maintained that the success of nationally 'federated' Australian cricket sides against the English in the late 1870s inspired a 'cricketing nationalism' that, in turn, paved the way for the political nationalism of Federation.[34] Contemporary support for such a view can be found in nationalistic publications such as *The Bulletin*, which trumpeted in 1898 that the victory of Harry Trott's Australian cricket team over England 'did more to enhance the cause of Australian nationality than could be achieved by miles of erudite essays and impassioned appeal'.[35]

However, almost from the moment it was published the Mandle thesis had its critics, particularly for what some saw as overstated connections to an early Australian nationalism. K. S. Inglis claimed that Australia's wholehearted adoption of and competence at this most English of sports was actually 'a sign of how spontaneously and profoundly Australians embraced the culture of the motherland'.[36] Since the 1970s, and again as with the historical debate surrounding Australian nationalism more broadly, there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of Britishness in Australian sport and sporting culture. As Wray Vamplew has put it, 'Sport was part of the cultural baggage brought out to Australia … [and hence] Britain's sporting heritage was transferred to the new Antipodean colonies.' Moreover, Vamplew goes on to claim that the 'the continued flow of migrants to Australia from Britain throughout the nineteenth century' – that key process by which, as we have seen, the British world was formed and sustained – 'reinforced [this] early cultural continuity in terms of

32 Richard Cashman, *Sport in the national imagination: Australian sport in the federation decades*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2002, p. 4. See also Richard Cashman, 'The Australian sporting obsession', *Sporting Traditions*, 4, 1, 1987, pp. 47–55; Keith Dunstan, *Sports*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1973; Brian Stoddart, *Saturday afternoon fever*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1986.

33 Dunstan, *Sports*, p. 12; Anthony Trollope, *Australia*, ed. P. D. Edwards and R. B. Joyce, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1967, p. 233.

34 W. F. Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian nationalism in the nineteenth century', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59, 4, 1973, pp. 225–46.

35 Quoted in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara, and Andrew Honey, eds., 'Introduction', in *Sport, federation, nation*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2001, p. 9.

36 K. S. Inglis, 'Imperial cricket: Test matches between Australia and England, 1877–1900', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan, eds., *Sport in history: the making of modern sporting history*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 148–79.

sporting activities'.[37] The sports that were played in nineteenth-century Australia were thus a 'British inheritance' and, admittedly, it is difficult *not* to see the Britishness of sports such as cricket and rugby.

Some have developed this point further to say that sport and the 'games ethic' generally actually played a key role in the imperializing mission itself. British sports not only offered comfort for homesick British imperialists and migrants; they also exemplified and communicated what it meant to be British. To this end, it has been argued that British sports and sporting culture functioned as essential vehicles for the dissemination and inculcation of British values, customs, and ideologies throughout the various colonies, among both colonizer and colonized. According to J. A. Mangan, cricket was 'the symbol *par excellence* of imperial solidarity and superiority epitomising a set of consolidatory moral imperatives that both exemplified and explained imperial ambition'.[38] And we can find evidence of contemporaries making similar claims for British sports as vehicles for imperial didacticism and unanimity. For example, Lord Harris, the aristocratic patron and captain of the English team that toured Australia in 1878–79, averred that 'cricket had done more to draw the Mother Country and the Colonies together than years of beneficial legislation'. In the case of Australia, this could often be articulated in racial terms whereby the success of Australian sportsmen (and it was most often men) proved that 'the old stock is not degenerating in those far off lands'.[39]

So what is to be done with such seemingly contrasting views of the role of sport in the formation of a colonial national identity? I would suggest that we do not necessarily have a simplistic choice between Mandle's radical nationalist position on the one hand and Mangan's 'imperial solidarity' argument on the other. Indeed, while sporting relations could certainly serve an imperial purpose, they could also be a source of tension within the empire, a situation amply attested by cricket's 'imperial crisis' – the 'Bodyline' series of 1932–33. It appears, in fact, that the 'nationalism/imperial loyalty' dynamic was much more complicated than such an either/or choice, particularly for the dominions. As Richard Holt argued, 'All Dominion sport mediated the desire for national self-determination and identity with a sense of imperial purpose', and he went on to state that 'Nowhere was the sense of shared [imperial] culture and of Dominion independence more finely balanced than in Australia.'[40]

It is in analysing how this mediation between imperial purpose and national identity was negotiated and performed that the British world framework has much to offer. In downplaying the importance of national(ist) histories, the British world framework mitigates

37 Wray Vamplew, 'Australians and sport', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart, eds., *Sport in Australia: a social history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 1, 7.

38 J. A. Mangan, 'Britain's chief spiritual export: imperial sport as moral metaphor, political symbol and cultural bond', in Mangan, *Cultural bond*, pp. 1–10. See also the other essays in this volume, as well as Mangan, *Games ethic*; John O'Hara, 'An approach to colonial sports history', in Wray Vamplew, ed., *Sport and colonialism in nineteenth-century Australasia*, Australian Society for Sports History, 1986, pp. 3–18; Brian Stoddart, 'The hidden influence of sport', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, eds., *Constructing a culture: a people's history of Australia since 1788*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1988, pp. 124–35; Stoddart and Sandiford, *The imperial game*.

39 Inglis, 'Imperial cricket', p. 166.

40 Richard Holt, *Sport and the British*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 229.

the deterministic nationalism of the Mandle thesis. The influence of Britishness and its facility as an imperial lubricant also seems particularly pertinent and instructive. But this is not to say that the British world approach should be used uncritically. A study of imperial sporting relations can also serve as a means to critique the British world framework. In particular, the incorporation of borderlands theory can provide an important corrective to a overly ready acceptance of Mangan's imperial solidarity argument. To demonstrate, the following brief case studies illustrate how such theoretical propositions might work in practice. The first two – cricket and swimming – offer examples where borderlands adaptations can be seen to have effected significant changes upon the shared metropolitan model, while the third – Australian Rules football – discusses an example where borderlands adaptations have produced something substantively different from the original metropolitan model.

Cricket

As has been indicated above, cricket has often been cited as the paragon of all things British and a major force for imperial unity. It was played throughout the British world, with many considering it the pre-eminent means for the inculcation of British values. As Sissons and Stoddart have stated, there existed in many parts of the British world 'an unshakeable belief in cricket as a code of cultural behaviour throughout the British Empire'.[41] The sport was embraced enthusiastically in Australia from early in the colony's history. Attempts were made to replicate as closely as possible the appearance and character of the imagined cricketing tableau back in the 'home' country. Even the types of trees that were chosen to fringe Australian cricket grounds were designed to mimic the aesthetic of the English pastoral, with imported English elms planted around the Melbourne Cricket Ground.[42]

One obvious way in which this pan-Britishness was fostered was through the tours of cricket teams oscillating between colony and metropole. As Cashman has noted, these tours 'were powerful expressions of empire, performing many cultural and educative roles in addition to advancing cricket-playing'.[43] The tours worked to reinforce the Britishness of cricket and operated as a means for the dissemination of the metropolitan model to the colony. Douglas Jardine, whom we will meet again as captain of the England team during the Bodyline series, firmly believed in the educative power of these Test matches. He complained that it was 'too seldom appreciated in England, let alone Australia, that there are millions of British citizens throughout the world who take their cue, as far as behaviour at cricket matches is concerned, from Test Matches between England and Australia'.[44] This quote is also allusive of the conflation between Englishness and Britishness that was commonplace in cricketing culture.[45]

41 Ric Sissons and Brian Stoddart, *Cricket and empire: the 1932–1933 bodyline tour of Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984, p. 29.

42 Cashman, 'Australia', in Stoddart and Sandiford, *The imperial game*, p. 35.

43 *Ibid*., p. 39.

44 D. R. Jardine, *In quest of the Ashes*, London: Hutchinson, 1933, p. 212.

45 See James Bradley, 'Inventing Australians and constructing Englishness: cricket and the creation of a national consciousness, 1860–1914', *Sporting Traditions*, 11, 2, 1995, pp. 35–60. Indeed, this conflation is also in evidence in a broader cultural sense in the quote from William Booth provided earlier in this article.

These tours also underscored the power structure of the British cricketing world by communicating the policies and decisions determined by the supreme governing body, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). In addition, the fact that many British politicians and civil servants were also MCC members served to conflate the British cricketing and British political spheres. The same people, in essence, 'wielded great influence throughout the cricketing empire as well as the political one [and] these empires, in fact, were one and the same'.[46] For Australian cricketers these tours offered the chance to visit various cricketing shrines such as Lord's Cricket Ground, the 'home' of cricket, but also to reconnect culturally with the metropole. Indeed, a cricket annual of the nineteenth century referred to these tours to England as 'The Trip Home'.[47]

Individuals could also function as transporters of pan-British cultural traffic through their own personal oscillations between metropole and colony. In the early years of the development of Australian cricket a number of English cricketers loaned their services as coaches to the embryonic colonial teams.[48] Once Australian cricket had begun to advance and approach parity with the English metropolitan model, this embodied cultural traffic was reciprocated with a number of Australian cricketers migrating to England and even playing in the English national side. Between 1877 and 1900 five Australian players represented both Australia and England but it is the words of a sixth, Fred Spofforth, who wanted to represent England but never had the opportunity, that are quite revealing of this Anglo-Australian cultural dynamic. Spofforth emigrated to England in 1888 and in response to a question about whether he would ever, if picked for the England team, play against Australia, he replied not only that he would but also 'if as a member of an English team he was instrumental in beating an Australian eleven, he would feel all the more proud of it for the sake of Australia'.[49] Spofforth here articulated some of the complexities of that mediation between national identity and imperial purpose that, as Holt has argued, was so central to dominion sport.

We can see, therefore, that cricket could be a powerful conveyor of British world cultural norms and a pan-British identity. However, it has often been noted by both historians and contemporaries that from a relatively early stage there were also certain local differences about cricket in Australia. This can be demonstrated in something as seemingly prosaic as variations in rules. In 1903, P. F. Warner was astonished to note that different rules (unsanctioned by the MCC) had developed in Australia. In particular, he remonstrated about a different follow-on rule that was being enforced: 'I was very much surprised to learn that this practice had been adopted in all recent test matches in Australia, for I had previously imagined that the laws of the Marylebone C.C. extended everywhere, and that in whatever part of the world the game was played those laws were religiously observed.'[50] Although noting a relatively minor point of difference, this quote is revealing for two reasons. First, it

46 Keith Sandiford, 'England', in Stoddart and Sandiford, *The imperial game*, p. 13.

47 Cashman, 'Australia', p. 45.

48 Richard Cashman, 'Symbols of unity: Anglo-Australian cricketers, 1877–1900', in Mangan, *Cultural bond*, p. 130.

49 *Ibid*., p. 131; Richard Cashman, *The 'demon' Spofforth*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 1990, pp. 193–4.

50 P. F. Warner, *Cricket across the seas, being an account of the tour of Lord Hawke's team in New Zealand and Australia*, London: Longmans, 1903, pp. 149–52.

shows the expectations that Englishmen such as Warner had of the metropole-centred power structure of the game. Second, it equally clearly demonstrates that there were indeed limits to this centripetal power structure.

A number of writers have elaborated more substantive borderlands variations. First, it has often been noted that, by the late nineteenth century, cricket in Australia had developed a much more diverse and egalitarian culture than its British counterpart. It was not uncommon for cricket teams to be drawn from a relatively wide range of social classes, from educated professionals (solicitors) through business owners (publicans and storekeepers) to artisans and labourers (bricklayers and carpenters). Holt has suggested that this may have had something to do with the fact that workers in Australia had more leisure time and earning power than in Britain.[51] By the 1930s there was a significant number of Irish Australians represented in the national team, which made the make-up of the Australian side much more Anglo-Celtic than was the case with the England team.[52] Furthermore, the amateur–professional divide was not nearly as rigid as it was in Britain.[53] Cricket in Australia was neither a predominantly urban nor a primarily rural sport, with cricketers in national sides sourced from both the city and the bush. Lastly, the formation of local competitions, ladders, and leagues happened much earlier than in Britain.[54]

It is obviously difficult to make direct linkages between such differences in the borderlands location or constitution of the sport and different ways of playing the game, but almost from the first tours between Australia and England there were those who commented on features of the Australian style and method of playing cricket. The London periodical *Review of Reviews* perhaps put it most bluntly in 1894, when it declared that Australian cricket was 'decidedly colonial, agricultural and uncouth'.[55] Australian cricketers quickly gained a reputation for a kind of single-minded, mercenary style of playing and an attitude of 'win at all costs'. Their 'industrial efficiency' was contrasted with the English amateur's 'languid and free-flowing pastoral style'.[56] Again, although it is unwise to make any hard and fast connections, at least one contemporary English author explicitly associated this Australian way of playing with their more relaxed attitude towards professional status, and it is also plausible to link a more hard-nosed, competitive playing style to the fact that cricket in Australia was structured into competitive leagues, the organization of which were often based on suburban or regional boundaries, at an earlier date than in England.[57]

What all this did mean was that, despite the British world rhetoric of imperial unity, Australian cricketers could never achieve an exact similitude of the metropolitan model. Even someone as aspirationally British as Spofforth could not avoid the borderlands tag. He was described by the famous English cricket writer Neville Cardus as having a 'dark,

51 Holt, *Sport*, p. 229.

52 Cashman, 'Australia', p. 47.

53 Bradley, 'Inventing Australians', pp. 46–50.

54 Cashman, *National imagination*, pp. 20–30.

55 Quoted in Mandle, 'Cricket', p. 227.

56 Stuart Macintyre, 'Prologue: sport and past Australasian culture', in J. A. Mangan and John Nauright, *Sport in Australasian society: past and present*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 6–7.

57 A. Lyttelton, 'Cricket reform', *National Review*, 34, 1899–1900, p. 233.

Mephistophelian aspect … [with] his face set in hard, predatory lines. *He was the Australian of the Australians, a stark man who let in with him the cold blast of antagonism that ever blew on a June field*'.[58] At bottom, the Australian cricketer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was defined as a strange borderlands creation that was neither professional nor amateur but existed somewhere between the two classes. The cultural traffic facilitated by touring only served to reinforce these borderlands stereotypes, as Australian teams began to defeat their metropolitan counterparts with more regularity in the 1920s and 1930s.

Which brings us to 'cricket's imperial crisis', the Bodyline series of 1932–33. In this series, the English cricket team devised a new tactic to combat that most ruthless of batters, Australia's Donald Bradman. The captain of the England team, Douglas Jardine, ordered the deployment of 'leg theory', which comprised stacking fielders on the leg side of the pitch and deliberately bowling at the body and head of the batsmen. While this was not illegal it was certainly aggressive and many felt that it did not conform to the spirit of cricket, and that the English were 'not playing the game'. They were seen as playing only to win, to the detriment of the spirit of the game. In the famous words of the Australian captain, Bill Woodfull, 'there are two teams out there, one is trying to play cricket, the other is not' (or words to that effect).[59]

John Hughson has applied cultural traffic to a sporting context to denote 'ongoing reciprocity and mutual impact … and [particularly] the to-and-fro movement of sport people between centre and periphery'.[60] This appears to be an apt description of the situation with the Bodyline series. The movement of cricketers and cricketing teams between the centre and periphery resulted in a constant exchange of cultural traffic. While this reciprocal flow of cultural traffic communicated pan-British cultural norms and expectations, it also served to highlight subtle differentiations between the metropolitan and hinterland versions of this shared cricketing culture. Strangely enough, the consequent mutual impact resulted in an inversion of cultural practice, whereby the metropolitan cricketing culture was accused of the very same thing of which the colonial cricketing culture was once accused: that is, cynically sacrificing the spirit of the game in order to win.[61]

In terms of its significance for the imaginary grandstand and an evolving national identity, the Bodyline series marked a turning point in the history of Australian cricket. The fiasco clearly tarnished Australia's hitherto high regard for the metropolitan cricketing culture, and the ability to claim the moral high ground seems to have led to an enhanced confidence and assertiveness in international cricketing circles. Both of these attitudinal changes are perhaps best indicated by the fact that the governing body in Australia disregarded the MCC's authority and appealed directly to the Imperial Cricket Conference when suggesting a new law to combat bodyline bowling attacks in the future.[62] Furthermore, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that Bodyline also had an impact on Australia's political relationship with Britain.

58 Cashman, *The 'demon' Spofforth* (emphasis added).

59 Davison, 'Imaginary grandstand', p. 8.

60 J. Hughson, 'The middle class, colonialism and the making of sport', *Sport in Society*, 12, 1, 2009, p. 78.

61 The Bodyline controversy has also been analysed in terms of gender politics: see McDevitt, *May the best man win*, pp. 81–110.

62 *Ibid*., p. 110.

For if it is true, as Davison maintains, that sport was the means through which Australia rehearsed its national identity, it is plausible to then claim that the Bodyline series foreshadowed the increasing distance between Australian and Britain during and after the Second World War. In this regard, one is reminded of the quote from Rockley Wilson, who had toured Australia in 1920–21, when told of the appointment of Jardine as captain for the 1932–33 series: 'Well, we shall win the Ashes – but we may lose a Dominion.'[63]

Swimming

In recent times there has been a large volume of scholarly work devoted to the sport of surf lifesaving in Australia. Indeed, this has been in marked contrast to the amount of work focusing on other aquatic sports, such as competitive swimming.[64] This is somewhat surprising given the strong position in competitive swimming that the country has occupied over the last hundred or so years. Australia has consistently featured in the top three nations in terms of Olympic medals won in swimming. Furthermore, we need only look at the events that unfolded in Swimming Australia after the 2012 London Olympics to see the importance placed on swimming as a barometer of Australian sporting prowess – and hence its importance for the imaginary grandstand. Following what was considered to be a sub-standard performance in which the Australian swim team won one gold, six silver, and three bronze medals, a national inquiry was established to investigate what had gone wrong.[65]

This elite position in competitive swimming was established early, with Australia holding all the world records for recognized men's events in 1905. In parallel, by 1912 Fanny Durack had established herself as the pre-eminent swimmer in the women's events.[66] The country's rise to the forefront of international competitive swimming took place in a British world context. For much of the nineteenth century, Australia's aquatic sports and culture largely mirrored British models. Despite Victorian notions of prudishness and the many restrictions on times and places of bathing, recreational swimming and bathing gained in popularity over the course of the nineteenth century. This was assisted to some extent by a widespread belief in the salubrious effects of outdoor bathing.[67] In conjunction with this growth in recreational bathing, the nineteenth century also witnessed, in both Australia and Britain, burgeoning interest and participation in competitive swimming. This, in turn, led to the establishment of administrative organizations such as the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) in Britain (1869), which provided the template for the Australian version, the New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association (1892). These governing bodies organized national titles and kept records of results and times. Such growth of competitive

63 Sissons and Stoddart, *Cricket and empire*, p. 10.

64 Rob Hess and Claire Parker, 'Against the tide: new work on Australasian aquatic cultures', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26, 14, 2009, pp. 2060–8.

65 Nicole Jeffery, 'Australia's Olympic swim team to be probed', 12 September 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/sport/australias-olympic-swim-teams-culture-to-be-probed/story-e6frg7mf-1226472136873 (consulted 20 February 2013).

66 Richard Cashman, *Paradise of sport: A history of Australian sport*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2010, p. 39.

67 Richard Light and Tracy Rockwell, 'The cultural origins of competitive swimming in Australia', *Sporting Traditions*, 22, 1, 2005, pp. 21–37; Murray Phillips, *Swimming Australia: one hundred years*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008, pp. 8–9.

swimming in the British world also gave rise to a new occupation in the teaching of aquatic pursuits – the so-called 'professors' of swimming.[68] All the early swimming professors in Australia – Thomas Bastard, Harriet Elphinstone Dick, Fred Cavill, and Charles Steedman – emigrated from Britain.[69]

These British world links between Australia and Britain were reinforced by the fact that, in the early years of competitive swimming, the top Australian swimmers would frequently travel back to Britain to compete against the best British swimmers in the English Championships (although this may also have had something to do with the fact that the British ASA, the most powerful swimming governing body of the day, only recognized records that were swum in Britain). Frederick 'Freddie' Lane was the first to achieve success back in the home country, holding five English Championships between the years 1899 and 1902. Other noteworthy success stories include Dick Cavill, of the famous Cavill swimming family, who in 1902 achieved fame for being the first man to break a minute for the 100 yards.[70] Barney Kieran, a prodigious young talent, burst onto the competitive swimming scene at the age of seventeen by beating Dick Cavill at the 1904 Australasian Championships; the next year he took these talents over to England where he set four world records. In women's competition, Annette Kellerman set numerous long-distance records and three times attempted that premier distance swim, the English Channel.[71]

So far, so British world. But to what extent did this first golden age of Australian swimming also have borderlands attributes? Obviously the natural environment and hot climate of Australia helped to foster a love of aquatic recreations. As early as 1837 it was noted that 'Where there is so much bathing it may naturally be supposed there are good swimmers, and Sydney is celebrated for them … men and women, boys and girls all more or less indulge in this healthy enjoyment'.[72] However, a less pleasant aspect of such ease of access to bodies of water and the natural inducements to use them was the likelihood of drowning. This appears to have been a tragically common occurrence in the early years of colonial Australia and it led to *The Bulletin* issuing a call for swimming proficiency to be a 'universal accomplishment'. In fact, this probably had some bearing on the introduction of swimming lessons – with an emphasis on rescue and lifesaving – into the school curriculum at an earlier date than in Britain.[73] Thus, swimming and aquatic recreation generally were, for better or worse, a prevalent feature of Australian colonial society. No doubt this played some role in the successes of Australian swimmers on the world stage at the turn of the

68 Light and Rockwell, 'Cultural origins', 31; Claire Parker, 'The rise of competitive swimming 1848 to 1870', *Sports Historian*, 21, 2, 2001, pp. 54–65.

69 Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 5.

70 It is interesting to note that these connections with the 'home country' were so pronounced that in 1900 Percy Cavill was mistakenly reported as the 'English swimmer' who defeated W. H. Smith in a race in America: see *Fun*, 14 August 1900, p. 55.

71 Cashman, *National imagination*, pp. 176–8; J. G. Williams, 'Cavill, Frederick (1839–1927)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cavill-frederick-5536/text9431 (consulted 5 March 2013); Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, pp. 137–46.

72 'Sketches of New South Wales, No. XVI', *Saturday Magazine*, 10, 1837, p. 122.

73 Rachel Winterton and Claire Parker, '"A utilitarian pursuit": swimming education in nineteenth-century Australia and England', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26, 14, 2009, pp. 2106–25.

century but the borderlands effect actually offers a more significant contribution in one specific, key aspect: stroke development.

The first instance of a borderlands impact on stroke development and innovation was the single-arm overarm sidestroke. According to Carlile, C. W. Wallis first saw Aboriginal Australians using the stroke in the Lane Cove River, Sydney. In 1855 he went to London and demonstrated the stroke to the swimming professor Fred Beckwith. Beckwith used the stroke to win the English Championships in 1859 and a version of it was used by the winner of the long-distance championships for the next fifty years.[74] But the more significant and long-lasting borderlands contribution to stroke development occurred in the two decades either side of 1900. When, in 1902, Dick Cavill broke the minute for the 100 yards he utilized a new stroke that would come to be called the 'Australian crawl', or what is commonly known today as freestyle. The development of this most influential of strokes has a particular borderlands history and the famous Cavill family occupies a central place.

In 1898, Arthur 'Tums' Cavill was observed to issue a series of challenges to fellow Sydney swimmers in which he deployed a new stroke and swam with his legs tied together. It was this stroke that Dick Cavill took to England, resulting in his 1902 success. However, we need to backtrack a little to when a third Cavill brother, Sydney, attested to watching a Samoan woman earlier in the 1890s swim an effortless crawl without kicking her legs while he was on a stopover to the United States. When he returned to Australia, he and his brothers worked on replicating and further honing this stroke. While they were tinkering with their crawl technique another borderlands influence arrived in Australia in 1901 in the form of Alick Wickham, a young man from the Solomon Islands. It was soon discovered that Wickham – an archetypal borderlands figure, being the son of an English trader and a Melanesian mother – also swam a similar crawl stroke, only faster. When the Cavills heard of this they invited Wickham to swim at their baths in order to observe his action.[75] Wickham essentially showed the Cavills the full potential of the Pacific-sourced stroke they had been working on for the last few years and it was through utilizing this refined crawl technique that Dick Cavill was able to achieve such heights in England.

The Australian crawl brought with it unprecedented success on the world stage. What was probably initially most important was that it drew acclaim for the colony's swimmers in the home country: as the *Manchester Guardian* reported after the visit of the Cavill and the other Australian swimmers in 1902, 'never before has the visit of Australian swimmers to this country been attended with so much success as has been the case during this season'.[76] That success was also reported in America with the *Chicago Tribune* writing that 'the English season of 1902 was the best in the annals of sport, and its feature was the great showing of the Australian swimmers'.[77] Perhaps signified most obviously through the name itself, the 'Australian crawl' is now a touchstone of Australian sporting identity. Its association with Australia was established early, with the *Washington Post* editorializing in

74 Forbes Carlile, *On swimming*, London: Pelham Books, 1965, p. 127.

75 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 January 1913, p. 9. See also Gary Osmond and Murray Phillips, '"Look at that kid crawling": race, myth and the "crawl" stroke', *Australian Historical Studies*, 127, 2006, pp. 43–62.

76 *Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1902, p. 3.

77 *Chicago Tribune*, 29 December 1902, p. 11.

1905 about how this 'new stroke for swimmers … has spread from Australia, the land of kangaroos and other odd types of motion, throughout the athletic world'.[78] The *Post*'s article also shows how this association of the stroke with Australia could sometimes lead to the erasing of its Pacific Islands origins. Crawl is here described as a wholly Australian innovation with Dick Cavill credited as its discoverer.[79] There has been some historical debate about the relative weight to be accorded to Wickham or the Cavills for the development of the stroke but it is now generally understood to have been a kind of hybrid invention, a fact recognized as early as 1913 in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In a piece entitled 'The famous crawl: an island stroke popularised in Sydney', the hybrid evolution of the stroke is succinctly mapped out and is worth quoting in full:

> It is probable that Arthur Cavill was unconsciously making some approach to the 'crawl' stroke when, on seeing Wickham he at once grasped the fact that the principle he was slowly working out was exemplified in the boy swimmer. Both he and his more famous brother carefully studied Wickham's actions, and using the stroke in public events popularised it. Although not the originators, the Cavills may claim the credit of having popularised the universal sprinting stroke.[80]

Thus, in this case study of Australia's first golden age of swimming, we can see that aquatic sport and culture in Australia had definite British world origins. Similar cultural prompts initiated the growth of aquatic recreation in both Australia and Britain and the organization of competitive swimming in Australia modelled itself on the British example. Furthermore, all the prominent early 'professors' of swimming were British émigrés. But there were also important borderlands aspects that influenced the growth and development of swimming in Australia which differentiated it significantly from the metropolitan model. The ease of access to and climatic inducements towards aquatic recreations meant that swimming was a popular pastime, but this fact also resulted in the high incidence of drowning in the early years of the colony. That, in turn, led to a greater emphasis on swimming and lifesaving in the school curriculum. However, by far the most significant borderlands impact on the sport of swimming in Australia was in the field of stroke development. Through a classic example of borderlands transculturation between the Cavill brothers and the Pacific swimming culture, particularly via the figure of the Solomon Islander Alick Wickham, the Australian crawl stroke arrived on the international swimming stage in 1902. This product of a borderlands adaptation of the metropolitan model has gone on to become a touchstone of Australian sporting identity and made a significant contribution to Australia's performance for the imaginary grandstand.

Australian Rules football

In the 1850s, the city of Melbourne was in the midst of gold-rush fever and its population had boomed: between 1851 and 1861 more than 548,000 people had migrated to the colony,

78 'New stroke for swimmers: an Australian wriggle called the crawl now in fashion', *Washington Post*, 13 August 1905, p. SP4.

79 See also, 'Dick Cavill: chat with the champion', *The Register*, 14 February 1908, p. 3.

80 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 January 1913, p. 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000259 Published online by Cambridge University Press

most from Britain.[81] It was in this context, in 1859, that the first rules for Australian Rules football were drawn up in Melbourne. The chief figures behind this initiative were the Rugby-school-educated Tom Wills; Thomas 'Red' Smith, an Irishman who had played football at Trinity College, Dublin; William Hammersley, a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge; and J. B. Thompson, who had also played football and cricket at Cambridge. The game was designed as an amalgam of the various footballs that these men had been exposed to in Britain and Australia. Moreover, it was intended to be an improvement on those versions. As Thompson is alleged to have claimed, the new Australian version of football would not only constitute an amalgam of the Rugby and Eton football codes but would 'combine the merits while excluding the vices of both'.[82] In addition, and in an acknowledgement of the large influx of new British migrants in Melbourne, it was intended that the rules be kept as simple as possible in order for new settlers or regiments of visiting British soldiers to more easily learn and participate in the game.[83]

So we can see that the context for the inception and codification of Australian Rules football was a typical version of the British world. The demographics of Melbourne at the time were very British, perhaps even more so than in previous decades. The founders of the game had all spent large portions of their formative years in Britain or, in the case of Smith, Ireland. Wills, whose idea it had originally been to suggest organizing games of football in order for cricketers to maintain fitness during the off season, was, in particular, a archetypical transnational British world figure. The son of an Australian squatter, he was sent for his education to Rugby School and went on to attend Cambridge. He then returned to Victoria in 1856. He was also the architect of the tour of an Aboriginal cricket team, for which he was captain and coach, to England in 1868.[84] As we have seen, the rules of Australian Rules football were deliberately designed as a hybrid of the various versions of football that were being played in England (and probably Ireland). As such, and notwithstanding Wills's alleged desire 'to work out a game of our own', it is probably best to view Australian Rules at the time it was codified in 1859 as 'one of many dozens of variations in the playing of football throughout the British Empire'.[85]

However, while the roots and original rules of the game were clearly from the British world, as the nineteenth century progressed Australian Rules football began to acquire more distinctive and unique characteristics that set it apart from the two main codes of football – rugby and Association football – being formalized in Britain. Many of these changes were merely the predictable tweaking and fine-tuning of rules that accompany the evolution of any game, but some, it has been suggested, were prompted by the uniquely Australian context. For example, it has been claimed that the larger playing area of Australian Rules

81 Robin Grow, 'From gum trees to goalposts, 1858–1876', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, eds., *More than a game: an unauthorised history of Australian Rules football*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 5.

82 Quoted in Tony Collins, 'The invention of sporting tradition: national myths, imperial pasts and the origins of Australian Rules football', in Stephen Wagg, ed., *Myths and milestones in the history of sport*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 20.

83 Grow, 'Gum trees', p. 11.

84 Greg de Moore, *Tom Wills: his spectacular rise and tragic fall*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2008.

85 Collins, 'Invention', p. 20.

football was a testament to the abundance of space in the Australian colonies.[86] Perhaps the most controversial 'Australian' distinction, however, is the alleged connection to Aboriginal ball games. This debate has chiefly nucleated around the extent to which Wills was influenced by Aboriginal ball games that he may have witnessed as a boy, before he was sent to England as a fourteen-year-old. Although there is, so far, no concrete empirical evidence for this connection, there are a number of circumstantial facts that suggest that an incipient influence cannot be ruled out.[87] There is, however, more agreement on the suggestion that the 'high mark', one of the most distinctive features of Australian Rules football, owed a conceptual debt to Aboriginal ball games that were played around Melbourne in the nineteenth century. This tactic, whereby a player leaps high in the air above his opponent(s) to 'mark', or catch, the ball, became an increasingly prevalent part of the game from the 1860s.[88]

However, the veracity of the roots or causes of particular borderlands variations is not necessarily the most germane consideration when it comes to analysing the development and 'thickening' of a borderlands culture. Rather, it is the cultural traffic that passes between centre and hinterland that plays the most important role in the evolution of such a culture. From the moment Australian Rules were established, there were a number of means by which such cultural traffic was facilitated. First, Melbourne was a garrison town for travelling British troops and most football seasons included an annual match against Her Majesty's 14th Regiment or the Royal Irish Regiment. It appears that, despite the rules being 'few and simple', the regimental teams nevertheless often found it difficult to adapt to the Australian game. In 1869, *The Australasian* reported that if the soldiers 'could be induced to forgo hugging and hitting, and to trust more to good kicking and dexterity in dodging, they would play a game more in accordance with what football is understood to be in Victoria'.[89] Second, various well-travelled British world figures passed comment on the game. Charles Dilke observed that the 'South-Sea' variant of football had 'assumed … a character of greater Science than in England'; similarly, in 1883, Richard Twopenny, who claimed to have played 'Rugby, Association and Victorian' football, opined that 'the Victorian game is by far the most scientific, the most amusing to players and onlookers, and altogether the best'.[90]

86 Cashman, *National imagination*, p. 45. This feature of the game was also commented on by British contemporaries: see 'Cricket and football notes', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 1 May 1888.

87 This debate is also far from concluded. For the various positions and views in the debate, see Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd, 'Duelling paradigms: Australian aborigines, marn-grook and football histories', *Sport in Society*, 15, 7, 2012, pp. 975–86; Jim Poulter, 'Marn-grook: original Australian Rules', in Peter Burke and Leo Grogan, eds., *This game of ours: supporters' tales of the people's game*, St Andrews: EATWARFLEMSD, 1993, pp. 64–7; Collins, 'Invention'; Geoffrey Blainey, *A game of our own: the origins of Australian Rules football*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003, pp. 203–5; Gillian Hibbins, 'Wills and the aboriginal game: a seductive myth', in Geoff Slattery, ed., *The Australian game of football since 1858*, Melbourne: GSP Books, 2008; John Hirst, 'Comment', *The Monthly*, 38 (September), 2008, pp. 8–11; Ciannon Cazaly, 'Off the ball: football's history wars', *Meanjin*, 67, 2008, pp. 82–7.

88 Even Blainey, a firm sceptic concerning the Aboriginal influence on the early Tom Wills, allows that 'it is just conceivable that several of the early exponents of what became a distinctively Australian form of marking had seen Aboriginals at play in rural areas, gained confidence from watching them and even imitated their style of leaping': see Blainey, *Game of our own*, p. 203.

89 'Football: the garrison v. the Melbourne club', *The Australasian*, 12 June 1869, n.p.

90 Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, vol. 1, p. 253; R. E. N. Twopenny, *Town life in Australia*, London: Elliot Stock, 1883, n.p.

Probably the most telling case of cultural traffic occurred in 1888, when a touring British rugby team agreed to play a number of matches of Australian Rules against some of the Victorian clubs, a tour that has since been dubbed 'football's forgotten tour'.[91] This event elicited a rash of commentary in the press, the nature of which is very revealing of the development of the borderlands character of the game. Almost all reports remarked upon the 'striking distinctions' between Australian Rules and Association or rugby football, but when it came to the relative merits of the game opinion was more divided. The *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* reported:

> the game is far more simple than Rugby, while with experts – men used to playing together – I am confident it would be even prettier than the Association … There is a lot of real merit in the game, but that it will ever oust Rugby or Association from its pride of place [in Britain] is very much open to doubt.[92]

S. Talbot Smith, writing in the *Boy's Own Paper*, believed that the game was 'certainly less interesting to watch than either Association or Rugby'. Smith averred that 'There is not the fine science of the former, while, compared with the latter (which it much more nearly resembles), some of the alterations made cannot be regarded as improvements.'[93] But perhaps the most interesting article for our purposes was that penned by 'Observer' in *The Australasian*. Observer's article essentially constituted a robust and lengthy defence against criticisms made of Australian Rules by a rugby devotee. The rugby critic was reported to have characterized the Australian game as a 'hybrid' game and 'a childish form of sport'. He also described the inception of the game thus: 'The Melbournites obtained the rules of all the games of football ever played, picked out the worst points in each, and putting them together called that the Victorian game.' Observer then devoted most of the rest of the article to a forthright and detailed refutation of these criticisms. In particular, Observer noted, 'as for the play being childish, the Englishmen, after their Victorian matches … will be in a position to remove all wrong impressions upon that head'.[94] Indeed, when the British rugby team came to play against the Victorian clubs it soon became apparent to the players that the relatively brief period of training they had undergone in the Australian game was insufficient for them to be competitive. The tour was ultimately cut short by the unfortunate death by drowning of the rugby team's captain.[95]

So we can see in this example of Australian Rules football some of the analytical profit to be made from an application of borderlands theory to the British world framework. The origins of Australian Rules football were clearly from the British world – that is, the game was a product of the circulation of British people, ideas, and, in this case, sports around the British

91 John Williamson, *Football's forgotten tour: the story of the British Australian Rules venture of 1888*, Applecross, Western Australia: John Williamson, 2003. In addition, earlier in the year 'a complete novelty in the way of sport' took place when two teams of Australian university students played an exhibition game of Australian Rules in London: see 'Australian football: London Australians v. Edinburgh Australians', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 16 April, 1888, n.p.

92 'Cricket and football notes'.

93 S. Talbot Smith, 'Australian football', *Boy's Own Paper*, 10 November 1888, n.p.

94 'Observer', 'A Rugby critic on Australian football', *The Australasian*, 9 June 1888, n.p.

95 Williamson, *Football's forgotten tour.*

world network – and at this early stage it is probably best to view it as simply one of a number of variants of football evolving around the British world.[96] However, as the sport evolved in its borderland location, it gradually developed unique and distinctive characteristics that set it apart from the metropolitan versions of football that were emerging concurrently in Britain. These characteristics were only further underscored when the metropolitan and hinterland sporting cultures interacted, the most conspicuous example of which was the 1888 tour of the English rugby team. The apparent inability or unwillingness of the metropolitan team to learn and play the hinterland version of football stood as a stark demonstration of the differences between the two sporting codes and cultures. But what is perhaps most significant are the ramifications that such 'rubbing up' of hinterland and metropolitan cultures in this way had for the development of a nascent Australian sporting identity. For it is only when the borderlands inhabitants begin to acknowledge and own their distinctive borderlands culture, in contradistinction to the metropolitan culture, that we begin to see the seeds of a national identity germinating. I would suggest that this is precisely what we can see happening in Observer's staunch defence of Australian Rules football against the rugby critic. This attachment to, or ownership of, Australian Rules was even remarked upon by metropolitan contemporaries: for example, even the critical eye of Talbot Smith allowed that 'In Australia, even more than in England, Football is asserting its right to be called the national game.'[97]

Thus it was during these years of the sport's 'Long Boom' (1860–90) that Australian Rules football became, as Robert Pascoe has outlined, 'a powerful cultural force itself, shaping people's ideas of themselves as much as reflecting their sense of who they were in this new land'.[98] These links between Australian Rules and a budding Australian national identity were highlighted in 1908 when the Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, delivered his address to the sport's Silver Jubilee carnival. Deakin declared on this occasion that 'the game is Australian in its origin, Australian in its principle, and, I venture to say, essentially of Australian development. It and every expression of the sporting spirit go to make that manhood which is competent for a nation's tasks.'[99] Although there is clearly some exaggeration, particularly regarding the origins of the game, the nationalist spirit or feeling in this statement is unmistakeable. As such, we can also see in this example how the creation of an endemically unique sporting culture can nevertheless still have a part to play in the national performance for the imaginary grandstand.

Conclusion

This article has principally argued for the importance of an exploration of sporting interactions in the British world. The British world framework possesses features – for example, an emphasis on transnational networks and systems, and a focus on the function of Britishness as a

96 For example, Collins, 'Invention', p. 25, refers to a South African variant being developed in Cape Town at the same time.

97 Talbot Smith, 'Australian football'.

98 Robert Pascoe, *The winter game: the complete history of Australian football*, Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1995, p. 52.

99 For the full speech, see Cashman, O'Hara, and Honey, *Sport, federation, nation*, pp. 111–13 (quote from p. 113).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000259 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cultural solvent – that could be usefully applied to the disparate yet interconnected British sporting world. In this rendition, sport and sporting culture basically operate as a synecdoche of Britishness. However, this article has also suggested a modification of this British world framework through the incorporation of borderlands theory. Borderlands theory has the potential to bring to the British world a greater appreciation of spatial and regional variation by attending to the flows of cultural traffic that were transmitted between metropole and colony, for it is via this cultural traffic that Britishness is constantly redefined and reconfigured. Furthermore, this rubbing up against each other of metropolitan and hinterland versions of a common culture could have a double-edged effect: it could communicate and disseminate pan-British ideals and values but it could also bring into relief subtle, and not so subtle, points of transmutation and difference.

This borderlands modification of the British world framework thus offers a new means for the explication of a colonial national identity for a dominion such as Australia. In other words, viewing Australia as a borderland of the British world provides a theoretical structure for explaining Australia as a nation-in-empire. And since, as Davison has argued, sport was the means through which Australia first rehearsed its national identity, then it follows that sport is an apt vehicle for the exploration of these theoretical claims. To this end, the three case studies of cricket, swimming, and Australian Rules football offer exemplars, albeit brief, of how such a task might proceed. It is important to note, however, that these case studies also demonstrate that British world sporting interactions did not necessarily follow a formulaic trajectory. The examples of cricket and swimming both generated a significant change within the metropolitan sporting culture, whereas the development of Australian Rules football produced a sporting culture that was substantively different from its metropolitan football cousins. Nevertheless, all three, in different ways, represented important acts in the performance for the imaginary grandstand.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000259 Published online by Cambridge University Press