

## Sporting Resistance: Thinking Race and Sport Diasporically

The idea of diaspora offers a ready alternative to the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging. It rejects the popular image of natural nations spontaneously endowed with self-consciousness, tidily composed of uniform families: those interchangeable collections of ordered bodies that express and reproduce absolutely distinctive cultures as well as perfectly formed heterosexual pairings ... It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness. It destroys the naïve invocation of common memory as the basis of particularity in a similar fashion by drawing attention to the contingent political dynamics of commemoration. (Paul Gilroy)

Sport is a key site of pleasure and domination, via a complex dialectic that does not always produce a clear synthesis from the clash of opposing camps. It involves both the imposition of authority from above, and the joy of autonomy from below. It exemplifies the exploitation of the labor process, even as it delivers autotelic pleasures. (Toby Miller)

I believe and hope to prove that cricket and football were the greatest cultural influences in nineteenth-century Britain, leaving far behind Tennyson's poems, Beardsley's drawings and concerts of the Philharmonic Society. These filled space in print but not in minds. (C.L.R. James)

### Sporting Resistance: Gramsci and Sport

In order to produce a cultural theory of race and sport it is first necessary to map the theoretical terrain in order to judge what of the existing frameworks can usefully be retained, what needs to be revised and what should be jettisoned. Therefore this chapter delineates the core *conceptual problems* of this study and provides a general theoretical framework that seeks to show how the key concepts introduced in the previous chapter and developed throughout the book, namely the 'white colonial frame', 'sporting racial projects', 'the sporting black Atlantic' and 'the black athlete', are interrelated and help us towards a more complex way of thinking about race and sport both across time and space.

The chapter proceeds by assessing the ideas of key sport sociologists and historians, in particular the work of hegemony theorists of sport and the definitional framing of sport and modernity provided by the historian Allen

Guttman. Despite the importance and widespread influence of these ways of viewing sport, it is suggested that a fundamental rethinking is required in order to take into account the significance of race in relation to both theories of social development within the west and the emergence of modern sport. It is argued that a profoundly Eurocentric model of sport's global 'diffusion' continues to haunt mainstream accounts of modern sport's development, producing what I term the Myth of Modern Sport. Seeking to develop an alternative post/colonial theory of sport, the chapter concludes by arguing for a diasporic reading of race and sport that might help to make better sense of the symbolic significance, social impact and political importance of sporting black Atlantic stars and their potential roles as agents of resistance to the logic and practices of white supremacy.

Within the sociology of sport it has now become something of a canonical orthodoxy to date the development of the critical, broadly Gramscian, moment in sports studies to the early to mid-1980s (Carrington and McDonald 2009). In particular, John Hargreaves's (1986) *Sport, Power and Culture*, a socio-historical account of sport, class formation and politics in Britain, and Richard Gruneau's (1983/1999) *Class, Sports and Social Development*, a similar analysis of the social transformations affecting Canadian sport, are often cited as two of the most important monographs produced during this period.<sup>1</sup> This 'turn to hegemony theory' enabled critical scholars to avoid both the latent conservatism of earlier accounts of sport that posited the inherently integrative functionality of sports and the economic determinism of Marxist approaches that tended to read sport solely through the prism of athletic bodily alienation, false class consciousness on the part of working-class fans, and sport's general capitulation to the ideologies of capital. Chas Critcher (1986: 335) noted at the time that for such theorists, 'the way out of the dichotomy between liberal idealism and vulgar Marxism lies in a model of sport as a relatively autonomous cultural practice within more general hegemonic class relations'.<sup>2</sup> Sport, in short, was viewed within such accounts as a contested site wherein the play of power could be found, a cultural site of class domination 'from above' as well as the location for forms of symbolic and material resistance 'from below'.

John Hargreaves (1986: 6–7) clarifies this central analytical point by arguing that 'sport was significantly implicated in the process whereby the growing economic and political power of the bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain was eventually transformed into that class's hegemony in the later part of the century'. In other words, as Hargreaves's book title plainly states, sport has to be located as a central, contested facet of culture, that is itself immersed within the broader circuits of (predominantly although not exclusively) classed power relations. For Hargreaves, in what has now become a somewhat classic formulation of hegemony theory:

Power resides more in the ability of the hegemonic group to win consent to, and support for, its leadership, and on its ability to pre-empt and disorganize opposition, so that the major forces in society are unified behind the hegemonic group and

forceful, coercive measures against opposition to the pattern of hegemony acquire legitimacy as well. Hegemony is achieved through a continuous process of work: potential resistance is anticipated, organized opposition is overcome and disarmed by broadening and deepening the base of support. Thus alliances with subaltern and subordinate groups are brought off, concessions to and compromises with potential as well as actual opponents are made. (1986: 7)

If the analytical concerns for Hargreaves center around class, sport and British industrialism, then for Gruneau, working through a remarkably similar set of issues from the location of Canada, the interrelationship of sport and class needs to be situated in the context of the study of social development itself. 'Put most simply,' Gruneau (1983/1999: xxix) states, 'I argue that any examination of the changing nature of human possibilities in social development must be drawn ineluctably to a very old sociological problem: the problem of class inequality and domination. It was this problem that defined many of the personal troubles and public issues of citizens in the earliest stages of liberal democracy'. Gruneau (p. 1) centers his study in the context of what he terms the two core problems of sociological theory, namely the problem of human agency and the problem of class inequality and structural change.

Tracing the dialectical relationship between freedom and autonomous play on the one hand and domination and cultural constraint on the other, Gruneau theorizes sport itself as a potentially liberatory space for self-actualization. Gruneau (p. 3) brings to the fore the 'fundamental paradox' of play, namely that it appears as both an *independent and spontaneous* as well as a *dependent and regulated* aspect of human agency. By extension, sport is viewed as a relatively autonomous institutionalized form that embodies play's central paradox: it is a space of freedom, creativity and human expression that can only come into being in the context of formalized rules that govern and delimit its boundaries, ethically, spatially and temporally.

In trying to avoid an overly voluntarist and metaphysical notion of play, as found within the writings of John Huizinga, Gruneau posits a more materialist account of sport, understood as a collective social experience that is actively made and remade by the participants themselves. An account of sport, in other words, that is 'sensitive to the dialectical relationships between socially structured possibilities and human agency' (p. 27). This requires an understanding and analysis of the historical conditions within which these dialectical relationships have taken place in order to map, in precise detail, the nature and consequences of these moments of freedom and limitation. Thus, as with Hargreaves, Gruneau utilizes hegemony as a way to think through the play of power within sport: 'the concept of hegemony allows for the idea of reflexive human agency in a manner not shared by functionalist models of inculcation or socialization' (p. 60).

### 'Additional Considerations': The Limits to Orthodox Hegemony Theory

In these insightful propositions we see both the promise of and limits to what a critical sociology of sport might offer for a cultural theory of race and sport. Hargreaves, Gruneau and other orthodox hegemony theorists, open up a space to think through sports as a modality for freedom and human actualization. Sport is read as a contested terrain wherein competing ideologies of domination and resistance can be traced. Nothing is guaranteed in terms of political outcomes. Sport is neither understood as a freely chosen leisure pursuit somehow divorced from the material conditions of its existence nor is it reducible to those very same economic determinants that would otherwise, and in the last instance, collapse all forms of culture making back into the logic of capital accumulation. Coercion as well as consent is ever present and sports and their participants are viewed as agents in the production of the very social relations from which they derive. Following this line of argument, Gruneau suggests that sports are 'active constitutive features of human experience' (p. 17) that should be analyzed in the context of the struggles over the limits and possibilities of the rules and resources through which they are themselves defined. Thus, depending 'on their association with divergent material interests, the meanings of sports, like all cultural creations, have the capacity to be either reproductive or oppositional, repressive or liberating' (p. 17).

But there are problems with how even these erudite theorists define the nature of political struggle and which forms of human experience are seen as central and which, by default, get cast as marginal. At first glance, these approaches appear to open up the possibility to think through racial formation (as well as questions of gender and sexuality) in the context of broader cultural battles over access to and ownership of sports, the meanings produced therein, and the effects of these contestations on social development more generally. However, such accounts' explanatory powers are rendered partial by their failure to engage in any substantive way with questions of race as well as their limited analysis of the structuring effects of European colonialism on class formation and on 'the west' itself.

*Class, Sport and Social Development*, for example, addresses the development of sport in the age of colonialism yet the theory of colonialism presented is significantly underdeveloped and there is a near total absence of any discussion of racism itself.<sup>3</sup> Thus, invoking C. Wright Mills, Gruneau's earlier remark concerning the 'personal troubles and public issues of citizens in the earliest stages of liberal democracy' (p. xxix) fails to acknowledge that for many blacks in North America and elsewhere the 'early stages of liberal democracy' were predicated upon their informal and formal exclusion from the very category of 'the citizen' and thus their reduced capacity to access and formally shape the public sphere. This begs the question, exactly which 'citizens' are being imagined here?

The 1857 *Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford* US Supreme Court decision vividly demonstrated that for black people the supposedly inalienable rights that derived from citizenship within liberal democratic societies were always conditional. Liberal concepts of citizenship were, from their very inception, explicitly racialized. In the American context, for example, Melissa Nobles (2000) has shown how the supposedly universal ideals of the Enlightenment and the claims of egalitarianism and liberty that were produced by the American Revolution were born in contradiction with the actual practices of a profoundly racialized American civic society. Nobles observes that racial identity mattered precisely because citizenship and access to the polity were dependent upon it:

To be free and white and to be free and black were distinct political experiences. Free whites were presumptively citizens. In the early years of the republic, in the absence of federal statutory definition, they became citizens by choosing to support the republican cause and, by the early nineteenth century, by birthright. As citizens, they enjoyed the full benefits of political membership (including the franchise). The citizenship status of free blacks remained unclear throughout the antebellum period. (2000: 28)<sup>4</sup>

These significant elisions flow from how Gruneau (narrowly) defines the founding concerns of sociological analysis. It is not so much that Gruneau fails to 'add' race to his analysis but more fundamentally that his theoretical framework is itself structured in such a way as to preclude any serious consideration of the multiplicity of ideological determinations and inequalities that constitute the social field in the first place. Put simply, Gruneau's class-centric framing of the epistemic foundations of modern liberal democracies derives from his reliance on the 'classic sociological tradition' meaning there is little analytical room for theorizing domination, freedom and play (and hence sport) through anything other than a reified class lens. The weaknesses (as well as strengths) of the classical sociological tradition are then reproduced *in toto* by Gruneau himself.

The 'foundational' problems that Gruneau identifies concern *human agency* and the problem of *class inequality and structural change*. But the concept of 'the human' is left unproblematized. The opportunity to think through the (prior) category of the human, that is who was included and who excluded from this putatively universal nomenclature, is missed. Similarly it is not *social inequality* and the problem of structural change and social development that underpins the analysis but simply *class inequality* that is asserted to be the defining social division. Thus the analysis of the patterns of 'inequality, domination, and subordination in capitalist societies' (1983/1999: 48) starts and ends with social class 'and the particular organization of rules and resources that define class systems' (p. 48). From this premise Gruneau seeks to develop a general theory of industrial society and sport (p. 48) but, again, this 'industrial society' is one that is dislocated from the context of the colonial forms of exploitation and slave economics that

made western industrialization possible in the first place (Blaut 1993; Williams 1944/1994).

There is, of course, much debate among economic historians and others as to the precise role of colonialism, the slave trade and the exploitation of slave labor itself in providing the economic stimulus and wealth necessary for the early formation of European and particularly British capitalism, and the extent to which capitalism then relied upon and thus sustained 'New World' slavery. While the dry calculation as to the actual level of profit extracted from the 'costs of investment' remain open to debate, it is undoubtedly the case, as Robin Blackburn (1997) has shown, that the super-exploitation of slaves enabled the development of capitalist industrialization to proceed on a level and scale that would not otherwise have been possible. This is not to argue that trans-Atlantic slavery necessarily 'produced' capitalism, in any simple economic or even political sense, but rather:

that exchanges with the slave plantations helped British capitalism to make a breakthrough to industrialism and global hegemony ahead of its rivals. It also shows that industrial capitalism boosted slavery. The advances of capitalism and industrialism nourished, in fateful combination, the demand for exotic produce and the capacity to meet this large-scale demand through the deployment of slave labor. The slave systems of the late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New World had far outstripped those of the earlier mercantilist epoch. (Blackburn 1997: 572)<sup>5</sup>

Thus having disavowed race and gender as *constitutive of inequality* in the west, Gruneau's analysis proceeds with such issues safely relegated to epiphenomenal features, allowing the inter-play between capital, slavery and colonialism to disappear as core conceptual problematics.<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that questions of race and gender are completely disregarded. Gruneau is too sophisticated a thinker to simply ignore them and he is clearly aware of the analytical problems that race and gender present for his class-centric framework. But these concerns end up shunted to the conceptual sidelines via the obligatory, unsatisfactory, use of the apologetic endnote. At the start of his second chapter, which is titled 'Problems of Class Inequality and Structural Change in Play, Games, and Sports', Gruneau adds the following endnote:

I recognize, of course, that there are a great range of social relations beyond class relations which might influence people's collective powers to 'structure' play, games and sports and 'finish off' the range of meanings commonly associated with them. Gender, ethnicity, and religion, for example, all might be identified as influencing resources that can be brought to bear on the structuring of sport ... Yet, I think it important that this issue be understood in the context of the *ensemble of social relations* that define different ways of living in modern societies. In this study I have emphasized the role of class as a central consideration in understanding this totality. It is clear, however, that far more needs to be taken into account and I hope to do this in future work on the intersections of class and patriarchy. (1983/1999: 137, emphasis in original)

Non-class subjectivities are duly acknowledged as important and as 'influencing resources' on sport though it is unclear whether these social relations play an *a priori constitutive* role in the making of sport itself. Gender (although not race, which is presumably what the inclusion of 'ethnicity' above refers to) is deemed to be of some importance, but is left out of the current analysis to be included at some later stage. Chas Critcher (1986) argues that such omissions bring into question the degree to which the interventions of Hargreaves and Gruneau in particular offer a truly radical break with previous theories of sport and society. For Critcher the problem is that gender (although, again, notably not race) is central to any critical analysis of sport:

The principled and theoretical point is that we cannot and must not produce a supposedly radical theory of sport that is as gender-blind (and in some cases, more so) as the conventional wisdom we seek to supplant ... It may be a commonplace observation, though it cannot then be taken for granted, that sport is a predominately male sphere of activity. The theoretical implication of this empirical fact is that sport is one of the most powerful representations of gender relations in contemporary society. The very absence and marginalization of women gives expression to their subordination. (1986: 338–339)

Whether a color-blind approach is equally unproblematic is left unsaid here, although later Critcher does add, in rather tokenistic fashion, that the 'social divisions represented in and through sport are not exhausted by the categories of class and gender; race and age require *additional consideration*' (p. 339, emphasis added). Critcher thus criticizes the failure of hegemony theorists to center gender within the analysis *but does so at the expense of a critical engagement with race*. Race simply becomes another social division, which, we are presumably to infer, has no more significance to the structuring of western societies (and by extension to sport) than 'ageism'. The inability to think race, gender and class concurrently and to explore their points of intersectionality and mutual construction beyond reducing non-class identities to 'additional considerations' has proven to be a serious intellectual obstacle for Gramscian accounts of sport.

In fairness, Gruneau does recognize the importance of colonialism as a central facet of his theory of social development in what he calls the 'unique pattern of Canada's colonial development' (1983/1999: 63). Indeed, he uses the facts of colonialism as a way to rebut overly teleological accounts that rely upon an endogenous theory of social change from the supposedly pre-modern rural through to the industrial modern nation state. For example, Gruneau acknowledges that Canada 'has a colonial past, and its class structure and cultural formations cannot be understood without some reference to the *dependency relations* it has maintained with colonial metropolises and to its own *internal* relations of dependency and development' (p. 58).

Thus on the one hand colonialism is situated historically as the 'colonial past'. Canada is read as a geo-politically subordinate space to the



metropolises (i.e. Britain and France), hence the invocation of dependency theory as a way to think through relations between the 'core' and 'periphery'. But the closest we get to any discussion of the explicitly *racialized* nature of Canada as a *white* settler space is the suggestive but underdeveloped observation that this colonial past somehow has contemporary effects in structuring internal relations of dependency and development. What this actually means is unclear other than the ambiguous sense that forms of social domination from the colonial past influence the post/colonial present. Gruneau suggests at one point that the 'early forms of colonial games and recreation were local, unorganized, and often based on oral traditions that were indigenous to Canada's native peoples or, more commonly, imported from France and Britain and adapted to the Canadian situation' (p. 65). However, we are offered no account as to what these indigenous forms looked like and no discussion as to how these were displaced by the colonial Europeans in the forging of Canadian identity, nor of the violence of white colonialists towards native peoples during this historical moment.

It is apparent then that such an account of colonialism is limited. There is little sense of the *type* of (settler) colonial state Canada was and no discussion of the forms of racial privilege that could be obtained by white working-class European immigrants over the previously settled racialized others. The opportunity to theorize how race acted as an important mediator in the formation of white working-class identities (Roediger 2005) is lost. Colonial relations are locked into the past, negating the ways in which the Canadian state (and the production of Canadian citizenship itself) continues to engage in internal neocolonial practices of dispossession, disenfranchisement and dislocation long after the formal period of external colonial dependency came to an end.

Critical race scholars and post/colonial theorists have demonstrated how discourses of race have served to exclude certain Canadians from the category of national subject. Sunera Thobani, for example, maps the complex processes whereby Aboriginal peoples were compelled to concede land ownership claims in exchange for nominal rights of citizenship that were predicated on destroying notions of collectivism and instituting instead civil institutions based upon private property rights, wage labor and the development of a money-based market economy. Thobani states:

Citizenship, as the quintessential hallmark of liberal democracy, was thus racialized from its very importation into the country; Aboriginal peoples were granted no democratic space or extension of rights and entitlements within the national political institutions that came to govern their lives. Indigenous forms of sociopolitical system, their organization of rights, entitlements, obligations, and responsibilities which bound the members of these communities together, were simply deemed non-existent and irrelevant by the state ... The subordination of Aboriginal systems of rights by the colonial state was coterminous with, and necessary to, the development of citizenship rights for nationals. Canadian



citizenship, therefore, represented an assault on Native peoples, a drive towards their cultural and political elimination; it articulated relations not only between citizens and their state but also between citizens and Aboriginal peoples as Indians and, hence, as non-citizens. (2007: 82)

For a state that was (and continues to be) fractured by competing Anglophone and Francophone conceptions of nationhood and where the very question of civic rights, group recognition, multiculturalism and belonging have dominated national discussions – ‘a land troubled by questions of race and space’ as Rinaldo Walcott (2003: 44) puts it – Gruneau’s failure to push the analysis into a deeper consideration of how race frames these debates is surprising. The fact that colonial states were, by definition, charged with managing ‘difference’ and heterogeneity via regulation and repression (Goldberg 2002) does not surface within Gruneau’s account.

In this respect R.W. Connell (1999) is correct when he notes in the Foreword to the 1999 reissue of *Class, Sports and Social Development* that despite its undoubted merits, Gruneau’s reliance on the Marxism of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams was problematic as these authors had little to say about colonialism *per se*. Gruneau himself acknowledges that in addition to being in dialogue with a new generation of Canadian social scientists and political theorists, his analysis was ‘greatly influenced by some important work coming out of Britain in the field of “cultural studies”’ (1983/1999: xxx). Significantly, in the supporting endnote that lists the key works that influenced his analysis, Stuart Hall’s (1978) co-authored volume *Policing the Crisis* is not included (Gruneau 1983/1999: 131). While the work of Raymond Williams, Paul Willis, and Hall and Jefferson’s *Resistance through Rituals* are all name-checked, the omission of *Policing the Crisis* is significant as this text marks the moment of Hall’s intervention against the disavowal of race and the inability to theorize racism on the part of Williams, Thompson and the New Left in general (Farred 2003). *Policing the Crisis* opened an analytical space for the interrogation and reworking of class and class politics to account for imperialism, colonialism and racism that would later be more fully developed by leading black British intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy, Hazel Carby and Kobena Mercer, among others (Carrington 2010).

Connell continues that while colonialism is discussed as an empirical fact, it does not register as a core conceptual issue: ‘*Class, Sport and Development* has little sense of imperialism as a system, nor of sport as part of a world structure of hegemony in social relations’ (1999: viii). Thus apart from occasional remarks, Native peoples are largely written out of the account of Canada’s social development and Canada’s policies of displacement, disenfranchisement and underdevelopment as a colonial settler state (Bannerji 2000; Mackey 2002) are generally ignored.

In part, as previously suggested, this is due to the failure of class-centric hegemony theorists to theorize the capitalist state – be it marked as a colonial settler state or otherwise – as inherently racialized. David Theo Goldberg (2002) has convincingly argued that the modern nation state, as conceived in

the west, was from its very inception racialized and racializing: 'As much as the modern state has been about anything – about increasing bureaucratization and rationalization, about increasingly sophisticated forms of democratization and social control, about the rule of law and the control of capital – it has been about increasingly sophisticated forms and techniques of racial formation, power, and exclusion' (2002: 49; see also Omi and Winant 1994: 77–91).<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, if the treatment and place of Native Canadians is given tokenistic acknowledgment then the position of black Canadians is equally problematic. It is not until the last page of *Class, Sport and Social Development* that the presence of black Canadians is acknowledged. Gruneau's analysis unintentionally propagates what Katherine McKittrick has termed the 'surprise' of discovering blackness in the Canadian context wherein the nation's dominant myths and narratives have served to silence and eradicate black Canada, creating a cartographic erasure of race, or what she labels Canada's 'systemic blackness' (2006: 92–97). Towards the very end of the book, Gruneau (1983/1999: 112) acknowledges the significance of the 'noncompetitive games movement of the early 1970s' and the 'important challenges posed by the struggle to equalize opportunities for women or blacks', but goes on to suggest that such interventions 'do not appear to have had much transformative consequence. I believe part of the problem for this has been the inability of these emergent and oppositional movements to offer anything more than mildly reformist strategies' (p. 112).

While acknowledging that the struggles of women and blacks in and around sport have been 'important', these interventions are then dismissed as merely 'reformist'. This is done on the basis that such 'oppositional movements' are both too particular (as opposed, presumably, to the universalist politics of class struggle) and concerned with inclusion *into* rather than transformation *of* capitalist hegemony. Gruneau further argues that such non-class social movements have failed to be transformative because they have lacked a broader vision and theory of freedom. Such reformist politics 'have never really been incorporated into the kinds of oppositional forces (e.g., political parties, unions, etc.) necessary to coordinate various pressures against dominant conceptions of capitalist life and channel them into the construction of *alternative structures*' (1983/1999: 112). For hegemony theorists, the only 'radical' space of contestation is class politics which is eventually read as redundant due to the eventual 'winning out' of bourgeois values over those of the working class. Critcher himself, while critical of Hargreaves and Gruneau on this point, proceeds to duly close down the possibility that sport can any longer offer alternative modes of political struggle, resistance or change. The contestations through which sport marked its formation during the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, are, Critcher asserts, largely at an end. Capitalism has proved proficient at incorporating most forms of protest while the State has successfully promoted the notion of 'self-health care' such that sport has become little more than a self-disciplining mechanism supported by various fun-runs, jogging crazes and (internalized) desires for 'regular exercise'.

Thus, just at the historical moment when women and people of color have entered into certain sports in unprecedented numbers, and have challenged the white masculinist ethos of many sports cultures, sport is now read as having reached the end of its hegemonic cycle. The fits of contestation/resistance that marked sport's development have largely been displaced. All we are now left with is an essentially conservative, and hence ideologically reproductive, culture of modern sport. 'Put in more theoretical terms,' Critcher announces, 'the conservatism of sport is an example of the near-total imposition of capitalist values on a popular culture activity. *The dynamic Process of hegemony has become a fixed state*' (1986: 340, emphasis added).<sup>8</sup>

Now that Critcher, and others, have decided that sport can no longer contribute anything meaningful towards the long revolution of social change, all that is left, we are informed, is to call off the cultural studies search for moments of disequilibrium and resistance: 'if a central part of cultural analysis is the identification of potential sources of contestation, then sport may not deserve a central place. If there is to remain a focus on sport in contemporary society, its validation may be as a study of a set of social practices that converse and do not challenge the existing social order' (1986: 341).

Why hegemony of all concepts has now suddenly and somewhat bizarrely, given its earlier definition, become a *fixed state* within the domain of sports is left unexplained. Quite how we would make sense of the anti-colonial struggles around cricket in the 1950s, the political protests around civil, sporting and human rights that marked the late 1960s, the global anti-apartheid sporting campaigns of the 1970s, through to the debates over gender equality and sexuality of the 1970s and 1980s, and the current struggles over inclusion, belonging and identity that have marked contemporary western sports cultures in the context of multiculturalism, is all left unsaid. The direct implication, however, is that such forms of protest that have challenged hegemonic forces *within* sport do not really count as, in the final analysis, they fail (allegedly) to connect with and to broaden questions of political economy *outside* of sport.

Gruneau (1983/1999: 112) suggests that the struggles 'against bureaucratization, sexual and racial oppression, and the constraints imposed on social life by the hierarchical and repressive features of state power' will only be successful once they locate themselves within 'the broader forms of class struggle' aimed at 'creating a more humanely rational society' (p. 112). We could, of course, easily reverse this injunctive and suggest that it is only when the politics of class struggle takes seriously and locates *itself* within questions of racism and sexual oppression, homophobia and the politics of recognition, that a more democratic and humane society will become possible.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, Critcher and Gruneau end up with an analysis of sport's supposed innate conservatism that perhaps owes more to the pessimism of the Frankfurt School – because no obvious signs of class struggle can, apparently, be found anymore, due, presumably to sport's capitulation to

the instrumental rationality of capital – than it does to cultural studies’ optimism for engaged everyday struggles. William Morgan notes that critics such as Gruneau and Critcher, having failed to find effective forms of class contestation to dominant values, ‘pessimistically conclude that sport has little emancipatory potential to speak of, and so deflect our attention to other forms of popular culture. In so arguing, however, they gloss over an important residue of freedom and emancipation embedded in the gratuitous rationality of sport’ (1988: 834).

Harry Cleaver reminds us that there are undoubtedly millions of people who engage in athletic activities around the world outside of what he calls the ‘capitalist management’ of both professional and school sports. Such activity, Cleaver (2009: xxxii) concedes, ‘may, effectively, simply reproduce labor power; no doubt some people exercise just to be able to continue working, which is one of the reasons why many businesses ... have provided “physical fitness” facilities to their workers. However, some, perhaps a great deal, of athletic activity provides both physical and mental energy that bolsters struggle rather than work for business’. However, even these limited sport/work locales offer ways to rethink active worker struggles. Cleaver continues that when ‘waged workers use corporate facilities to regain energy lost on the job so that they can struggle for better working conditions, higher wages or less work, it’s a nice piece of *détournement* (as the Situationists might say)’ (p. xxxii).

But, Cleaver suggests, most athletic activity that escapes capitalist management probably takes place beyond the walls of corporations. Rather than succumbing to the belief that sport no longer offers anything other than self-alienating activity, we should instead orientate radical accounts of sport towards those spaces that escape, defy and rearticulate the instrumental rationality of capital. Developing this broadly ‘autonomist’ reading of Marx, Cleaver concludes:

Reversing Marx’s analysis of the four kinds of alienation, we can postulate that non-alienated athletics would presumably involve: (1) athletes’ control over their own activity in individual and collective self-expression, (2) activity that creates bonds among players, (3) activity whose ‘product’, whether immediate satisfaction or spectacle, would be under the control of the players and (4) be organized as a creative realization of human species-being. Have such non-alienated athletics existed? Can we find moments of such non-alienated activity? When, where and to what degree? Determining the answers to these questions requires finding and analyzing examples of self-organized sports ... But does the absence of organized ‘movements’ mean the absence of self-organized athletic activity that contributes to social struggle, and potentially to revolutionary struggle? I don’t think so. (2009: xxii–xxxiii)

Class-centric hegemony theorists miss out on precisely those forms of sporting resistance to the logics of contemporary commodified sport, that, for example, can often be found within black recreational sporting spaces through which sports become a modality for self-actualization and the

reaffirmation of previously abject identities (Carrington 1998a, 1999). Thus, despite the always obligatory reference to C.L.R. James,<sup>10</sup> we end up with undoubtedly learned and in many ways theoretically sophisticated accounts of the formation of modern sports in the west, but accounts that can only achieve their degree of conceptual and theoretical precision by negating the historical reality of European colonialism that produced ideas about race and that saturated the very categories of 'class', 'the west' and even, as we shall see, 'sport' itself.

What is required, then, is a critical theory of sport that remains attuned to the fact that 'imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity' (McClintock 1995: 5); a cultural theory of sport that can begin to think of race, gender and class as 'articulated categories' that come into existence in and through each other, rather than seeing them as discrete and distinct realms of social experience in which class is always understood, in the last instance, to be the primary category of analysis.

### Sport, Colonialism and the Primitives

Modern sport was born in the age of colonialism. The formal codification of many of the sports that would eventually achieve a dominant position within the global sports market took place during a period when European colonialism was at its height. While historians often trace the antecedents of modern sports back to sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and in some cases earlier still, the spectacular growth and institutionalization of the physically competitive activities that we recognize today as 'sports' occurred more recently. The period from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century witnessed the sportization of European folk games into an assemblage of rule-governed and institutionally sanctioned cultural pursuits. Local and regional variations became increasingly regularized. By the end of the nineteenth century, national, and soon after international, sets of standardized rules and codes of conduct had been established for most sports. This was seen as a desirable principle (if not quite yet universally practiced and not without dispute as to *which* set of rules would prevail) that reshaped how sport would and should be played. Thus the Enlightenment urge to map, demarcate and master both the physical and social environment was reflected in sport's material development. The heterogeneity of disparate, sometimes chaotic and often unruly pastimes largely gave way to the formalization of homogenous, ordered competitive sports that in turn would provide the locus for modern forms of identity and identification.<sup>11</sup>

National sporting institutions, as Barry Smart suggests, 'brought order and coherence to competitive sport within the territorial boundaries of the nation state. They introduced and regulated local, regional and national competitions and in turn promoted the prospect of international sport' (2005: 36).

This moment saw the rapid establishment of bureaucracies that would assert their rights as ‘governing bodies’ to oversee how actual bodies would in fact be allowed to play. This process was most clearly evident in the extraordinarily large numbers of sports that were codified and institutionalized within Britain alone during this period. Significant examples included the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews (1834), the Football Association (1863), the Rugby Football Union (1871), the Amateur Athletic Association (1880), the Amateur Boxing Association (1881), the Lawn Tennis Association (1888) and the Rugby League (1895), among others.

This sporting history, of course, maps directly onto the period, as Edward Said puts it, ‘of unparalleled European expansion’ (1978/2003: 41) when, from around 1815 until 1914, European direct colonial rule dramatically increased from 35 to 85 percent of the world’s surface. The two great imperial powers of that time, namely Britain and France, are also the two countries that did most to institute the national and international codes of sporting conduct and governance. This has led many historians to argue that sports are an example of western cultural diffusionism *par excellence*. Where the Empire went, so did the sports of the colonizers. This dominant historical narrative of sport’s evolution tends to locate it as a singularly European and modern invention. The origins of the many forms of competitive team games found across the globe today are more often than not traced back to Victorian Britain. Here, special attention is given to the role of school masters and the graduates of Britain’s leading public schools in shaping not just the formal rules but the very ethos of modern sports that became defined by a logic of muscular Christianity and codes of martial masculinity that sought to produce virile and physically supreme white Christian imperialists of healthy mind and strong body (Mangan 1998). Thus, an ‘imperial masculinity consonant with empire-building became a gender imperative’ (Mangan 2008: 1083).<sup>12</sup> The historian J.A. Mangan notes:

With some justification, it may be claimed that the New Imperial Britain of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras attempted to socialize a young elite into attitudes fundamental to the ambitions of the respective political regimes. This conditioning involved values based on four interlocking spheres of sociopolitical consciousness: the need to establish an ideal of selfless service to the state; the need to establish a sense of racial superiority as a cornerstone of this selflessness; the need to establish and maintain an imperial chauvinism; and the need to engender uncritical conformity to the values of the group. A major purpose of this interlinked set of values was to create a ‘martial middle-class’ ready to serve the nation in the plethora of its imperial struggles in both societies ... In the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, games in schooldays and hunting in post-school days represented, ensured and institutionalized upper-class support for martial imperialization. (2008: 1101)

Even sports that are now perceived as largely or uniquely American affairs are still regarded in their inception as reactions to or extensions of a more general European/British diffusionist trend. Thus games formerly



played in Britain were often modified in the colonies to produce new 'national pastimes' as an explicit rejection of Anglophile associations (in America rounders becomes baseball). Or, conversely, certain sports were taken up by colonial settler communities precisely to maintain a link to the motherland, even where such adaptations at once functioned to produce national mores that were connected to but distinct from notions of Englishness (such as the embrace of cricket in Australia). Thus, the varied global reactions to cricket, that most symbolically English of sports, is seen as a shorthand way to chart the entire history of Britain's imperial successes and failures. 'From the remnants of wickets and bats,' Allen Guttman asserts, 'future archeologists of material culture will be able to reconstruct the boundaries of the British Empire' (2004: 77).

Sports are seen to have 'diffused', largely unmodified, from the European center outward. Where non-western sporting forms were found by the colonizers these were either 'supplanted' and displaced or subjected to a process of 'modernization' such that 'traditional games' eventually conformed to the logic of modern sport (Guttman 1994: 3–4). Although there is debate as to what the key motivators were for this process, be it (economic) capitalism or (rational) modernity, or some combination of the two, and latterly whether such cultural process should properly be labeled cultural *imperialism* (read as imposition) or cultural *hegemony* (read as negotiation), the underlying concept of *sporting diffusionism* from which these debates spring (see Guttman 1994) is itself rarely challenged.

Even when there is a questioning of the sports diffusionist model this is largely done from *within* an avowedly European-centric framework. While there is much discussion as to *how far back* we can trace the antecedents of modern sport – seventeenth century France rather than Victorian Britain, or further to the period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, or even to classical antiquity – and disputes as to the role of various European states in shaping these developments, these debates rely on a more or less self-enclosed theory of endogenous European cultural development. Mention of athletic pursuits in other parts of the world, normally Japan, India and China, is sometimes made and occasionally an acknowledgment is given that similar forms of physical culture can be seen in the ancient civilizations of Central America, but these tend to be treated as discrete local variants that do not directly affect, except as interesting points of comparison, the central story of *the* history of sport which is read as a largely internal European affair.<sup>13</sup>

Allen Guttman's (1978) Weberian typology of modern sports, first expounded in *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* which defined sport not so much in terms of chronology but rather by a set of interrelated formal-structural characteristics, has become the standard, if occasionally contested, definition within sport history and beyond.<sup>14</sup> Drawing on anthropological work on the relationship between play and social structure, an account is offered of different types of play that range from basic games of chance and mimicry to more complex forms of competition that involve various levels of skill and strategy. It is suggested that

'primitive' societies are marked by simple forms of spontaneous play, whereas advanced societies develop more complex forms of rule-bound play. Historical change occurs through a latent evolutionary progression from the primitive, to the ancient and medieval, and eventually to the modern. Thus, as societies become more complex so do their forms of play. 'Structured games mirror structured society', as Guttmann (1978: 10) summarizes it. This structuralist account is then used to provide a set of seven core characteristics that are claimed to define and distinguish 'modern sport' from that which came before: these characteristics are secularism, equality of opportunity, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification and the quest for records (1978: 16).

On this basis, Guttmann implies that the 'primitive' (never clearly defined and left somewhat vague as to its precise meaning) is incapable of producing sport.<sup>15</sup> 'Primitive cultures', suggests Guttmann, 'rarely have a word for sport in our sense. If we hold strictly to our definition of sport as a nonutilitarian physical contest, we may be tempted to say that primitive men had no sports at all' (1978: 16). This argument is based on the notion that 'primitive cultures' are ontologically incapable of producing sports due to their assumed inability to make adequate distinctions between the profane and the sacred within the social structures of their societies, hence their lack of 'secularism' renders them incompletely modern. However, Guttmann pulls back from this 'temptation' to permanently expunge the primitive from the domain of sport. Guttmann (1978: 19) suggests that such '[d]ogmatic proclamations of negative universals ("Primitive peoples have *no* secular sports") are unwise'. In the very next sentence, Guttmann continues to suggest that, nonetheless, 'sports, as opposed to "physical exercises", may indeed have entered the lives of primitive adults primarily in conjunction with some form of religious significance. It is a fault of our own pervasive secularism that we tend to underestimate the cultic aspects of primitive sports' (p. 19).

Despite such cautions, underpinning Guttmann's framework, a framework that has been foundational to much sociological work on sport, is a series of problematic binaries. These operate to distinguish the modern from the traditional, the west and the rest, Europe and its Others, and ultimately the rational civilized moderns contrasted against the irrational violent primitives who, we are told, can barely even speak the language of sport. Rather than contesting whether or not these particular seven characteristics really do define and distinguish modern sports, I want instead to critically assess the preconditional assumptions and tropes of alterity that infuse the approach itself.<sup>16</sup>

Within the logic of such modernization theories, the primitives are located outside of modern time and space (and by extension sport). The primitives are not simply pre-Enlightenment European subjects, as these are separately designated as the ancients (which can therefore include the Aztecs as much as the Athenians, as both have complex if not fully developed civilizations unlike, presumably, the primitives) and the medievalists.

Defining modern sport is not just a question of chronology. Sport signifies something deeper about the very meaning of western modernity and its constitution. Modernity is cleansed of violence and violence itself is read as a characteristic of the primitive. So a sport such as American football, with its ritualistic, linguistic, symbolic and actual forms of bodily violence that would otherwise render it 'primitive', is instead reframed as an example of a civilizing practice that helps to dissipate latent forms of evolutionary violence that still reside within the modern subject, allowing for a relatively harmless cathartic release of aggression. Thus, since 'football combines primitive elements with a sophisticated complex of teamwork and strategy, it seems especially well suited for its dual function as a model of modern social organization and as an occasion for atavistic release' (Guttman 1978: 135). The complex patterning of rule-governed behavior that makes sport possible, combined with the techniques and strategies that are prerequisites for success, indicate that what appears to be a primitive activity of barely concealed violent excess is in fact an example of how the modern western subject defines itself via the very notion of emotional control, cognitive calculation and bodily mastery: 'football requires a complex strategy. It is more than neanderthalic mayhem' (Guttman 1978: 124).<sup>17</sup>

We get a clearer sense as to who 'the primitives' are when Guttman describes *modern day* 'Zulu soccer players of Durban, South Africa' (1978: 18) as exhibiting some of these anti-modern tendencies. Guttman qualifies his attempt to project contemporary black Africans back into pre-history by suggesting that such athletes are 'not, strictly speaking, drawn from a primitive society' (p. 18). Instead, Zulu football players are 'members of a transitional culture between tribal and modern social organization' (p. 18). From this we can deduce that African 'tribespeople' are the real primitives, while Zulu players with their superstitious pre- and post-game rituals are caught in a 'transitional culture' between western modernity and African tradition – neither fully primitive any more since they have discovered football, but not fully westernized either, as they still cling to their irrational forms of witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>18</sup> Thus, South African Zulus, standing in for the (semi-)primitive, manage to turn even something as thoroughly modern (read British) as Association Football into an object almost unrecognizable to the western eye: 'Their game, soccer, is the most widespread of modern ballgames, but their perception of the game assimilates it to a way of life anything but modern' (p. 18).

The primitive thus becomes the Other through and against which the modern sporting self is defined. Primitive games can never be sports and the closer an activity is to that which the primitives play, the less it becomes sport. Thus Guttman contrasts ancient Greek athletic contests not so much by their distance *from* modern sports but rather by their very *closeness to* primitive games: 'Although Greek sports may be conceived of as the ancestors of modern sports, the physical contests of Olympia and Delphi were culturally closer to those of primitive peoples than to our own Olympics' (1978: 20).

Even children of the Enlightened west (including here the supposedly economically advanced and civilizationaly complex Japanese) are better able to grasp the requirements and core characteristics of modern sport than those doomed to socialization within primitive culture, where counting and even numeracy itself are, apparently, so weak as to barely figure within the primitive's developmentally truncated society. Thus the teleological impulse of the modern subject to rationalize, master and quantify, that is, *to be able to reason*, is simply lacking in the underdeveloped primitive who is destined never to understand let alone appreciate sport:

There can hardly be an American, a Frenchman, or a Japanese who did not, as a child, while playing alone, count the numbers of consecutive times that he or she tossed a ball into the air and caught it again. If one can throw, one can count. One *must* count. It is a childish game that is far more typical of modern than of primitive society, where quantification is not a *modus vivendi*. (Guttmann 1978: 47)

In short, the primitive mind is incapable of complex thought, hence the primitive produces a simple social structure wherein the play of the primitive remains underdeveloped, lacking the complex, multi-dimensional elements of calculation, quantification, secularism, specialization of roles and so on, that are claimed to define western, and hence modern, sport. This in turn means that there is little possibility for 'sport' for the primitive, who even when shown how to play the game distorts sport into something irredeemably Other.

### Sporting Diffusionism: Rethinking the Myth of Modern Sport

Some critical reflections on this theory of sport are in order. J.M. Blaut (1993) has convincingly argued that 'rationalist' accounts of the modern versus the primitive are based on a series of problematic and in some cases simply erroneous historical, anthropological and geographical claims. Blaut demonstrates how 'rationality' itself, as a discourse, was central to the justification of colonialism. Far from being a neutral description of objective social forces, relations and ways of thinking, the invocation of rationality operated as an ideological framework for explaining the 'superiority' of European economic and political progress compared to the rest of the world. The rationality of western science was at the same time a defining feature of its own self-definition (how science came to know itself) and also an important way to allocate and sanction social inequalities both between the 'west and the rest' as well as within western liberal democracies.

Hence 'rationality' was used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to construct the very concept of the white, western, masculine self and became one of the key justifications, as was argued earlier, for why certain subjects, more often women, Native peoples and blacks, should be restricted from the public sphere and hence from citizenship due to their

supposed inherent *irrationality*. Enlightenment scholars thus made rationality into a defining characteristic of European history. As Blaut (1993: 96) puts it, European thinkers unquestionably accepted and propagated this myth: 'Europeans became more rational as history progressed, just as children acquire rationality in the course of ontogenetic development. Ancient people had been not merely less intelligent, but also much more governed by emotions and passions than by intellect, just as is the case with modern children.' For the non-European, colonial tutelage would be the mechanism through which the colonized could eventually achieve some level of parity with the colonizer. Revolts by the colonized, who decided that they neither wanted nor required such paternalistic overseeing, were seen as irrational, violent outbursts, further confirming their stunted cognitive growth and limited ability to learn from the master.

The 'primitive mind' was deemed incapable of abstract thought, being driven instead by emotion. The primitive's own language was an outward sign of the fundamentally child-like mind. Blaut argues that this barely concealed racist doctrine underwent important changes during the middle of the twentieth century as 'modernization' theory sought to displace the cruder versions of this account. Thus:

'Colonial tutelage' gave way to 'diffusion of modernizing innovations'. Non-Europeans no longer were 'natives', and no longer were described as 'childlike'. In place of the notions of 'primitive mind' and 'primitive language' came the notion of *traditional mentality*. Non-Europeans are 'traditional' in two senses: they lack 'modern cognitive abilities', that is the ability to think theoretically and scientifically, and they lack 'modern attitudes' of the sort that push a person to achieve higher things, to reject the old, and so on. (1993: 98)

Rationality becomes not simply a descriptor of Modern Man but more importantly a way to explain social change itself. Non-Europe is stagnant and traditional because it *lacks the agent of change*, that is rationality. Today this sense of superiority is rarely attributed to racial or biological difference but, Blaut suggests, in the background of modernization theories lies the old colonial assumption of simple ontological difference: 'causality is consigned to the impenetrable mists of ancient history, with perhaps an occasional speculation about ancient free-living European peasants or the evils of Oriental despotism, or with ritual citation of Max Weber. For many historians, I suspect, the idea of European rationality is simply axiomatic. Europeans, for whatever reason, are just built that way' (1993: 104).

This way of understanding world events was not simply an account of colonialism and its effects but was a part of the colonial project itself; it was, as Blaut's title puts it, *the colonizer's model of the world*. This model assumes that Europeans are the makers of history, that Europe shapes, dictates and drives forward social change while the rest of the world stagnates and is dragged along. The world is thus imagined as having a center and a periphery, an Inside and Outside. The Inside leads, the Outside follows, the Inside

innovates, the Outside imitates (Blaut 1993: 1). Diffusionism, or rather what Blaut terms *Eurocentric diffusionism*, establishes itself as a theory to explain the way cultural processes move across and over the world's surface as a whole, flowing 'out' of the European sector and towards the non-European: 'This is the natural, normal, logical, and ethical flow of culture, of innovation, of human causality. Europe, eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside. Europe is the source of most diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient' (p. 1).

Underlying this worldview are a series of linked claims that suggest that the largely autonomous rise of Europe, or the 'European miracle', occurred largely because Europe was more advanced and progressive compared to the other regions of the world prior to 1492. Blaut (1993: 59) defines the myth of the European miracle as:

the doctrine that the rise of Europe resulted, essentially, from historical forces generated within Europe itself; that Europe's rise above other civilizations, in terms of level of development or rate of development or both, began before the dawn of the modern era, before 1492; that the post-1492 modernization of Europe came about essentially because of the working out of these older internal forces, not because of the inflowing of wealth and innovations from non-Europe; and that the post-1492 history of the non-European (colonial) world was essentially an outflowing of modernization from Europe. The core of the myth is the set of arguments about ancient and medieval Europe that allow the claim to be made, as truth, that Europe in 1492 was more modernized, or was modernizing more rapidly, than the rest of the world.

Europe's internal qualities and unique characteristics are seen to have enabled it to achieve its dominant world position, thus Europe's 'modernization' starts from within (unique innovation) and spreads outwards (diffusion). Modernity itself becomes a singularly European achievement, such that modernity is European, Europe is modernity. Colonialism is seen to be exterior to this formation, therefore 'colonialism must mean, for the Africans, Asians, and Americans, not spoliation and cultural destruction but, rather, the receipt-by-diffusion of European civilization: modernization' (1993: 2).

Drawing on and critiquing extensive data on issues such as supposed biological differences between the 'races', demographic rates of population growth, environmental factors, differences in technology, through to accounts of the state, class and family structures, Blaut shows that such issues cannot in fact be shown to have 'caused' the dominance of Europe. Instead Blaut argues that the key factors were the huge increase in wealth that flowed into Europe from the sixteenth century onwards as a result of colonization, married to fortuitous circumstances of Europe's geographical location in the midst of the expansion of both trade routes and emerging capital markets.<sup>19</sup> Blaut further suggests that although the model of essential European uniqueness and racial superiority has been challenged over the years, and the more overtly racist versions have been discredited and rejected, there still remains a general framework of imagining human history



that falls back upon this narrative. Blaut describes it as a form of 'tunnel history' that relies on the idea that the world does in fact have an Inside and an Outside, and that what really counts (historically speaking) is what has occurred Inside.

This model is then used to explain cultural diffusionism. Diffusionism in and of itself is not necessarily problematic when taken simply to refer to the spread and movement of ideas from one place to another that leads to cultural development and change. But there is still the prior issue as to when and where certain innovations came about, the problem of 'independent invention'. Diffusionism becomes Eurocentric when it is premised on the notion that true invention tends to occur in one place (Europe) where innovation and change are seen as a natural state and that similar forms of invention could not have happened elsewhere. The basic cause of this innovative progress is the sense of European spirit or special intellect (the muscular Christians of Britain's public schools) 'that leads to creativity, imagination, invention, innovation, rationality, and a sense of honor and ethics: "European values"' (1993: 15). Non-Europe's 'stalled progress' is thus seen to be a result of this intellectual and spiritual lack. Other regions are sometimes acknowledged to have been 'rational' to some degree at certain points in their history, such as the Middle East during biblical times, China, Japan and India at moments, although other parts of the world such as Africa 'are unqualifiedly lacking in rationality' (1993: 15). The only way for such backward regions to progress out of their stagnant traditionalism is to come into contact with and benefit from European ingenuity: colonialism.

Another key proposition that underlies the Eurocentric diffusionist model is the claim that ideas that diffuse back into Europe must be uncivilized and atavistic – black magic, sorcery, witchcraft, vampires and the like. Moving farther away from civilized Europe is akin to traveling backwards in time: 'Thus the so-called "stone-age people" of the Antipodes are likened to the Paleolithic Europeans. The argument here is that diffusion works in successive waves, spreading outward, such that the farther outward we go the farther backward we go in terms of cultural evolution' (1993: 16–17).<sup>20</sup> The key characteristics of the European Inside come to be understood as inventiveness, rationality, abstract thought, theoretical reasoning, discipline, adulthood, sanity, science and progress. In contrast, the non-European periphery gets defined in terms of imitativeness, irrationality, emotion, instinct, practical reasoning, spontaneity, childhood, insanity and stagnation (1993: 17). Blaut argues that this classical form of European diffusionist thought materialized during the nineteenth century largely to justify the exploitation of colonized lands and to explain why Europe held such dominance:

The era of classical diffusionism was the era of classical colonialism, the era when European expansion was so swift and so profitable that European superiority seemed almost to be a law of nature. Diffusionism, in its essence, codified this apparent fact into a general theory about European historical, cultural, and psychological superiority, non-European inferiority, and the inevitability

and absolute righteousness of the process by which Europe and its traits diffused to non-Europe. Diffusionism then ramified the general theory into innumerable empirical beliefs in all the human sciences, in philosophy, in the arts. (Blaut 1993: 26)

It could be argued therefore that the history of sport (as dominant narrative) and sports history (as discipline) are indebted to a model of Eurocentric diffusionist thought and logic. In tautological fashion, Europe is seen as the unique incubator of all forms of meaningful physical activity that can be properly understood as sport, and sport is defined in such a way as to preclude other forms of physical culture from being sport. Europe is the place where sport 'starts' and then 'spreads' on the wings of colonialism. There is little cross-cultural diffusion (Blaut 1993: 167) in the development of sports themselves and the influence of sporting forms from outside of Europe on 'modern' sports is either downplayed or ignored altogether. Deeply racialized and gendered colonial tropes of social development infuse the narrative. Binaries, often invoked unproblematically, of modernity/tradition, the rational/irrational and the civilized/primitive, work to structure how modern sport is defined and understood. Barry Smart, for example, drawing on the work of Michael Oriard, notes that 'the process of transformation from pre-modern, disorganized and disorderly recreational activities to formalized modern sports has been described as an evolution from "primitive physicality" to "reason and order"' (2005: 31).

Sporting modernity becomes reliant upon a notion of 'tradition' in order to produce itself. That the irrational is often an outcome of rationality itself and further how the civilized only comes into being through acts of great savagery (genocidal war, systemic torture, colonial subjugation) is disavowed so as to produce a clear line of ontological distinction between the (masculine) modern and the (feminine) primitive. As Sandra Harding notes, '[t]radition is always represented as feminine, primitive, in modernity's past. Modernity is obsessively preoccupied with contrasting itself and its distinctive features with these Others; the feminine and the primitive always appear in modernity's narratives as the negatives to modernity's positives' (2008: 202).

We might better formulate sport, then, as embodying not so much modernity and its self-declared properties – secularization, rationality, meritocracy and so on – but rather the *incomplete, partial and paradoxical* elements of competing modernities that refuse to be disavowed. Much ideological work has been necessary to hide modern sport's supposedly premodern, anti-rational tendencies – gratuitous violence, unpredictability, emotional instability – while these very attributes are actually *constitutive elements* that help to create sport's appeal and to sustain its very possibility. Put another way, sport, like the claims of liberal democracy – cultural tolerance, ethical decency, civic nationalism and citizenship, deliberative philosophical reason – should be conceptualized more as a particular physical manifestation and representation of modernist myths born of colonial conflict than as the actual instantiation

of the 'truth' of such claims. These are, as Robert Young following Jacques Derrida puts it, the colonizer's *white mythologies*: 'western philosophy, through which the west in part defines itself, operates by exactly this kind of double logic which conflates a myth with a universal truth, the myth of reason for Reason' (Young 2001: 421).

Just as 'citizenship' is imagined as a universal category somehow free from the colonial state from which it was produced, so 'sport' is magically removed from the conditions of white supremacy, patriarchy and colonial governance to which it is necessarily tied. The ideological work necessary to produce a de-racialized and genderless liberal theory of citizenship is the same work undertaken to fabricate sport as actually constituting a meritocratic and egalitarian space of 'fair play' and 'level playing fields', conflating in its own way sporting myth with universal truth, the myth of rationality for Modern Sport. Sport's 'power' comes as much from the ability of some to exclude others from rightful participation and ownership as it does from its own 'intrinsic' rules and characteristics. The non-sporting 'primitive' turns out to be, in the end, a fiction of the western imagination.

### Césaire and Fanon Played Football Too

Given both the centrality of sports to the cultural project of western colonialism and the deeply problematic way colonialism itself has been figured within much of the scholarship on sport, it might be expected that critical work on colonialism and race would have much to say about sport. But this is not so. It is not even the case that sport is discussed, analyzed and then found to be institutionally and/or politically deficient as regards the broader politics of subaltern resistance and colonial struggle. It is, simply put, that sport as a cultural practice and social institution is not considered or theorized at all. Students have to read long and hard to find even a cursory examination of sport within the texts of leading post/colonial theorists and critical scholars of race and culture.

Opportunities to theorize sport beyond a footnote mention tend to be missed within the work of contemporary post/colonial scholars. For example, Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, expertly explores, in part, 'the historically different but persistent ways in which women served as the boundary markers of imperialism, the ambiguous mediators of what appeared to be – at least superficially – the predominantly male agon of empire' (1995: 24; see also 1995: 361). Agon, of course, implies a sense of contest, a gathering for the act of physical competition often associated with the sporting games of ancient Greece (Hawhee 2004: 15). However, agon here is stripped of its sporting connotations thus closing down the opportunity to theorize sport itself as distinct cultural practice that was immersed in deeply gendered forms of imperial boundary making. Hence there is little discussion within McClintock's hugely influential text of sport as a

key aspect of colonial racial governance and the use of gender and race as markers of empire.

However sport is not completely absent. Sport is briefly mentioned in the context of describing the polyvocal and contradictory nature of fetishes, including 'national fetishes such as flags, team colors and sport mascots' (1995: 202). This is later followed up in a discussion of the ways in which racist nationalist movements in South Africa, adopting the Nazi use of fetish political symbols, used 'spectacle' as a way to produce racial narratives of white hyper-nationalism. Challenging Benedict Anderson's argument that print technology was the key factor in the mass mobilization of, and identification with, nationalism, as the access to such print forms was limited to a relatively small literate elite, McClintock instead suggests that national collectivity has been primarily mobilized and managed via certain forms of mass commodity spectacle:

nationalism inhabits the realm of fetishism. Despite the commitment of European nationalism to the idea of the nation-state as the embodiment of rational progress, nationalism has been experienced and transmitted primarily through fetishism – precisely the cultural form that the Enlightenment denigrated as the antithesis of Reason. More often than not, nationalism takes shape through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects – flags, uniforms, airplane logos, maps, anthems, national flowers, national cuisines and architectures as well as through the organization of collective fetish spectacle – in team sports, military displays, mass rallies, the myriad forms of popular culture and so on. (1995: 374–375)

These are all provocative and suggestive observations but are left at that. In a later section McClintock discusses the historical marginalization of women within the political activities of the African National Congress and women's struggles to express their political agency, quoting one activist as saying: 'We women can no longer remain in the background or concern ourselves only with domestic and sport affairs. The time has arrived for women to enter the political field and stand shoulder to shoulder with their men in the struggle' (1995: 381). It is interesting that sport is relegated, alongside the domestic sphere, to the realm of the *non-political*. 'Sport' and 'domestic' coupled as standing against and outside the 'political field'. We might begin to rethink the politics of sport, space and colonialism in light of an important aspect of McClintock's general argument that the 'domestic sphere', far from being a space of apolitical private activity, was in fact infused with the tensions of imperialism while domesticity itself denoted a particular social relation to power, or as she puts it, 'as domestic space became racialized, colonial space became domesticated' (1995: 36). In other words, and as I explore in more detail in the following chapter, we perhaps need to consider further how sport's assumed apolitical location paradoxically allowed it to become the site for politicized contestations over the permissible limits to black freedom.

When sport is occasionally mentioned within the texts of critical theorists, this is largely done by way of a passing comment that is rarely theorized or expanded upon or via the almost obligatory engagement with C.L.R. James and his work *Beyond a Boundary*.<sup>21</sup> The latter, in and of itself, is not necessarily a problem. James's work and ideas remain indispensable for any critical approach to sport and colonialism. The problem lies in that *simply invoking James is seen to be sufficient*, as though that in and of itself completed the intellectual work necessary to think of sport and the colonial. The totality of what can be learned about the sport/race/colonialism conjuncture starts and ends with *Beyond a Boundary*. It is as if cricket in the Caribbean *circa* 1950–63 constituted and exhausted the possibilities to talk about sport, colonialism and politics.

The intellectual project that might *start* with questions of biography and politics, embodiment and freedom, sport as art versus sport as social control, is stymied by the repetitive and perfunctory 'Jamesian nod'. Sport is recognized as somehow important. James's weaving of the wider socio-historical forces that frame cricket is duly and respectfully acknowledged, and with that the critical theorist can leave the murky, populist waters of sport and get back to reading eighteenth century novels and nineteenth century poetry. And all this despite James's emphatic declaration that such bourgeois pursuits and cultural products merely filled space in 'print but not in minds' (1963/1994: 64). It would seem that post/colonial theory's over-reliance upon reading culture as text and treating literary texts as the sum of culture itself, derived largely because the field is so dominated by literary theorists, means that 'culture' often gets reduced to a purely linguistic frame, rendering forms of *physical* culture problematic, and hence largely ignored.

This is a problem not just for post/colonial theory but for cultural studies in general. That is, despite claims that such inter-disciplinary fields have developed a post-Leavisite model of understanding culture that embraces and takes seriously 'the popular', there is still a reluctance and inability to read certain popular cultural forms like sport on their own terms. Put differently, film, music (including popular music), fashion, television and so on, can all be rendered as signifying texts that can then be 'read' by simply reworking the familiar tropes of literary criticism in order to make sense of the play of ideology, power, politics and identity found within the contested spaces of popular culture and everyday life. However, sport's very physicality, the emphatically embodied nature of its performance, the sheer diversity of sporting forms and sites, and its assumed 'non-art' instrumental rationality, make it a distinct cultural type that cannot easily be 'read' in the same way as these other cultural practices. To analyze sport only as a 'text' means losing much of sport's power (both as spectacle and in terms of its ludic appeal) as a form of competitive human movement, embodied practice and emotional release. We still lack a conceptual language, in other words, with which to make sense of sport except by trying to apply ways of reading sport that have been developed elsewhere to sport.

In the 400 or so pages of Edward Said's (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*, sport hardly surfaces. There is a passing reference, though no analysis, to European football cultures (1994: 36), and then sport appears again via a brief engagement with C.L.R. James, who is variously described as a remarkable sportsman (p. 295) and athlete (p. 298), and a cricket correspondent (p. 299). But there is no analysis or even commentary on any aspect of sport, despite James's insistence on the necessity of such work. A strikingly similar absence, I would argue, can be observed in the works of other major post/colonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

It would be wrong, however, to claim that there are no writers engaged in developing a post/colonial theory of sport. Important exceptions would include the occasional writings on sport by the sociologist Brett St Louis and the literary theorist Grant Farred, both of whom, interestingly, completed their doctorates on C.L.R. James and who have both produced important books on James's work and life (see Farred 1996; St Louis 2007). The point, rather, is that such work, insightful as it is, remains sporadic and limited to a very small group of scholars. Writings on sport and post/colonial theory remain marginal compared to, say, the field of post/colonial literary studies, or even other cultural areas such as film, music and art.

There is some indication that sport studies scholars are slowly becoming aware of the potentially important contributions of post/colonial theory in rethinking some of the established narratives of sport. For example, John Bale and Mike Cronin's (2003) edited collection *Sport and Postcolonialism* and Stephen Wagg's (2005) edited book *Cricket and National Identity in the Postcolonial Age* both make important contributions to the emerging literature. Yet even here the engagement remains limited. Many of the contributors to Bale and Cronin's volume use the term 'postcolonial' in a rather descriptive sense that simply refers to analyses of sport in societies that were once formally colonized, thus negating a deeper discussion that would require examining the ways in which, and as noted earlier, such societies are 'post/colonial' in different and significant ways (see Hall 1996; McClintock 1995: 12–13). The use of post/colonial theory is also limited, reduced in many of the chapters to simply quoting Edward Said in either the introduction or conclusion.

A similar approach structures Wagg's book, where the key figures and concepts within post/colonial theory are largely ignored: Homi Bhabha is cited once in a footnote in one chapter, Gayatri Spivak is quoted once, second hand, in the introduction, and Said does not appear at all (similarly Césaire and Fanon have a marginal presence in both books). While this is not necessarily problematic – there are many ways to engage in post/colonial critique without simply quoting lines from the theorists most associated with the post/colonial turn in social theory – it does suggest that the serious engagement of post/colonial theory *and* sport, that challenges some of the epistemic claims of both sport itself and sport theory as produced in the west – that is, the serious intellectual work of deconstructing and decolonizing ways of understanding sport – has yet to fully arrive.



Part of this reframing of post/colonial theory would require us to not skip over those moments when sport rudely inserts itself into the political narrative but rather to consider what is at stake if we take the academically debased subject of sport seriously as an object for analysis. Historians and biographers have tended simply to note without further exploration the impact of certain key anti-colonial theorists' engagement with sport. Thus even an historian as sophisticated and adept as Robin Kelley, and someone who has himself written well on C.L.R. James in the past (see Kelley 1996), mentions in passing, but does not analyze, the friendship between Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas that was formed in part through their footballing encounters (Kelley 2000: 11). Thus we have no sense as to whether or how such a sporting *cum* political relationship resembled that, say, between James and Learie Constantine in another context, in the development of negritude, Francophone concepts of solidarity, and of their wider understandings of freedom and embodied struggle.

Similarly, David Macey (2000), in *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, notes Fanon's love of and passion for football, a sport that he would play weekly in La Savane, Martinique, and a space whose physical landscape Fanon describes in less than glowing terms in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008: 8). Yet, notes Macey (2000: 58), 'for the boy who played football there it was a space of freedom and offered a welcome escape from the choking grid of narrow streets'. We might want to further consider, then, these relationships between freedom and space, of escape and movement, of revolutionary violence both real and symbolic, and of embodied emancipation, themes that drive much of Fanon's analysis of the native's constant striving to break free. Just as scholars have spent considerable time, and rightly so, on analyzing James's understanding of politics and political struggle via a reading of cricket's impact on James's development as an intellectual, we might also want to remember that Césaire and Fanon played football too.

### Diasporizing Sociology

There are problems with even some of the more self-reflexive accounts of globalization (whether theorized in terms of the modernity or capitalist axis), which in their periodization and conceptualization adopt a Eurocentric viewpoint, disavowing the complex relationship between globalization and imperialism. Such accounts, it has been argued, are simply 'a theory of Westernization by another name, which replicates all the problems associated with Eurocentrism: a narrow window on the world, historically and culturally' (Pieterse 1995: 47; see also Hesse 1999). Further, one of the central problems in attempting to think through the issue of global cultural formation and identification across and beyond national borders is that sociology itself and the social sciences in general have been so closely tied to the development of colonial nation states. That is, sociology has too often taken, sometimes uncritically, the nation as its primary object for analysis,

unproblematically equating 'society' with 'the nation state', thus neglecting the fact that the production of knowledge and the theories produced therein are as much tied to the nation state formation process as the world such theories tried to explain. Increasingly attempts have been made to re-position sociology in such a way that it problematizes the nation/society couplet and takes a wider, 'transnational', historical approach. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995: 63) argues, such a rethinking requires a new sociology, based 'around notions such as social networks (rather than "societies"), border zones, boundary crossing and global society. In other words, a sociology conceived within the framework of nations/societies is making place for a post-inter/national sociology of hybrid formations, times and spaces' (see also Urry 2003).

One such move has been to utilize the concept of *diaspora* as a way to reconceptualize current sociological debates concerning 'the global' versus 'the local' and the related discussions on cultural change and identity formation. One of the effects of the 'turn to diaspora' has been that in trying to understand the processes of global cultural formation, conceptualizations of *space* have been radically rethought. Space is understood in this context as operating *between* and *within* the outer-national, national, regional and local – sometimes occupying all of these locations simultaneously. This way of considering forms of attachment, solidarity and identification has challenged the tendency towards 'natural', territorially fixed, notions of the relationship between culture, community and place.

This new approach can be seen in the attempts by various post-national writers to rethink these traditional categories in terms of the external *flows* through which local space is constructed and the multiple *routes* through which identity is produced. Examples from across the social sciences of this analytical shift that began to emerge during the late 1980s and 1990s would include Doreen Massey's (1994) invocation of what she terms a 'global sense of place', Jan Nederveen Pieterse's (1995) concept of 'translocal space', and Avtar Brah's (1996) 'diasporic space'. What all of these accounts have done is to loosen notions of space and place from necessarily being rooted to specific bounded notions of geographical location, and relatedly to show how culture and identity are constructed through complex political and ideological discourses. Space is rethought as a hegemonic site for the maintenance and challenging of power relations that regularly exceed the delimitations of the nation state. Thus our understanding of space is transformed 'when it is seen less through outmoded notions of fixity and place and more in terms of the ex-centric communicative circuitry that has enabled dispersed populations to converse, interact and even synchronize significant elements of their social and cultural lives' (Gilroy 1994a: 211). The claim to *diasporic* identifications can be seen as a way to re-articulate wider political struggles in order to re-claim localized and discrepant histories. This means that the term *diaspora* becomes 'a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement'

(Clifford 1994: 308). In short, the concept of diaspora helps to challenge static and at times Eurocentric models of history and place defined through predictable binaries such as inside/outside, internal/external and core/periphery.

The need to write such diasporic histories of global culture (Pieterse 1995: 63) can be seen most readily in the evocative writings of Paul Gilroy, who has worked to transcend the national(ist) paradigm that dominates social science theorizing. Instead, Gilroy proposes a counter-history of modernity based on the inter-cultural and transnational formation of an alternative black public sphere, or what he calls 'the black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993a). Seeking to introduce 'new intermediate concepts, between the local and the global' (Gilroy 1992: 188), he takes the Atlantic as a unit of analysis in order to 'produce an explicitly transnational perspective' (1992: 192). Gilroy uses the ship as a metaphor, or what he refers to as a 'chronotope', as the conceptual link to think through the travels between Africa, Europe and the Americas that literally and figuratively framed the black Atlantic world – the moving location from where black moderns made the transition from slave ship to citizenship. The image of the ship as a 'living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion' (Gilroy 1993a: 4) helps to focus our attention on 'the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs' (p. 4).

In attempting to extend 'existing formulations of the diaspora idea' (1996: 22), Gilroy further defines the black Atlantic as 'a deterritorialized, multiplex and anti-national basis for the affinity or "identity of passions" between diverse black populations' (1996: 18). The concept of the 'black Atlantic' thus 'provides an invitation to move into the contested spaces between the local and the global in ways that do not privilege the modern nation state and its institutional order over the sub-national and supra-national networks and patterns of power, communication and conflict that they work to discipline, regulate and govern' (1996: 22). Black Atlantic intellectuals from Phillis Wheatley to Fredrick Douglass, and W.E.B. Du Bois to Richard Wright, have challenged western myths of progress and the tropes of European civilization that denied the importance of slavery, colonialism and white supremacy in the very founding of the west, while developing a deep scepticism towards the pull of racial nationalisms as the primary basis for modern identity formation. Historically speaking, Gilroy contends, the black Atlantic has been propelled by the need to 'supply a counter-narrative of modernity that could offset the wilful innocence of those Eurocentric theories that ignored the complicity of terror and rationality and in so doing denied that modern racial slavery could have anything to do with the sometimes brutal practice of modernisation or the conceits of enlightenment' (Gilroy 1996: 25).<sup>22</sup>

As with the field of post/colonial studies, sport has rarely figured within diaspora studies and African diasporic scholarship in particular (for example, on the non-analysis of sport within key texts see Clarke and Thomas 2006;

Cohen 2008; Dufoix 2008; Edwards 2003; Kanneh 1998; Okpewho et al. 2001). The focus, up until now, has tended to be on the exchanges and movements of writers and intellectuals (but rarely athletes) and within the cultural sphere on cultural practices such as music, film, dance and literature (but seldom sport).<sup>23</sup> If diaspora theorists have neglected *sport* as an object worthy of study then, similarly, the concept of *diaspora* has been surprisingly overlooked within the sociology of sport. With the exception of the occasional reference to the Irish diaspora, key theorists within the sociology of sport have largely failed to engage the expansive literature on diaspora as a way to consider sporting identifications, flows and processes that exceed nation state frameworks, instead relying on traditional approaches found within globalization theory that are then simply applied to sport (see Bairner 2001; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007; Maguire 1999, 2005; Miller et al. 2001).<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, I want to suggest that the notion of the *sporting black Atlantic* can be productively used as a way to comprehend the lives, travels, migrations and significances of black athletes over the past two hundred years or so, in the shaping of a sporting black diasporic space. This approach allows us to comprehend the *political* connections between athletes, intellectuals, writers and political leaders, the historical role of sport within black politics, the reasons why black Atlantic athletes could invoke forms of racial and inter-racial solidarity across and beyond national lines, and why, when such athletes achieved a degree of fame and power, they were able to pose threats to the racial order of the day, be they located in Europe, North America, the Caribbean or elsewhere within the African diaspora.

### Towards a Genealogy of the Sporting Black Atlantic

Peter Fryer notes that Africans were living in Britain during the third century, as part of the Roman imperial army, long before the 'English' arrived (1984: 1). Later, during the sixteenth century, as British imperialism and the mechanisms of slavery gathered pace, a sizeable, though disparate, black population began to emerge – most working as servants – as it became fashionable in some quarters to have black slaves amongst the household servants (1984: 9). By the middle of the eighteenth century, particularly in the 'slave-ports' of Liverpool, Bristol and London, it was possible to talk of an emerging self-conscious, and politicized, black community living and working in Britain and engaged with the radical working-class politics of the time. It is into this history of migration that we need to locate black Atlantic athletes, as they formed an important part of these emerging communities. As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker observed, during the eighteenth century black men and women arrived in increasing numbers in London where they found various forms of work as 'cooks, boxers, writers, and especially domestic servants, day labourers, and seamen' (1990: 243; see also Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). Black athletes, primarily as boxers, and

often as freed-slaves, became central icons in publicly symbolizing the fraught transition of black people from former slave subjects to nascent public citizens. Extending this connection between sport and politics, play and freedom, and as I pursue in more detail in the following chapter, Fryer makes an interesting and suggestive connection between the political significance of black radicals such as William Cuffay, William Davidson and Robert Wedderburn, and black pugilists of the eighteenth century: 'It is hardly surprising that, of the black people living in Britain in this period whose names are known, so many were fighters of one sort or another: political activists or prize-fighters' (1984: 227).

Early figures who exemplified many of the key characteristics of the sporting black Atlantic world would include boxers such as Bill Richmond and Tom Molineaux. Born in Staten Island, New York in 1763, the son of Georgia-born slaves, Richmond was brought to England aged fourteen in 1777 as a servant by a British General. Richmond attended school in Yorkshire where he took up many sports, including boxing both as a fighter and later as a trainer, becoming 'the first black athlete to receive international acclaim' (Rhodes 2006: 47). Richmond became a well-known and liked figure in London's social circles, finishing his days as a publican in London's West End and running a boxing academy until his death in 1829 (Fryer 1984: 445–454; See also Rhoden 2006, ch. 2).

Following Richmond in winning his freedom through boxing, Tom Molineaux, born on a Virginia plantation in 1784, came to England in 1803 working as a deckhand on a ship. Molineaux eventually met Richmond who helped to establish him on the boxing circuit. Record crowds turned out to see Molineaux fight and he became a popular figure in early nineteenth century British sporting life, referred to in the press at the time as 'the American Othello' and 'the Great American Moor' (Rhodes 2006: 40). He eventually died in poverty, aged only 34, in Ireland (Fryer 1984: 445–454). Although Molineaux's life was short (although not unexceptional for the time), his impact was significant. The American journalist William Rhoden notes in *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of the Black Athlete*, that while Richmond had stumbled into professional sports, Molineaux's decision to pursue a career as a professional athlete was a deliberate one: 'Molineaux was a pioneer in many ways, not least of which was in showing how the tools of enslavement could become the tools of liberation' (2006: 47). The arena of sports enabled such men to momentarily transgress some of the racial constraints imposed on their lives and in so doing they began to redefine black political claims to freedom. By publicly challenging western racial sciences' proclamations concerning the supposed inherent degeneracy and weaknesses (moral, intellectual *and* physical) of the 'black race', and by performing on a national and increasingly international stage that was largely unattainable for blacks in any other cultural sphere at that time, their sporting achievements acquired a symbolic and therefore political significance that transcended the circumscribed space of the sporting arena.

The Atlantic, and the role of ships, remained central for this emerging 'transnational' athlete. As a mode of transportation, sometimes as a form of early employment, and as a way of practicing the skills needed to compete in Europe's boxing arenas, these black men quite literally fought their way across the Atlantic. Indeed, the hidden history of not only black boxers, but footballers, rugby players, cricketers, cyclists and athletes in Britain, from the eighteenth century through to the Victorian and Edwardian periods, is only now beginning to become recognized (see Fryer 1984; Green 1998; Vasili 1996, 1998), helping to complement the more extensive histories already available on African American athletes (see Bass 2005; Miller and Wiggins 2004; Sammons 1994; Shropshire 1996; Wiggins 1997; Wiggins and Miller 2003). This work is important in connecting questions of imperialism to the cultural, political and economic development of modern Britain, and the positioning of blacks as agents within that history, as well as in helping to establish the empirical basis for a broader, inter-connected global history of the sporting black Atlantic.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the sporting black Atlantic can be defined as a complex, transnational cultural and political space, that exceeds the boundaries of nation states, whereby the migrations and achievements of black athletes have come to assume a heightened *political significance* for the dispersed peoples of the black diaspora: the sports arena thus operates as an important symbolic space in the struggles of black peoples for freedom and liberty, cultural recognition and civic rights, against the ideologies and practices of white supremacy. For black peoples throughout the African diaspora, such cosmopolitan formations and outer-national identifications operate as powerful counter-claims against nation state nationalisms and conservative mono-cultural ideologies, with their associated assimilationist drives. Such self-consciously selected identifications often cut across national borders, reconfiguring what it means to be a national subject, providing transnational routes of identity formation. Contemporary diasporic identifications with transnational stars such as Serena and Venus Williams, Kobe Bryant, Lewis Hamilton, Tiger Woods and Usain Bolt challenge narrow, prescriptive ways of thinking about national identity in the context of sport. These sporting identifications re-articulate elements of the black Atlantic sporting world alongside figures from music, fashion, film and television, and occasionally with black political icons too, in the production of new forms of black identity.

It is important to note that the cultural configurations of the sporting black Atlantic are not merely a reflection of underlying economic determinants driven by the circuits of global capitalism. Rather, such diasporic formations move between and beyond the processes of corporate sports globalization, though they can never, of course, be entirely divorced from them. They exist in productive tension with the logic of late capital, sometimes complicit, sometimes critical. As James Clifford (1994: 302) notes, 'contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism. While defined and constrained by these structures, they also exceed and criticize them'.



Although the antecedents of the sporting black Atlantic stretch back centuries, we can perhaps date the emergence of the first truly global and internationally known 'star' of the black diaspora to the appearance of the African American boxer Jack Johnson in the first decade of the twentieth century. When Johnson beat his fellow American Jim Jeffries in 1910 to retain the world heavyweight championship its international significance, which attracted front page headlines across the world, could be seen not only in the racial uprisings that took place in many American cities as jubilant blacks celebrating in the streets were attacked by whites, but throughout the British colonies too where similar forms of unrest were reported (Green 1998: 177).

Such was the fear of Johnson's impact on the white racial order that an exhibition match between Johnson and the British boxer William 'Bombardier Billy' Wells in 1911 was eventually banned by the then Home Secretary Winston Churchill, due in part to fears about the effects of a Johnson victory in instigating further demands for political equality throughout the British empire. While the campaign, led by the Baptist pastor F.B. Meyer and supported by religious elites and Edwardian moralists, to prevent the Johnson versus Wells bout was publicly framed as an ethical concern about the barbarism of boxing itself, the underlying racial significance was apparent to many at the time. Jeffrey Green notes that the very fabric of the British imperial order was deemed to be at risk should Johnson be allowed to fight the British champion: 'A huge empire would come close to collapse if a British soldier met a Texan labourer in west London. The empire was indeed a confidence trick' (Green 1998: 176). Similarly, as Phil Vasili points out, the success of sporting black Atlantic figures, such as Johnson, struck directly at the core fears of white supremacist logic, namely: 'Black athletic success as symbolic expression of the degeneracy of the White "race"; the consequent rewards of this success as a threat to White economic (and social) superiority; that the collective confidence and spiritual sustenance given to Black communities by Johnson as an heroic model may inspire emulation' (1998: 185).

Johnson is important as a diasporic figure precisely because, as a boxer, his sport was located within the colonial routes that reshaped the world, thus his impact on racial formation was global and not just national. This is not to deny the importance of Johnson as an African American figure but simply to note that many of his major bouts occurred *outside* the United States, their significance impacting black communities 'locally', be that in Australia, Europe, Canada, the Caribbean or Central America, as much as in the United States itself. William Rhoden notes that American baseball was in fact 'unofficially' integrated in 1945 when Jackie Robinson signed for the Montreal Royals, *two years before* Robinson would famously step onto the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rhoden (2006: 119) continues: 'Interestingly, three of the greatest landmarks of African American sports history took place outside the United States, a testament to this country's

# The Daily Mirror

THE MORNING JOURNAL WITH THE SECOND LARGEST NET SALE

No. 2,087.

Registered at the G. P. O.  
as a Newspaper.

TUESDAY, JULY 5, 1910

One Halfpenny.

JOHNSON, THE NEGRO PUGILIST WHO BEAT JEFFRIES, THUS RETAINING THE  
TITLE OF HEAVY-WEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD.



Yesterday's great boxing contest at Reno, Nevada, between Jack Johnson and James J. Jeffries, resulted in a victory for the negro, who thus retains the title of heavy-weight champion of the world. Born thirty-two years ago, the giant negro won his

present title in December, 1908, when he defeated Burns, at Sydney. Last October Ketchell made an attempt to regain the title for the white race, but was beaten by Johnson, at San Francisco. Above is a recent photograph of Johnson.

Figure 1.1 Jack Johnson: The 'Giant Negro' (1910) *The Daily Mirror* (reproduced courtesy of Mirrorpix)

racist response to the emergence of black sports figures: Tom Molineaux fought for the boxing championship in England; Jack Johnson won the championship in Australia; and Jackie Robinson integrated baseball in Canada.'

We might go further and note that, in addition to the three examples identified by Rhoden, many of the most iconic moments in African American sporting history occurred *outside* of the United States, the African American athlete often associated more with international geographical markers than with American ones. We think, for example, of Jesse Owens in Berlin, Althea Gibson winning the French Open and Wimbledon, Wilma Rudolph in Rome, Tommie Smith and John Carlos in Mexico City, and Muhammad Ali in the Congo and Manila. This is why it is important to read the politics of race and sport diasporically in order to understand how nominally 'national' star athletes come to have a global significance that both alters their relationship to their countries of origin and enables transnational forms of identification to be established within the broader cultural circuits of the black Atlantic. Historically, for many African American athletes, leaving the United States enabled their development as athletes and provided a means to obtain status, fame and wider social significance that was often curtailed in their 'home' country.

Many contemporary accounts significantly underplay this aspect of Jack Johnson's career and his diasporic impact. Similarly, Johnson's time abroad is often overlooked or downplayed, seen simply as time spent 'in exile' rather than a formative period in defining his own identity as a thoroughly modern subject. Johnson thus gets reduced to simply being an African American athlete who bravely fought Jim Crow racism and became an iconic (if sometimes overlooked) figure within the self-enclosed story of America's long journey from the 'original sin' of slavery through to historic election of the nation's first African American President. This is of course all true. But it is not all that Johnson is and was. As I examine in more detail in the following chapter, Johnson also helped to challenge and change the meaning of race itself, in America and throughout the western world, and in so doing helps us to understand the complex *diasporic relations* between race, sport and politics.

## Notes

- 1 David Rowe describes Gruneau's text as an 'influential early study' (2004: 105) and Hargreaves's later work as '[o]ne of the most cited sociological works deploying Gramsci' (2004: 106). Other key texts from this period that pursued similar themes would include Jennifer Hargreaves's (1982) edited collection *Sport, Culture and Ideology* and John Clarke and Chas Critcher's (1985) *The Devil Makes Work*.
- 2 In contrast, Alan Bairner argues that many of the key works mentioned here *do not* in fact rely on Gramsci and his writings but on a somewhat watered down, cultural studies version of hegemony theory that owes more to the ideas of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall than to the Italian revolutionary Marxist

himself. As Bairner (2009) notes, 'Gruneau's ... only direct reference to Gramsci is in a footnote where his role in the development of the concept of hegemony is acknowledged but it is made apparent that Gruneau's particular concept owes more to Williams and Stuart Hall. Interestingly, neither Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* nor any of his other writings appear in the book's bibliography' (2009: 200); and '[w]hile it is true that Hargreaves is frequently cited in this context, his work contains little direct reference to Gramsci' (p. 200). Thus Bairner argues that Gramsci's ideas have been misused and abused by sociologists of sport, and others, who have placed too great an emphasis on notions of domination by consent rather than by coercion and have been too eager to find examples of resistance in sporting cultures that are focused on non-class identities instead of material economic struggle. Bairner calls for a return to a more orthodox reading of Gramsci and the sublimation of cultural struggles around identity to material class struggles over the economic: 'there is a real need for the rehabilitation of Marxism at the level of theory, as well as for Marxist sociologists to stand up and pronounce publicly on the economic injustices of our age. As for Marxist sociologists of sport, the time has surely come for fewer apologies and for a more robust defense of the subtleties of historical materialism as properly understood. If that means retrieving the argument that our identities can best be understood in terms of economics, then so be it' (2007a: 33; see also Bairner 2007b). For a critique of Bairner's 'back to basics' position see Andrews (2007) and Carrington (2007).

- 3 I focus on Gruneau's text not because I think it is uniquely flawed (it is, rather, symptomatic) nor that that book's omissions render it without merit. It is arguably the most important theoretical exegesis of sport and society produced in the last thirty years and has rightly remained an essential reference point for anyone interested in developing a critical sociology of sport. My critique, rather, is an attempt to supplement and not supplant Gruneau's analysis by identifying what I take to be a fundamental omission of the 'hegemony theorists' of this period, and who continue to exert a strong influence over contemporary debates, without seeking to repudiate the entire framework, as William Morgan (1994) attempts to do.
- 4 We should note too that depending on the context women and the 'lower classes', especially those without property, could be similarly excluded. While white working-class men could, under certain conditions, gain entry into the sphere of citizenship, the barriers to women and to blacks remained more fundamental. David Theo Goldberg notes: 'Lacking the necessary degree of rational capacity to underpin self-determination, blacks and women accordingly lack the possibility of self-directed labor and so of self-mastery. Reduced rationally to working for white men, blacks and women are incapable accordingly of modern state citizenship. It must follow, *of course*, that to imagine it otherwise presumptively would be to take on that irrationality rendering one at once illegitimate and so unqualified for citizenship. The struggle of women and people characterized as not white to acquire voting rights in the first half of the twentieth century as a consequence was as much about clearing away these insidious background assumptions as about the formalities of legal change' (2002: 48–49).
- 5 J.M. Blaut makes a stronger claim with regard to the demand for commodities and other goods that colonialism both produced and itself needed: 'there would not have been an Industrial Revolution had it not been for the immense demand that Europeans were able to generate in the colonies, and it was this

- fact that, more than anything else, pushed the Industrial Revolution forward' (1993: 206).
- 6 Gruneau himself, in a reflexive postscript to the 1999 reissue of his book, concedes this point: 'my appeal to "classical" sociology in *Class, Sports and Social Development* largely precluded any discussion of global core-periphery relations beyond Europe and North America, as well as racial and gender oppression. The die was cast the moment I linked the idea of "classical" sociology as a distinctive style of analysis to a more specific set of "classical" sociological problems associated with agency, freedom, and constraint in the development of industrial capitalism, defined primarily with respect to social class. The focus on "internal" social dynamics and struggles arising in conjunction with industrial capitalism was undertaken with progressive intentions, but it nonetheless reproduced many of the Eurocentric and Androcentric assumptions implicit in the canonical foundation of sociological history' (1983/1999: 123).
  - 7 Again, see Thobani (2007: 25): 'Likewise, the Canadian state can be accurately characterized as having been an overt racial dictatorship up until the mid-twentieth century, as it organized the governance of Aboriginal populations through the Indian Act and upheld racialized immigration and citizenship legislation to produce a homogenous and dominant white majority.'
  - 8 Critcher's own conceptual commitment to reading questions of ideology and politics almost exclusively through a de-racialized class lens is all the more striking (and in some ways disappointing) given his role as a co-author of *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978). It could be argued that while that text marks an important and pivotal moment within British cultural studies in opening up a space to think seriously about racism in British politics, it is not until the 1982 publication of the CCCS's *The Empire Strikes Back* that a complete rethinking of the race and class conjuncture is produced, and that provides an adequate account of autonomous black political struggles against racism (Carrington 2010; Harris 2009).
  - 9 Gruneau (1983/1999: 127) acknowledges this problem in his 1999 postscript when he writes: 'my discussion of class and sports actually would have been far stronger if I had explored the mutually constitutive relations between class and such things as masculinity, internal colonialism, overt and subtle racism, and racial nationalism'.
  - 10 Gruneau, in a footnote, summarizes *Beyond a Boundary* as 'a study of sport, class forces, and third world development' (1983/1999: 132), thus reducing both the politics of James's anti-colonialism into a neutered framework of development theory and collapsing the specificity of race itself back into class. C.L.R. James makes it into Hargreaves's text (1986: 42) with a single, passing, unreferenced quote.
  - 11 There were, of course, other forms of embodied activity that attempted to offer an alternative ethics and performative physicality to this particular model of sport such as the *Turner* movement that stressed exercise and a concept of physical culture more grounded in expressive gymnastics than competitive, score-driven sports. We might also consider in this context, as a critical form of resistance and challenge to the logic of colonial sport discourse, the development of *Capoeira*, a cultural form that continues to exceed western definitional boundaries separating sport, art, dance and music.
  - 12 It should be noted that there is some disagreement among historians as to whether muscular Christianity *or* martial masculinity was the dominant ethical



- code among British elites during this period. This dispute is not central to my argument here.
- 13 Occasionally mention is made of pre-Hellenic sporting antecedents in ancient Egypt. But sporting time is really seen to 'start' with ancient Greece, thus relegating Egypt to a pre-historical moment that also serves to underplay the extent to which Egypt influenced the political, intellectual and cultural formations of the period that is seen as the 'birth of civilization'. Ancient Greeks are nearly always read as the true 'ancestors of modern sports' (Guttman 1978: 20). Thus, as Allen Guttman (2004) phrases it in his 400-plus page historical overview of sport, *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, the chapter discussing Egyptian sports is titled 'Before the Greeks'. Discussions on ancient Greece rarely start by framing them as 'After the Egyptians'.
  - 14 Some classicists have questioned the distinction often made between the sporting pursuits of antiquity and those of modernity. For example, Tom Hubbard (2008) suggests that Guttman's modernization theory of sport's historical development that sharply contrasts modern sports with the games found in antiquity is a difference based on degree rather than substance, with many of the 'modern' features of sport also found in the games of ancient Greece.
  - 15 The primitives, for Guttman, appear to include Native Peoples defined by land and location, such as the 'Ifugao of the Philippine Islands' (1978: 43) and the 'Polynesians of Tikopia' (p. 47) and other 'tribespeople'.
  - 16 See Richard Giulianotti (2005: 22–24), who suggests that all of the core characteristics of modern sports are empirically questionable. For example, sports in the west, and particularly in the United States, remain deeply inscribed with forms of religiosity, social stratification rather than meritocracy still largely determines access to and involvement in sport, and sports themselves are valued by many according to autotelic pleasures and a sense of the aesthetic that often negates the desire for records and extrinsic reward.
  - 17 Although Guttman's rhetorical flourish is presumably not meant to be taken literally, the invocation of Neanderthals nevertheless suggests that the modern subject is not just being contrasted with the primitive but quite literally the pre-human.
  - 18 We might usefully compare this with Ann McClintock's fascinating discussion of nineteenth century commodity racism and the Pears' soap advertisements wherein the native, having found a bar of soap, is seen to have discovered modernity itself: 'The Birth of Civilization' as one advertisement put it (McClintock 1995: 223–224).
  - 19 The structure and 'uniqueness' of European modernization, the extent to which different European countries modernized at different times and speeds, and the primary factors behind the so-called 'rise of the west' continue to be debated by historians and historical sociologists. For example, see the exchange between Bryant (2008), Elvin (2008), Goldstone (2008) and Langlois (2008).
  - 20 See also McClintock when she notes: 'colonized people – like women and the working class in the metropolis – do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time, within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic "primitive"' (1995: 30).
  - 21 For example, Neil Lazarus (1999) discusses sport in a chapter in *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, but largely in the context of cricket via James and *Beyond a Boundary*, E. San Juan, Jr (1999) mentions



- cricket in passing, via James, in *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*, as does Timothy Brennan (1997) in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*.
- 22 Brent Hayes Edwards (2001) provides a useful genealogical mapping of the concept of diaspora within black studies. Edwards suggests that the term 'African diaspora' emerges in the 1960s and is coterminous with the institutionalization of black studies departments in the United States. Edwards suggests that, 'as a frame for knowledge production, the "African diaspora" ... inaugurates an ambitious and radically decentered analysis of transnational circuits of culture and politics that are resistant or exorbitant to the frames of nations and continents' (2001: 52).
  - 23 Gilroy himself is perhaps an exception here. Although music remains Gilroy's paradigmatic cultural form of choice, his more recent work shows a more sustained attempt to think critically about sport.
  - 24 There are some recent exceptions to this. For examples of sociological work on sport that does engage the concept of diaspora and the black Atlantic, see Burdsey (2006), Andersson (2007) and McNeil (2009). See also the historical work of Runstedtler (2009).
  - 25 Another early twentieth century figure whose life exemplifies the passage and transnational movement of black Atlantic athletes is the boxer Larry Gains. Born in Toronto, Canada, at the turn of the twentieth century, Gains travelled to Europe to pursue his career as a boxer (after being inspired by meeting Jack Johnson when he was a teenager), and moved throughout Europe fighting in Paris (where he met a young Ernest Hemmingway), Stockholm, Milan and Berlin, before he finally settled in England, where he became British Empire champion (he was prevented from fighting for the British heavyweight championship because of his color). Ironically, despite being inspired to become a boxer after meeting Johnson, it was Johnson's very success in challenging the ideology of white supremacy, and the subsequent drawing of the 'color line', that prevented Gains from competing for the official world heavyweight championship. In Gains's autobiography he provides an interesting account of how the passage across the Atlantic was more than just a means of transportation, and a chance to practice the skills he would later require, but importantly a way of gaining acceptance into male working-class culture, through his ability and status as a boxer. In a chapter headed 'Slow Boat to England', Gains writes: 'every time I trained on deck, a big, tough-looking stoker who had done a bit of fighting would stand watching me ... Well, eventually he came over and said he would like to spar with me. I was grateful for the chance of a work-out. But I soon realised that this was to be a little more than that. All work on the boat came to a standstill, and everyone came crowding around ... His intention quite clearly was to knock me out. He came in, swinging with both hands. He was really a brawler and nothing more. I couldn't miss him and eventually I stretched him out on the deck. They carried him below. After that, the attitude of the crew changed drastically. Overnight, I became everybody's friend, a man of respect. Their judgements were simple, almost primitive. If you were the best fighting man aboard, the boat belonged to you' (Gains no date 27–28).