

**The Transformation of ‘Community’ in the  
Australian Football League**

**Part Two: Redrawing ‘Community’ Boundaries in the Post-War  
AFL**

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It is of course, intellectually easier . . . to acknowledge one trend at a time keeping them scattered, as it were, than to make the effort to see them all together (Mills, 1970: 170).

Part One of this article (Andrews, 1998) set down a conceptual framework for elucidating the problematic term ‘community’. Distilling the vast sociological literature on the topic, four distinct conceptions were noted: ‘community’ as 1) a geographical locale; 2) a local social system; 3) a sense of identity and/or belonging (communion); and 4) an ideology. It was stated that these constituted ‘ideal types’, that may or may not overlap in practice (a matter requiring empirical verification). To complete the framework, these ‘ideal types’ were combined with Raymond Williams’ threefold schema of dominant, emergent and residual social forces. It was argued that the resulting construct enabled one to grasp both the relative importance of each variation of ‘community’ at a given moment in time, and additionally any historical shifts that occurred in the balance between the four conceptions.

Here, in Part Two of the article, the purpose is to systematically apply this framework to the post-war history of the Australian Football League (AFL).<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the aim is to clarify why, and in what ways, AFL ‘football communities’ have changed between 1946 and the present. The argument is divided into three sections. Firstly, a sketch is provided of the economic, social, and cultural transformation of Australian society in the years 1946 to 1974 – the period known as the ‘Long Boom’. This section concludes with a brief discussion of how this transformation impacted upon traditional community structures in the major cities. In Section Two, and against this backdrop, the wholesale post-war restructuring of the AFL is traced, from 1946 through to the present day.<sup>2</sup> In order to tease out the implications of this process for ‘football communities’, the analysis is interwoven with a series of ‘snapshots’ dealing with telling episodes from this history. These are intended to highlight key themes in the shifting club-community nexus over the post-war period. Finally,

in Section Three, a table is presented, summarising the major trends in the post-war transformation of 'community' in the AFL. The accompanying discussion is intended to steer a middle course between yielding to the bewildering array of details associated with the experiences of individual clubs on the one hand, and proffering schematic over-generalisations on the other.

### **The Post-War Transformation of Australia: The Impact of the 'Long Boom'**

The AFL forms an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of Australia, and, in particular, the city of Melbourne. It follows that changes to the AFL can only be fully grasped against the backdrop of broader political-economic and socio-cultural developments. In the post-war period, Australian society has been transformed across these dimensions, resulting in major changes to the structure and experience of 'community'. Before addressing the post-war transformation of 'community' in the AFL, it is therefore necessary to outline this changed societal context in some detail.<sup>3</sup>

The Second World War marks a definitive break in Australian history. Prior to this event, notwithstanding the granting of 'self-governing' status in 1901, Australia effectively stood as a colonial outpost of Britain (Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995). Politically, much of its foreign policy was derived from the 'mother country'; Australia had no department of foreign affairs and maintained no embassies overseas. In terms of the economy, the typical colonial trading relationship prevailed: Australia exported primary products to Britain, and relied upon imported secondary or manufactured goods in return (Baldock, 1978). By the 1940s, this relationship had long since ceased to provide prosperity for Australia. Indeed, with the exception of two brief windows of hope,<sup>4</sup> the half-century preceding the Second World War was characterised by economic hardship. In this environment, many Australians struggled to sustain, let alone improve, their living standards. Indeed, in 1935, average real incomes were the same as they had been in 1920 (Connell & Irving, 1992).

Before the Second World War, the population of Australia was small, standing at around seven million in 1939 (Ward, 1992). It was also ethnically and culturally homogeneous, with the 1947 census revealing that ninety per cent of the population was Australian-born, and 97 per cent had been born either in Australia or the British Isles. Immigration was based upon the racially exclusive White Australia Policy,<sup>5</sup> and during the Depression intakes were kept at low levels, due partly to the belief that migrants would exacerbate the problem of unemployment. In conjunction with a fall in the birth rate, these low levels of immigration meant that the population of the major cities actually declined during the 1930s (Baldock, 1978).

After the Second World War, in all of the areas discussed, Australian society was rapidly transformed. This transformation had been in the planning

since 1942, when the war began to turn the way of the Allied forces. At this time, the Curtin Labor Government established the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, which was charged with providing a compelling blueprint for an improved post-war Australia. The resultant 'vision' was framed around a series of key objectives, including a commitment to full employment; the realisation and consolidation of a sizeable manufacturing sector, viable in the long term; the undertaking of a series of major public works projects; the inception of a mass immigration program; and the extension of the welfare state (McQueen, 1991).

Over the next three decades, many of these wartime visions became reality, although this had more to do with a sustained period of economic growth, than enlightened political planning.<sup>6</sup> The economic success story began slowly, with a process of 'reconstruction' in the late 1940s.<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s it had gathered momentum, and 'reconstruction' gave way to the so-called 'Long Boom', which lasted through until 1974. The duration of this boom was unprecedented in Australian history, and was linked to a worldwide phase of economic growth across the advanced capitalist countries. In Australia, the post-war economy produced a potent combination of high growth figures, and low unemployment rates. Notwithstanding minor setbacks, including periods of high inflation and relative recession, the overall trajectory of the economy was upwards, and for most Australians real wages and living standards climbed steadily.

A significant component of the post-war boom in Australia was the expansion of the manufacturing sector of the economy. This stood as a primary and longstanding objective of both sides of politics. However, structural pressures in the Australian economy now rendered this objective a necessity, as capital had largely exhausted the opportunities for accumulation in the 'fringe-imperial economy' (Connell & Irving, 1992: 171). This situation resulted in a bipartisan political will to consolidate on the wartime creation of large-scale secondary industries. Nurtured by tariff protection, and fuelled by overseas capital,<sup>8</sup> this objective was successfully accomplished during the 'Long Boom'. Indeed, compared to 1940 figures, by as early as 1960 the number of factories had more than doubled, the real value of manufactured goods had more than tripled, and the quantity of power applied to secondary industries had nearly quadrupled (Ward, 1992).

The post-war growth in manufacturing was linked to another transformative process – that of mass immigration. Although a complex set of factors drove the post-war immigration program, the pivotal role of migrants in the expansion of the manufacturing sector was decisive.<sup>9</sup> In 1947, the Department of Immigration was established, and its first Minister, Labor's Arthur Calwell, set in motion a program aimed at attracting enough migrants to facilitate a one per cent growth in population per year. This program was continued, and even extended, when the Liberal Party came to power in 1949. As a result, between

1947 and the mid-1960s well over two million migrants came to Australia. Coupled with the post-war 'baby boom', this led to a growth in population from approximately 7.6 million in 1947, to 11.5 million in 1966 (Jamrozik et al., 1995). By 1978, despite a fall in the immigration intake after the end of the 'Long Boom', the population had grown further still, to around 14.3 million (Collins, 1991).

Crucially, the size of the targets set in the post-war immigration program necessitated an intake that reached far beyond the British Isles, the traditional source of immigrants to Australia. Therefore, the immigration net was (reluctantly) cast wider to include eastern and southern Europeans, and from the 1970s wider still, to include a significant number of Asians. The results were striking, with a growing proportion of the Australian population coming from non-English speaking backgrounds. Thus, whilst in 1947 only three per cent of the population had been born outside of Australia and the British Isles, by 1966 this figure had risen to over ten per cent. This increase was largely due to the influx of southern Europeans, particularly Italians and Greeks, who by this time comprised approximately five per cent of the population (Jamrozik et al., 1995). Today, roughly forty per cent of Australia's population is comprised of post-war migrants and their offspring, and half of this figure, or twenty per cent of the total population, originate from non-English speaking backgrounds (Castles, Cope, Kalantzis & Morrissey, 1988). Clearly then, the impact of the post-war immigration program has not only been felt in terms of population *size*, but just as importantly in terms of population *composition*. Ultimately, it has seen Australia pass from an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation in the pre-war period – notwithstanding the class and sectarian divisions between those born in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales – to one characterised by a high degree of diversity.<sup>10</sup>

The post-war immigration program also impacted upon the demographics of Australia by transforming the spatial distribution of the population. Most of the migrants settled in the major metropolitan centres, especially Sydney and Melbourne, strengthening the trends towards 'urban sprawl' and 'suburbanisation'. In the case of Melbourne, post-war migrants contributed to a doubling of the population between 1933 and 1971, which in turn witnessed a shift in distribution from the old inner-city areas, to newly created outer suburbs (Sandercock & Turner, 1981). In addition to falling populations, the inner-city also changed through receiving substantial numbers of non-English speaking background migrants, who sought cheap accommodation close to their place of work. Thus, suburbs like Richmond and Collingwood came to have heavy concentrations of Greek migrants, whilst Carlton and Fitzroy received large numbers of Italians (Collins, 1991). Immigration then, contributed both to the establishment of new outer suburbs and to ongoing changes in the composition of the old inner-city suburbs (Connell & Irving, 1992). With regard to the latter, further changes commenced in the 1960s via a process of

'gentrification'. Here, professionals from the so-called 'new middle class' began to move back into the inner-city area, in order to avoid the transportation difficulties and perceived cultural conformity associated with the sprawling metropolis (Sandercock & Turner, 1981).

During the 'Long Boom', changes not only took place in the number of people who lived in the major Australian cities, or where they lived in these cities, but also in how they lived. That is, the *lifestyles* of most Australians altered dramatically over these years, as economic prosperity dovetailed with an assimilationist settlement policy,<sup>11</sup> resulting in the social construction of a distinctive 'Australian way of life'. According to White (1981), this 'way of life' revolved around the long-held 'Great Australian Dream' of owning a free-standing house on a quarter acre block, filled with the latest high-tech consumer durables, and complete with a car in the driveway. The non-rationally exclusive nature of this 'dream' made it well suited to the task of assimilating 'New Australians' (that is, migrants), as *all* could aspire to the consumerist ideal. This emphasis on consumerism also served the interests of the manufacturing sector, which required an ever-expanding market for its products.

Over the course of the 'Long Boom', the level of prosperity ensured that the 'Great Australian Dream', at the material level at least, did not merely stand as ideology. For instance, from 1950 the housing industry was building 80,000 homes per year, only to find itself struggling to keep pace with demand (Connell & Irving, 1992). Home ownership levels also climbed dramatically, from less than fifty per cent before the war, to 75 per cent by the 1960s (Sandercock & Turner, 1981). Increasingly, these homes were filled with the latest consumer durables, as ownership levels of one-time luxury items, such as refrigerators, washing machines, and (after 1956) television sets, rose steadily. Most importantly, coinciding with the release of the Australian-made Holden in 1948, mass production lowered the price of cars, and ownership levels increased sharply. During the 1950s the figure rose from one car for every nine people, to one for every three-and-a-half, making Australia the world's fourth leading car-owning nation (McQueen, 1991). The car quickly became a key 'basis of the economics of everyday life', resulting in greater mobility and flexibility of lifestyle (Connell & Irving, 1992: 198). In this sense, it not only signalled a major increase in living standards, but also formed the linchpin in the emergence of a distinctive 'suburban lifestyle'. From 1948, this lifestyle included an increasing amount of weekend leisure time for most workers, as the 40-hour working week was introduced (McQueen, 1991).

Taken together, these sweeping societal changes served to transform the structure and experience of 'community' in the cities of post-war Australia. Progressively, the degree of overlap of the four conceptions of 'community' outlined above diminished, as social life became more complex, fragmented and dispersed. In the pre-war period, due to a lack of access to efficient means of transportation, work and leisure typically took place within a defined local

area. The high density of social interaction that ensued, coupled with the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the population, assured a strong sense of local 'community' identity. At this time then, the word 'community' could accurately be used to denote *all four* conceptions of the term at once: that is, 'communities' were simultaneously specific geographical locales; local social systems; a source of identity and/or belonging; and ideologies that were used to differentiate social groups from one another.

In the post-war years, the nature of 'community' has been radically altered, in accordance with the wider transformation of society that began with the 'Long Boom'. No longer are people necessarily tied to a fixed locale, and no longer are people likely to be part of a tight-knit or self-contained social system. Instead, broad societal changes have widened their geographical and social horizons, to the point where the traditional bonds of class, work, and religion have been loosened. Paradoxically, however, this broadening of options has arguably been associated with a narrowing of social experiences, as life in the new suburbs has tended to be based around home-centred and privatised forms of consumption. In short, the process of suburbanisation has fundamentally transformed the structure of life, especially for the working class, such that traditional social networks have been dismantled (Connell & Irving, 1992). However, this does not mean that 'community' has ceased to exist, rather that the *forms* of 'community' have changed over time.

Given the broad societal context outlined above, it is misleading to imply that in the post-war period the AFL has 'left behind' the traditional communities that once anchored the competition culturally, and sustained it economically. Such implications mar many journalistic and numerous scholarly, accounts of the AFL. What these accounts fail to recognise is that, over the course of the 'Long Boom', these 'traditional communities' themselves were transformed beyond recognition. In this sense, it is more accurate to state that the AFL *itself* risked being 'left behind', as broader societal changes re-fashioned the social, cultural, and economic context within which the competition operated. Indeed, this societal transformation has exerted a major influence on the post-war changes in the structure and operation of the AFL. A crucial cultural dimension of these changes has been the transformation of 'football communities', however, as with the broader society, the demise of traditional forms of 'community' has not heralded the demise of 'community' as such. Instead, what has occurred is a complex restructuring of the nature of 'community' in the AFL, and it is to this complicated matter that we now mm our attention.

### **The Renegotiation of 'Community' Boundaries in the AFL: 1946-1999**

Since the end of the Second World War, the AFL has been transformed from a twelve team, semi-professional, city-based competition, into a sixteen team, fully professional and thoroughly commercialised national league. This transformation has been the product of a combination of the external societal

changes outlined above; the intensifying impact of media and sponsorship interests; and a set of financial pressures emanating from within the league itself. Together, these have driven a wholesale economic restructuring of the competition, coupled with a frequently traumatic adjustment in the cultural dimensions of the game. The latter has included substantial changes to the club-community nexus, whereby AFL 'football communities' have changed both in their *form*, and in the *means* through which they are constructed.

For present purposes, the post-war history of the AFL will be divided into three periods: 1) 1946 to 1963; 2) 1964 to 1984; and 3) 1985 to the present. The first period (1946-63) was generally characterised by continuity and stability in the organisation and operation of the competition (Stewart, 1998). Thus, the pre-war structure was carried over into the post-war years, with the AFL being comprised of the same twelve clubs that had constituted the league since 1925. These clubs continued to appoint representatives to the traditional Board of Directors, which was responsible for overseeing the running of the competition as a whole. Throughout this period, the game was administered largely by long-serving and committed amateurs,<sup>12</sup> who were entrenched in the cultural traditions of the AFL. Crucially, primary income sources, namely gate receipts and membership subscriptions, were sufficient to fund the operation of the competition. Thus, although radio and (from 1956) television broadcasting rights were a valued and growing source of revenue, at this time they were *not* central to the finances of the AFL. At the club level, in the mid-1960s as much as 95 per cent of income came from primary sources, and no revenue was derived from sponsorship or merchandising (Stewart, 1983).

Although the general structure of the AFL remained stable between 1946 and 1963, the societal transformation outlined above served to progressively undermine the traditional relationship between clubs and their supporters. Prior to the war, this relationship had hinged upon a strong fusion of the four conceptions of 'community' outlined above. That is, 'football communities' had been based upon specific inner-city locales, which constituted local social systems, and which produced a strong sense of identity that was sharpened against the identities of rival suburbs and clubs. However, from the late 1940s demographic changes associated with immigration and suburbanisation began to undermine this fusion. For instance, before the Second World War, the population of Collingwood was relatively large and stable, as well as being comparatively homogeneous both ethnically (Irish Catholic) and socially (working class). However, in the post-war years, the suburb's population declined by more than half, and an influx of non-English speaking background migrants witnessed rapid rates of population turnover, and a reduction in demographic homogeneity (Sandercock & Turner, 1981). When coupled with the fact that fewer and fewer players were being drawn from the local area,<sup>13</sup> the traditional club-community nexus at Collingwood Football Club was seriously disrupted.

Notwithstanding the significant impact of demographic shifts, over the period 1946 to 1963 the club-community nexus in the AFL remained remarkably strong. That is, although more and more supporters came to reside outside the traditional inner-city heartland of the AFL, many continued to identify with 'their' club and its suburban locale. Nowhere was this more evident than at Collingwood's great rival – the Carlton Football Club. Here, the impact of demographic changes was particularly conspicuous, as the suburb received a large influx of post-war Italian migrants. However, although these migrants were typically unfamiliar with Australian Rules football upon their arrival, in time many of them became 'converts' to the indigenous game, and came to support and play for Carlton (Frost, 1998; Stewart, Hess & Dixon, 1997). This conversion process was partly due to the role of the mass media, especially television, in promoting the game. Essentially, the media served to socialise these groups into the culture and traditions of the AFL as a whole, and 'their' clubs in particular. What increasingly emerged was a distinctive mediated form of communion.

This socialisation role of the media extended to many of the former residents of Carlton, who in the post-war period moved into the new outer suburbs of Melbourne. The extensive media coverage of AFL football,<sup>14</sup> coupled with club memberships and attendances at home matches, ensured that the tribal allegiances of this group proved portable, as they maintained their old loyalties despite residing in new geographical areas (Pascoe, 1994). The end result was a club that drew support from across a number of different suburbs (multi-suburban communion), and that formed the base for a number of distinct communities. These included the so-called 'silvertails', who were drawn to the club on account of Prime Minister Menzies being the number one ticket holder; the 'academic community' associated with nearby Melbourne University; the above mentioned newly arrived Italians; the old Jewish and Lebanese families who had moved out of the suburb, but had taken their allegiances with them; and the working class people located in Carlton's metropolitan recruitment zone (Nadel, 1998c). This range reveals that the nature of 'community' in the AFL was becoming increasingly complex.

The years 1964 to 1984 – our second period – arguably constitute the most turbulent phase in the history of the AFL. This period witnessed a reduction in club loyalty, associated with the onset and intensification of rampant commercialisation and professionalisation. The emergence of these trends was symbolised by the so-called 'Barassi affair', which erupted at the close of the 1964 season. This incident saw Ron Barassi, a 'favourite son' of the Melbourne Football Club, lured over to Carlton in a lucrative deal. This event met with outrage on the part of supporters and sections of the media, and the level of hostility reflected the growing social distance that was emerging between supporters and players. The episode also served as a catalyst for a generalised concern over a perceived decline in club loyalty. Together, these developments

posed serious threats to the sense of mutuality that supporters traditionally sought with the players of 'their' club.

In the wake of the 'Barassi affair', a trend towards professionalisation was set in train, and by the late 1960s the 'professional ethos' was clearly in the ascendancy (Stewart, 1998). In 1970, a number of 'star' players at Collingwood and Essendon threatened strike action as a means of securing higher payments, and three years later a players' association was formed. In 1975, several events combined to increase the pace of change in the AFL. Firstly, North Melbourne won its first ever premiership, a victory that was widely attributed to the professionalisation of its administration; an increasing emphasis on secondary sources of funding; and a so-called 'chequebook' approach to player recruitment. Similar commercial changes were afoot at the central administration, and this was reflected in the setting up of the Properties Division, charged with marketing the League's logo. Finally, colour television was introduced in 1975, increasing the appeal of football to viewers, and resulting in an escalation in television rights and corporate sponsorship (Nadel, 1998a). By this time, the AFL could no longer fund itself on the basis of primary sources alone, meaning that it was not even nominally autonomous from outside commercial interests.

These developments in the AFL undermined the power of club members and supporters. Increasingly, they were transformed into consumers of a sports commodity that was shaped by the commercial imperatives of television and sponsors. The most striking example of this process occurred with the relocation of the South Melbourne club to Sydney in 1982. This event demonstrated a total disregard for the traditional local roots and cultural significance of the club. Indeed, the move proved so unpopular with certain sections of the South Melbourne 'community' that they became embroiled in an ultimately doomed three-and-a-half month court battle to keep the club in Victoria (Nadel, 1998a).

In the hyper-commercialised context of the late 1970s and early 1980s many supporters came to counterpoise traditional notions of 'community' to the economically driven agenda of the central administration. The latter was increasingly viewed as a power-hungry corporate bully, more concerned with profits than the overall interests of the code. This view came to be reflected in many media reports on the AFL: for example, in 1982 Tim Duncan in *The Bulletin* scrutinised the politics behind the AFL's 'boom', and in 1984 Garrie Hutchinson of *The National Times* posed the question 'Football, Finis?'. Implicit in these accounts was the theme of 'community lost', whereby the notion of 'community' was enlisted in an ideological manner, as a means of criticising the current administration.

The criticism of the AFL was strengthened by the pronounced financial disarray that plagued the competition. In 1984, a confidential internal document was leaked to the media. Known as the Tilley Report, it confirmed that the League had suffered a loss of almost \$2 million in 1983, and that at this time half of its clubs had been technically bankrupt. This dire situation stemmed

from a number of sources, including rising player payments, spiralling transfer fees, and a general lack of financial regulation. These problems were exacerbated by the fact that crowds had been falling during the 1980s suggesting both a waning enthusiasm for the game and growing competition from other sporting and entertainment rivals (Linnell, 1995).

In March 1984, John Elliott, the controversial entrepreneur and President of the Carlton Football Club, attempted to orchestrate a breakaway league, ostensibly in order to tackle these problems. Following this episode, the clubs reached the decision that to satisfactorily address the crisis confronting the competition, it was necessary to hand over power to a new, independent and streamlined Commission. The Commission replaced the traditional Board of Directors in October 1984, and its powers were substantially strengthened in the wake of the 1992 Crawford Report (Linnell, 1995). Effectively, these moves amounted to a two-step process of 'appropriation', whereby club members indirectly lost much of their power. In short, the clubs to which the members belonged had surrendered the bulk of their influence regarding the overarching development of the game. From this point on then, the future of the AFL was subsumed by Commission priorities, and whilst members might still democratically influence decisions at the club level, the real locus of power lay in the hands of the more distant Commission. In this context, many members have been reduced to the status of 'privileged consumers', complete with priority seating etcetera, but *without* the official power to actively shape the direction of the competition.

Under the auspices of the AFL Commission, the years since 1984 have witnessed a major restructuring of the competition. The outline for this restructuring was set down in 1985 with the release of a key policy statement, entitled *Establishing the Basis for Future Success* (Linnell, 1995). This document provided the blueprint for a series of key reforms, centred on three central strategies: ground rationalisation; labour market regulation; and national expansion. Each of these has impacted in important ways upon the nature and experience of 'community' in the AFL.

The policy of ground rationalisation has been adopted to contain the cost structures of individual clubs, as well as to maximise crowds by fully utilising major stadia. Currently, the ten Victorian clubs share five stadia, with half of these clubs being based at just one 'home' venue – the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). This policy has exacerbated the decline of geographically specific forms of community, as traditional attachments to the local 'home ground' have been fractured.

Another factor that has undermined the geographical nature of football communities is the Commission's extensive system of labour market regulation. This involves a series of measures, including a salary cap introduced in 1984, and a national player draft introduced in 1991 (Dabscheck, 1996). The latter has harboured the most significant implications for 'community', for it

has put an end to all forms of zoning, with the consequence that clubs now routinely draw their players from across the nation. In this context, there is a negligible chance of players representing their 'local' AFL club. Coupled with ground rationalisation, the end of zoning has substantially eroded the attachments between clubs and their traditional geographical territories.

Building on the relocation of the Swans in 1982, the Commission instigated a full-blown program of national expansion in 1987, with the acceptance of teams from Queensland (the Brisbane Bears), and Western Australia (the West Coast Eagles). In 1991, further expansion occurred with the inclusion of a team from South Australia (the Adelaide Crows). At the time of their establishment, each was the only team from its respective state, and this resulted in a new state-based form of communion. With no prior existence, these teams were forced to construct, or 'invent', a cultural tradition, in order to secure a substantial following. This process was carried out on the basis of existing notions of state chauvinism, and it necessarily involved a much wider, more amorphous sense of 'community' than had hitherto existed in the local competitions.<sup>15</sup> In Western Australia and South Australia, the success of this strategy was evident in the subsequent decline in interest for official interstate matches. Put simply, the Eagles and the Crows were effectively regarded as the state side by the majority of supporters.

In 1995, the Commission further expanded the AFL by admitting a second team from Western Australia (the Fremantle Dockers), and two years later a second team from South Australia (Port Adelaide). Presently, the Commission is in the process of strengthening the AFL presence in Sydney, by scheduling a series of Kangaroo matches to be played in the NSW capital from 1999 onwards.<sup>16</sup> These developments indicate that state-based forms of communion are on the decline, as the AFL subdivides state loyalties in an attempt to build a more balanced national competition. In the case of the Dockers and Port, the Commission has attempted to achieve this aim by tapping into established football loyalties and 'community' identities.<sup>17</sup>

The Commission's integrated policies of ground rationalisation, labour market regulation, and national expansion have proved a major financial success.<sup>18</sup> Further, there is no doubt that in 1987 national expansion was essential to the financial survival of several of the Victorian clubs, injecting substantial funds through licensing fees, and subsequently increases in television and sponsorship revenue.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this 'bail-out' function merely served to disguise the Commission's ultimate intention to reduce the number of Melbourne clubs. That is, in order to bring about a 'properly balanced' national competition, the Commission reneged on its initial assurance that expansion would not involve a reduction in the number of Victorian teams. Instead, it has engaged in a sustained push to secure club relocations and/or mergers. To this end, a Merger Summit was organised in 1989, and by 1996 the Commission offered \$6 million to any clubs who voluntarily took this step (Nadel, 1998b).

In an effort to defend themselves from this restructuring agenda, many of the Melbourne-based clubs have constructed ideologies based around notions of 'community'. Here, the quintessential example is that of the Footscray Football Club, which, in 1989, successfully staved off a proposed merger with the Fitzroy Lions. This was achieved by building a cohesive 'community' campaign centred on issues of class and geography (Gordon & Dalton, 1990; Lack, McConville, Small & Wright, 1996). During the 1990s a number of other clubs, including Richmond, St Kilda, Melbourne and Hawthorn, successfully harnessed 'community' support in secure an independent existence. Here, the strategies employed have varied considerably, according to the specific histories of each club. Thus, Richmond was able to garner support on the basis of its proud playing record, an option which had hardly been open to Footscray, with only one distant premiership to its credit (Nadel, 1998c). For its part, in 1996 Fitzroy failed to stave off a merger with the Brisbane Bears, partly because demographic transition and a poor recent on-field history combined to undermine its potential for constructing a powerful and plausible ideology.

### **Making Sense of 'Community.' in the Post-War AFL**

The discussion above goes some way towards establishing the high degree of complexity associated with the post-war transformation of 'community' in the AFL. Specifically, it makes clear the fact that each club has *particular* historical resources upon which to draw, and these serve to constrain the forms of 'community' that can be convincingly 'imagined'. To make matters even more complicated, these *inter*-club differences are coupled with *intra*-club differences, whereby each club typically serves as the source for a number of distinct 'communities'. Thus, one 'community' might revolve around the traditional local area of the club; while another might be constructed largely through the media, having little to do with a specific geographical area; and another still through a shared struggle to stave off the closure, merger, or relocation of the club. In turn, there is frequently an overlap between these various 'communities', such that an individual may belong to several 'communities' at once. At a given moment then, a whole series of 'football communities' coexist with one another, varying in terms of size, form, and the means through which they are constructed.

In the face of such complexity, one might be forgiven – or perhaps even lauded – for shying away from drawing any general conclusions, however, as C. Wright Mills (1970) has convincingly argued, one of the key tasks confronting the social scientist is to make 'orderly sense' of specific events by locating them within the context of broader trends. Even more important, Mills (1970: 170) contends, is the challenge to 'see all the trends at once, as moving parts of the total social structure of the period'. In short, social scientists should not be overwhelmed by the vast array of events before them, but instead should seek to clarify them by relating them to broader structural patterns and trends.

It was argued in Part One of this article that the main trends in the post-war transformation of ‘community’ in the AFL can be clarified by systematically applying Raymond Williams’s schema of dominant, emergent, and residual social forces. To reiterate briefly, *dominant* social forces are those that are most powerful at a given point in time; *emergent* social forces present a challenge to the dominant forces of the current period, and often attain dominant status in the future; and *residual* social forces are those that were once dominant, but which have since been superseded (although they continue to exert an influence on the present). Taken together, these categories allow for the coexistence of dominance and multiplicity, and they also serve to relate past, present, and future trends in the current moment. The result is an appreciation of, and a keen sensitivity to, the shifting balance of social forces over time.

By drawing on this framework, we can establish some of the major trends in ‘community’ in the AFL over the post-war period, although as mentioned these should be interpreted in the light of the specific structural contexts and cultural traditions of particular clubs. The broad trends are summarised in the table presented as Figure One.

Figure One: Summary of the Post-War Transformation of ‘Community’ in the AFL

	1946-1963	1964-1984	1985-1999
Residual	local social system	local social system suburban communion members as producers	local social system suburban communion state communion (1995 - ongoing) members as producers
Dominant	suburban communion members as producers	multi-suburban communion mediated communion	multi-suburban communion mediated communion ideology members as consumers (especially after 1992)
Emergent	multi-suburban communion mediated communion	ideology members as consumers	‘new’ mediated communion state communion (1987-1994)

Figure One confirms that throughout the post-war period, ‘community’ as a local social system has comprised a residual force in the AFL, and this has largely been a consequence of the societal transformation that commenced with

the 'Long Boom'. From 1946 to the present, the dominant forms of 'community' have included various kinds of communion (or identity). These have shifted in terms of geographical orientation – broadly, from the suburban to the multi-suburban levels. However, between 1982 and 1994, as a phase in the transition to a national competition, multi-suburban communion in Melbourne was coupled with emergent city and state-based forms of communion in (respectively) New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. Since 1995, however, new additions to the League have reversed this trend. In 1999, with the Kangaroos playing five of their games in Sydney, Brisbane will be left as the only genuine one-team city.

Over the post-war period, the forms of communion have also varied in terms of the *means* through which a sense of identity or belonging is constructed. Crucially, the media have come to play an increasingly important role in this process, as 'communities' have become less localised, and as their members are less likely to be co-present, or to engage in face-to-face interaction. By 1998, some 1,200 media personnel were accredited to cover the competition. Their work was carried out within the framework of the AFL's newly introduced 'media relations policy' and was facilitated at half of the clubs by full-time staff dedicated to media management and communications. The relative importance of this coverage is reflected in the fact that in 1998 the average attendance per round of AFL matches was 278,000, whereas the television audience was more than ten times that figure – hovering between three to four million per round (AFL, 1999).

Interestingly, a trend is emerging whereby supporters are using 'new media' in an attempt to gain greater control over the ways in which they consume 'their' game. Such 'new media' include a growing number of unofficial internet sites, and supporter-produced fanzines, such as the Sydney-based *Footyzine* publication. However, not all supporters are prepared to limit their power to the sphere of consumption. Indeed, a key theme that surfaces in Figure One is the growing importance of ideological variants of 'community' over the post-war period. Commencing in earnest with the attempt to prevent the relocation of the South Melbourne club to Sydney in 1982, these usages have intensified over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. This reflects the fact that many AFL supporters feel that commercial interests have increasingly appropriated 'their' sport. In this context, versions of 'community' are 'invented' or 'constructed' in order to push back, or resist, the escalating corporate penetration of the competition. These attempts have occurred at the level of individual clubs, as with Footscray in 1989, but also at the level of the league as a whole. An example of the latter is the document *AFL Out of Bounds* (1992) produced by Fight for Football (Victoria) Incorporated. This source explicitly draws upon a discourse of 'community football' to challenge the modern trajectory of the game.

## Conclusion

Clearly, the issue of ‘community’ in the AFL is a highly complex one, however, it has been argued here that we should not allow ourselves to be paralysed by this complexity, nor should we shirk the challenge of drawing some general conclusions. Instead, while remaining mindful of the fact that each club has its own particular cultural tradition and structural context, we should recognise that all clubs are faced by, and must respond to, similar forces working through the competition as a whole.

Ultimately, this article is *not* intended to serve as a definitive account of ‘community’ in the post-war AFL – indeed, much empirical research remains to be done on this topic. Instead, the threefold aim has been: 1) to establish the need for conceptual precision in the area; 2) to provide an integrated conceptual framework and vocabulary capable of delivering such precision; and 3) to briefly demonstrate the usefulness of this framework. The result warns against a simple ‘loss of community’ perspective, which all too often pervades journalistic and scholarly accounts of post-war changes in the AFL. In these accounts, the treatment of the past is frequently tinged with nostalgia, while the present is subjected to a misconstrued form of hyper-criticism. In place of such an approach, which typically sees football communities as having ‘disappeared’ in the post-war period, it is preferable to recognise that their nature and boundaries have been recast in complex ways. Understanding this transitional process is a necessary basis for engaging in informed critique regarding the recent development and trajectory of the game.

## NOTES:

1. From 1897 through to 1989, the Australian Football League (AFL) was known as the Victorian Football League (VFL). The change of name reflected the national expansion of the competition in the 1980s and ’90s. Throughout this article, for the sake of simplicity, the ‘AFL’ acronym alone will be used to denote the competition.
2. Due to word constraints, my treatment of the post-war development of the AFL will necessarily be cursory. Readers unfamiliar with this development are advised to consult chapters 6 to 8 of Hess and Stewart (1998).
3. Too often in accounts of the post-war transformation of ‘community’ in the AFL, the influence of the broad societal context is treated tangentially, or skimmed over briefly. However, it is central to a well-rounded understanding of this process.
4. The first window of economic prosperity occurred just prior to World War One, the second in the mid- 1920s (McQueen, 1991: 176-78).
5. The White Australia Policy was enshrined in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the first Act of the newly formed Federal Parliament. The policy began to be formally

dismantled from the late 1960s but this process was not completed until 1975 (Markus, 1994).

6. Indeed, as it turned out, the Labor Party was not able to fully see through the plans it had devised during the war. Instead, it lost office to Robert Menzies's Liberal Party in 1949, and due partly to the infamous 'split' of 1955, Labor remained in the political wilderness until 1972. Nevertheless, during Menzies's long tenure as Prime Minister (1949-1966), most of the Labor objectives were adopted and realised, as Australia (and its leader) coasted on the tide of post-war economic prosperity.
7. This 'reconstruction' followed in the wake of the Chifley Labor Government's commitment to full employment in 1945. It led to a series of major public works projects, the most famous of which was the Snowy Mountains hydro-electricity scheme.
8. Initially, this capital came predominantly from Britain. However, as part of a broader economic and political realignment with the United States, over time an increasing proportion of investment in Australia came from American transnational corporations. By the 1970s investment from the US roughly equalled that from Britain. From the 1960s, Japanese investment also came to play an important role in Australia's economic development, particularly in the burgeoning mining sector (Connell & Irving, 1992).
9. The reasons behind the bipartisan political support for the post-war immigration program included the related perceived threats of communism and 'Asian hordes to the north' – the so-called 'red peril' and 'yellow peril' respectively. Together, these were sufficient to convince many politicians and senior civil servants that defence requirements necessitated large-scale immigration -Australia must either 'populate or perish'. However, in the medium to longer term, of greater importance than these Cold War phobias was the fact that migrants were needed to realise key economic and development goals. These included the above mentioned public works projects, as well as the desire to realise a viable manufacturing sector (see Baldock, 1978: 64-5). In both of these areas, the contribution of migrants proved crucial. This was particularly true of those from a non-English speaking background, who were officially 'directed' by the Government to work on particular projects, and who were 'prepared' to accept the dirty jobs that many other Australians considered beneath them (Collins, 1991).
10. Currently, the Australian population is comprised of over 100 ethnic groups, speaking more than 150 languages (Castles et al., 1988).
11. In Australia, the settlement policy of assimilationism operated until the mid 1960s, at which time it was replaced by the policy of integration – the precursor of multiculturalism. Assimilationism demanded that migrants leave behind the language and culture of their country of origin, and that they immediately allow themselves to be absorbed into the (assumed) homogeneous culture of the host society (see Castles et al., 1988: 45-5 1).
12. The persistence of amateurs during this period occurred despite the aim of Kenneth Luke, the League's President from 1956, to professionalise the administration of the game.

13. Prior to the Second World War, Collingwood had staffed its team almost entirely from local players, but after the war this situation changed rapidly. Thus, by as early as 1952, only a quarter of Collingwood's players were locals, and this figure fell to the point where by the mid-1960s a local Collingwood player had become a rarity (Sandercock & Turner, 1981).
14. From the late 1950s AFL football programs were televised on multiple channels, and stretched from Thursdays through to Sundays, despite the fact that matches were restricted to Saturday afternoons. Many of these programs adopted a panel format, and were an ideal vehicle for socialising viewers into the culture of the sport (Pascoe, 1995).
15. In the cases of Western Australia and South Australia, the local competitions – the WAFL and SANFL respectively – had long and distinguished histories, and their clubs were based upon forms of 'community' similar to those in Melbourne.
16. Up until 1999, the Kangaroos were known as the North Melbourne Football Club. Their change of name not only reflects the club's Sydney aspirations, but also stands as a testament to the declining significance of suburban locality as a basis for 'community' in the AFL.
17. This strategy suggests that the Commission was determined to avoid some of the problems it had previously encountered in setting up teams from scratch, although these problems had been particularly pronounced in the states that were traditional strongholds of rugby league – namely, New South Wales and Queensland.
18. Indeed, all of the key 'performance indicators' seem to vindicate the Commission's policies. For instance, in 1998, aggregate and per-game attendances; aggregate and per-club memberships; the competition's media profile; and total AFL revenue all stood at record-high levels (AFL, 1999).
19. In 1987, the windfall (per club) from the combined West Coast and Brisbane licence fees totalled \$666,666.

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