

# Reclaiming the Game: Fandom, Community and Globalisation

**Michael Moller**

Just after 10am on 6 July 2001, I received an email from a South Sydney rugby league football club supporter advising that the club had won the support of the Australian Federal Court in pressing for re-admission to the competition from which it had been excluded for the past two years. As a subscriber to a supporters' e-group, my inbox rapidly filled with dozens of messages jubilantly proclaiming the club's legal win. I felt a powerful sense of elation and of wanting to be among others who would respond even more keenly to 'their' victory. This was satisfied by a visit to Souths' League's Club in Redfern where I knew supporters had been assembled since early morning. As I reached the main bar area upstairs a red and green clad man took me by the arm and, with a happiness that was both patient and effusive, asked if 'George' was going to be coming up the escalator soon. He was referring to Souths' president George Piggins who, as player, coach and administrator, had resolutely maintained loyalty to the club, and in doing so had won the admiration of a great many Souths supporters. 'Nah, mate', I replied, 'that's Coleman' (another former Souths player and coach), who was encircled by cameramen and sound crew downstairs.

An hour later, accompanied by a chant of 'South Sydney', Piggins did make it upstairs. The chanting was not tuneful or rhythmic, but it hit me straight in the guts, and I suddenly felt as if something was stuck in my throat. I quickly rationalised it as a visceral response to the very obvious displays of enthusiasm and joy that were all around. A couple of blokes near me, tears running down their faces, were straining to shout as loudly as they possibly could, with hands clasped on each other's shoulder. Everywhere I looked people were shouting at the top of their voices, hugging each other, laughing, smiling and crying, sometimes all at once. A minute later, I again found myself close to tears when the crowd of a few hundred began to sing 'Glory, Glory', a song I had long thought soppy and embarrassingly nostalgic. Later, I wondered if this may be precisely why fans know and respond to it in the way they do.

The experience of being a fan has become an important object of analysis in both academic and popular discourses. Being a fan refers to a set of activities unlike those which characterise most other kinds of social and cultural practice. Shouting at the top of your lungs in a pub, for example, will most often lead to your expulsion from the premises. Being a fan means cultivating a certain kind of relationship to products or services produced for consumption in the public leisure sphere by a particular person or group. This relationship is founded on an investment — in time, money, affect, desire and emotion — by consumers who thereby feel themselves to have a stake in the performance of that person or group. The level and mix of personal investment differs between individuals.

An interest in sport implies learning a distinct set of codes and meanings due to sport's historically specific social politics.<sup>1</sup> Since at least the second half of the

nineteenth century, sport has been widely valued as a means of cultivating individual self-discipline, camaraderie, norms of social identity (in terms of masculinity and race, for example) and respect for authority. The values, ideals and codes of behaviour associated with locality are other important features of sports cultures that distinguish sports fandom from most other fan cultures, especially in the case of team sports. While being a fan is nearly always associated with the trope of belonging and shared cultural investment,<sup>2</sup> sports fandom organises communality in a unique way, deploying ideas about locality that speak very powerfully to many people.

This article traces the localising aspect of sports fandom through a case study of the South Sydney rugby league football club, the geo-political, social and cultural distinctions deployed in its name, and the fans who support and uphold this set of distinctions.<sup>3</sup> Mark Courtney, a Souths' supporter who wrote a book called *Moving the Goalposts* about his experiences as a fan, expresses some of these values:

Something deep inside me resonates with something deep inside the South Sydney Club ... For me South Sydney stand for something ... Things like honesty and integrity and loyalty. Like saying you are going to do something, and then doing it, even if you get a better offer in the meantime. Like standing by your mates, even if they are up against a difficult opponent in a fight they seem destined to lose.<sup>4</sup>

Courtney links his support for the club to the values transmitted to it through its mutually productive relationship with the local area, its economic, social and cultural conditions, and the people who live them. Moreover, the perceived lack of such a relationship in the case of other clubs is a recurring theme in Souths' fans' criticisms of newer clubs — notably merged entities such as Wests Tigers and clubs with only a recent association with rugby league such as Melbourne and New Zealand.

Courtney's model of supporter identification tallies with Lee's discussion of localities as places invested with an historically specific set of dispositions toward economic, social and cultural processes and the people who perform them. Lee argues that places cannot be reduced to a site at which people are free to make and enact decisions about their cultural life. Places are filled with a complex historical set of actions and relations that ground articulations of taste, pride and ethics. He draws extensively on Bourdieu's model of socio-cultural stratification, particularly his concept of habitus as a structured set of dispositions toward objects in the social field.<sup>5</sup> From Lee, participation in local sporting teams is one way of exhibiting a disposition towards certain kinds of activity, thought and feeling. Through the sedimentation of repeated practices, the South Sydney club has come to value — and be valued for — particular inflections of such things as labour, mateship and pride, or in Courtney's words, 'honesty and integrity and loyalty'. This can be seen in an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) documentary about Souths screened a few weeks prior to their exclusion from the National Rugby League (NRL). The documentary focused extensively on how the boys and young men in the South Sydney area respond to the mythology about the bleak economic conditions faced by residents of inner-urban areas.<sup>6</sup> It contained an interview with former player/coach Craig Coleman describing his very personal attachment to the club:

That's all I wanted to do when I was a kid. I just wanted to play for South Sydney. And when I did make my first grade debut, it was the greatest day of me life. A lot of my class-mates finished in jail. South Sydney've given me that opportunity which I'm very, very grateful for. And who knows? Who knows? I'm not qualified to do anything else apart from play football.<sup>7</sup>

Such representations support the belief that rugby league, and, more particularly, representing Souths, presents a scarce opportunity to make something of oneself — an opportunity that requires determination, hard work and pride. Playing football is presented as being one of the few avenues of hope and opportunity, and as being highly valued as a consequence.

Globalisation is perhaps most often thought of as a vast process involving the exploitation of local opportunities and/or the circumvention of local obstacles. Economic power, on this model, negates, transforms or destroys the cultural values and power of a group of people. When I discussed the work I was doing about rugby league and globalisation with a group of fans at Souths Leagues Club, for example, a number of people asked me what there could possibly be to investigate. As one man put it, 'What you want to know is how we've been Murdoched'.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Souths and the NRL/News Limited, there are clearly grounds for an 'us' versus 'them' mentality — or at least there were until the club's readmission. The club's legal action, after all, listed the NRL, News Limited and the other clubs in the competition as respondents to its claim that the *Trade Practices Act* had been illegally breached by the NRL's actions. This antagonistic, binary relationship, however, is complicated by the fact that the club and its supporters had all along been hoping to gain readmission to the very competition they had vehemently decried.

Souths' readmission to the NRL competition for the 2002 season, quickly and warmly proposed by both the NRL and News Limited, raises the problem of how to recast the relationship between the club and the game's administrative body. Souths' fans have routinely characterised themselves as something of a panacea for the game's ills, leaving little room for their continued resentment of the NRL. Moreover, Souths' claims to local specificity are framed against the claims of others in rugby league's supra-local marketplace. Assertions of local identity, as Robertson points out, are 'made within the global terms of identity and particularity'.<sup>9</sup>

In his discussion of globalisation and culture, Tomlinson refers to globalisation as a complex, multi-dimensional set of connections between places and cultures, each seeking to promote their particularity. The 'complex connectivity' which he argues is the hallmark of globalisation is created through 'the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterise modern social life'.<sup>10</sup> Such an understanding of globalisation foregrounds the intensification of flows of various kinds: people, images, capital and knowledge to name a few.<sup>11</sup> The relative ease of this movement, its taken-for-grantedness by at least some people, Tomlinson argues, contradicts the historically learned experience of physical distance as limiting. It does so, however, in quite specific ways. Tomlinson suggests that the sense of proximity facilitated by improved transport, mass media and communications technology compresses space and time. It is able to connect places that are uneven in scale; in the 1999

season, for example, South Sydney competed against teams from north Queensland and Auckland. Further, places remain culturally distinct entities, their physical connectivity meaning that people in local communities are routinely brought into contact with patterns of similarity and difference to which they are compelled to respond.

The negation of physical distance by air travel and mass media was critical to the regional and interstate spread of the major rugby league competition in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Tomlinson declares that ‘connectivity means ... that we now experience this distance in different ways’.<sup>13</sup> The South Sydney club, located close to the city centre and historically identified as at the heart of rugby league in Sydney, is confronted by an uncertain future at least partly as a result of the way connectivity facilitates expansion, but also the embedding of difference within local relations. A number of demographic, physical and cultural changes within South Sydney shape the manner in which the football club has represented the sense of belonging that accompanies a culture of passionate fandom. Connectivity means that we now experience closeness in different ways.

In an expanded competition, supporters need to reinvent how their identification with Souths is organised, particularly through their use of media. With matches being played as far away as Townsville and Auckland, fans have little alternative but to use television as a primary means of entertainment and support. The distance/closeness of players to fans has also been reorganised by the movement of players away from the kinds of social spaces and activities — particularly employment and socialising — that had historically afforded them with a local, public visibility. With their labour increasingly subject to scientifically controlled, professional regimes, players are not as readily available to their fans as they were twenty years ago. Peter, a local resident in his late fifties who I interviewed in a Kensington pub in which Souths has held informal post-match celebrations for many years, lamented the passing of this boozy form of social interaction. He described how the pub, which had long been a ‘rugby league pub’, had changed dramatically over the past ten years or so, particularly since the Super League/Australian Rugby League (ARL) feud of the mid 1990s. I asked Peter, who owned a small web-based logistics company specialising in electrical components, about who he talked to about rugby league and Souths:

Nobody. Nobody cares any more. It’s very rare that the subject of rugby league is broached, very rare. When you think about how football mad this pub was six years ago, and think of it today, they couldn’t get enough to fill a tipping competition. Nobody would want to go in it.

Notwithstanding very real concerns about power and the uneven distribution of wealth, the binary model of the relation between globalisation and locality is beginning to be critiqued by a number of writers for its lack of theoretical rigour, its often uncritical valorisation of the local, and its failure to account for local identity as a historically specific phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> Robertson argues against simplistic formulations of the local and the global, maintaining that it is more productive to see their relationship as dynamic and mutually constitutive. Globalisation cannot exist without its activities being located somewhere. In an economic, cultural and political context of ‘place-competition’,<sup>15</sup> localities are always implicated in the discursive and material realities of globality. The idea

that globalisation is simply a force that rides roughshod over local dispositions and desires fails to take into account how global processes are inflected with local characteristics. In Robertson's terms, the outcomes produced by the dialogue between globalising flows and local places is best thought of as an instance of 'glocality'.

Glocalisation problematises easy divisions between global and local. Rather than viewing late-capitalist cultural, economic and political expression as forming 'a world of local assertions against globalising trends',<sup>16</sup> the concept of the glocal theorises social and cultural practices as responsive to, and constitutive of, a complex intermeshing of spatial and evaluative scales. Terms like 'home', 'community' and 'locality', evoking a sense of spatial proximity as well as affective belonging, ought not to be counterposed to processes of globalisation. The processes of globalisation are deeply implicated in the construction of these terms' semantic and affective value: '[t]o that extent the local is not best seen ... as a counterpoint to the global. Indeed it can be regarded, subject to some qualification, as an aspect of globalisation'.<sup>17</sup> Sassen takes this suggestion a step further, proposing that it is precisely at the level of locality or place, that popular expressions of power can be most effectively formulated.<sup>18</sup> Rather than simply being something that eradicates local specificity, globalisation may also facilitate the rearticulation of local identity. The distinction between geographical and cultural distance emerges at this juncture, the physical connectivity of localities, cities and regions adding a new valency to expressions of local identity and belonging. Globalisation demands that communities and the institutions in some way dependent on the support of community members outline how and why place matters to them. Further, it requires that individuals exercise diverse kinds of power in the articulation of that specificity.

In their struggle for inclusion in the NRL, Souths repeatedly refused to contemplate merging with another club, arguing that this would destroy a proud local sporting culture. Souths' fans and officials frequently deride other clubs for failing to preserve their distinct cultural values, arguing that the relative lack of success of merged entities such as Wests Tigers (Balmain and Wests), St George/Illawarra, and the Northern Eagles (Norths and Manly) on and off the field is due to a clash of cultures of fandom, management and players. With regard to the Northern Eagles, for example, Souths' fans point to the different management and supporter cultures of Manly and Norths. For many years Manly had a strong recruitment program, and supporters were tantalised by the club's success in the 1970s and 1980s, but the club had to defend perceptions that it simply bought premierships by raiding poorer less successful clubs, including neighbouring Norths. Perennial underachievers, Norths are an object of Souths' fans' sympathy, their dire financial position at the end of 1999 leaving them little choice but to accept a merger with Manly. By contrast, part of the reason George Piggins is so admired is his adamant that Souths can compete in a competition expanding from north Queensland to Melbourne, and that the local culture Souths represent can do this on their own.

South Sydney (the geographical place) has negotiated other kinds of demands. Underpinning the changing social and cultural relations articulated through rugby league's local institutions are a number of broader changes, connected and

inflected in specific ways in South Sydney. The first of these concerns the increasingly global competition for export revenue and markets which has seen traditional manufacturing businesses and jobs disappear from the area. The national decline in the manufacturing industry has been particularly significant in inner-urban areas such as South Sydney. In the inner-city/South Sydney area — the area between Leichhardt, Botany and the CBD — manufacturing jobs fell from 128,200 in 1968-69 to 59,800 in 1983-84; a drop of some 51 per cent.<sup>19</sup> With ageing equipment and an increasingly competitive national and global market for raw and value-added goods, manufacturers began to either close down operations, reinvest and automate, or move from the inner-city to cheaper land in areas such as Bankstown, Parramatta and Auburn with infrastructure specifically developed for industry.<sup>20</sup> The mythology of resistance to economic hardship and lack of opportunity in South Sydney clearly has historical resonance for the way working class culture and values are perceived.

The particular characteristics and effects of this local decline — at a time when the baby-boomer generation were beginning to make demands of their own for full, meaningful employment and secure housing — situate South Sydney in a very specific way in relation to other (sub)urban and regional localities. The decline of the area's traditional industries, and the resulting loss of jobs and youth to other areas (geographic and labour market) which offered better housing and employment opportunities, looms large in the way both the area and the club are imagined by fans. State Government housing policy in the 1960s favouring newly built housing estates in western and southern Sydney suburbs further positioned established inner-city areas as cramped, depressing and lacking opportunity. The flight of aspirational, white working class families away from the inner-city, and their (partial) replacement with students in flats and share accommodation, professionals and investors seeking property close to the city, as well as migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, had dramatically altered South Sydney as a place to live and work. Different kinds of movement into and out of South Sydney had seen the establishment of new industries, competing patterns and meanings of property ownership, and an expanded range of leisure activities. Peter, a long time resident in the Kensington area, recounted how few people in his street had lived there for more than five years. Proximity to the coast and the university, combined with a more widespread process of gentrification, had seen a number of his friends pack up and leave Sydney for the central coast.<sup>21</sup>

The closure of factories and warehouses not only affects the local job market; it also creates a spatial and cultural vacuum, leaving behind large areas of relatively unimproved and undercapitalised land.<sup>22</sup> A second broad social and cultural shift can be outlined: the redevelopment of physical sites with a consequent shift in the cultural characteristics and politics of communities which use the spaces. In contrast to the new suburbs policy of the 1960s, government housing policy from the late 1980s aiming to reduce urban sprawl made large-scale housing development in well serviced inner-city areas attractive to buyers, investors and developers. With fewer land-holders with whom to negotiate and strong government support for medium to high density housing, developers are better able to create and market large-scale projects promising design features (appliances, finishings, amenities) and a lifestyle distinct from that offered by

'suburbia' in terms of convenience to the city. An emphasis on design, newness and convenience conceals a remarkable degree of uniformity and separation of people from one another.

South Sydney consists of a complex intermeshing of people, communities, tastes and lifestyles. Juxtaposed with turn-of-the-century terrace housing, older-style walk-up flats, and converted warehouse buildings, some parts of South Sydney (such as Redfern or Erskineville) can be positioned favourably against the sameness of suburban architecture, spaces and, implicitly, people. Elsewhere, large-scale residential developments marketed at young professionals effect a radical break from an antiquated Fordist idea of progress and community wealth through heavy manufacturing industry. Green Square, a redeveloped area centred around Botany Road which just a few decades ago contained a large number of tanneries, soap and chemical manufacturers, and industrial printers is a prime example. Where before there was a form of community associated with dirty manufacturing industries — one marked by pollution and claustrophobia but nevertheless with a distinctive social history — now there is designer living and the opportunity to assert social distinction, though also a lack of any sense of community, difference or history.

The football club is also implicated in the construction of such perceptions and subsequent repatternings of cultural practice. The club's halcyon days of the late 1960s and early 1970s represent, for fans, the last period of great success before the calamitous changes which engulfed rugby league, and inner-city clubs like Souths in particular, in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Modern coaching techniques, increased sponsorship, the intervention of televisual media and lucrative (though for clubs and fans dislocating) player transfers all came to the fore after Souths' last premiership victory in 1971. In 1973, crowds at Souths matches were down 130,000 on 1972 figures, and both the football and leagues clubs were in serious financial difficulty, with the leagues club having to close its doors for three months.<sup>23</sup> Into the early 80s, clubs from inner-urban areas struggled on and off the field, while newer, suburban clubs such as Canterbury, Parramatta and Manly overpowered the competition. This subtle shift in the imagination of geographical might and community fortunes, and the reinvention of their expression, has positioned Souths as having to keep up.

South Sydney has responded dynamically to economic, social and cultural changes that can be broadly considered 'globalising'. Tomlinson's model of globalisation as connectivity allows us to outline how the cultural life experienced within a particular locality is shaped by events in other locations. In the face of industrial decline and demographic change, the working class values espoused through rugby league become an increasingly important source of pride and identification. Increasingly, also, it provides a narrative that both frames and provides an outlet for people's desire for opportunity, hope and pride in local institutions such as football clubs. One of the central characteristics of sports fandom is that supporters generally display a bias towards one team or club over others.

There is something special about South Sydney that explains why he supports them so passionately. In their battle for readmission to the NRL competition, a key part of Souths' argument has revolved around such sentiments. Their legal team

argued that the NRL, News Limited and the other clubs had consorted to exclude Souths from providing to their supporters a cultural good expressing particular symbolic values. The NRL, it was charged, had breached the *Trade Practices Act* by restraining a company from providing a specific, exchangeable good. The recognition of this argument logically depends on the ability to show that the club provides a particular good or service that is unlike that provided by others. In this, the statements, actions and feelings of supporters are central. Invariably, these statements make particular claims about Souths, which in turn refer to quite specific ideas about South Sydney as a locality and how it has responded to globalising forces.

Souths' supporters have expressed their attachment to the football club, and implicitly to the personal, social and cultural values of the locality in which it is based, in a number of ways. A week prior to the announcement that the club had been excluded from the 2000 NRL competition, for example, some 40,000 people (mostly, but not exclusively Souths' fans) rallied through the CBD in support of the club. Resisting the belief that decisions about competition structure and club location should be determined purely according to a market rationality, Souths' fans were adamant that local identifications and rivalries, far from being impediments to the game's success, were in fact essential to it. One of the banners at the rally stated: 'Reclaim the Game. It's OUR game'. Football club supporters are well placed to articulate how and why the particularity of local institutions, communities and histories matter to 'globalising' processes. As actors in the production, dissemination and consumption of images and meanings, fans explicitly demand that global processes not only respect local cultures, but that the production of symbolic goods such as club names, colours, merchandise and histories be based on them.<sup>24</sup> Matthew, a Souths' supporter in his late thirties who is an information technology worker who grew up in the Sutherland shire, and now lives close to the University of New South Wales in Kensington, argues that:

[W]hen you get clubs that relocate, rename, repackage, and players that come in and out of the club one year to the next, the club loses its identity. If it loses its identity you then lose the reason for fans to stay loyal. If you have none of those things to hang onto — identifying with the club through who they represent, where they play, who plays for them — if you don't have those things, you then lose the reasons to stay a fan of that club.

Failing to recognise the power of localities, as the testimony of Souths' fans individually and collectively make clear, leaves global corporations such as News Limited with nothing to interest consumers.

The repeated assertion of the club's historical significance and cultural specificity is widely adopted, though modified in various ways, by Souths' fans. Like many other Souths' supporters, George, a professional in his early forties, positions his type of fandom on the side of tradition and depth. A Souths' supporter for over thirty years, he rails against what he sees as the NRL's promotion of faddism and superficial fandom:

They've killed the game from a working man's point of view; people don't want to go and see all these mickey mouse teams. If someone says, "I'm a Wests Tigers supporter", I'd say, "Oh, you've followed them all your life, have you? Or for the last five months?" We grew up with Souths.<sup>25</sup>

George ridicules the fans of other clubs, and of merged entities in particular, for a lack of substance and meaning. Drawing on a powerful mythology characterising Souths and its supporters as ordinary people with their passion for the club tied to their personal lives, his response crystallises the idea that the communities of South Sydney remain committed to the club and the area despite dramatic social changes, or, better, as a way of responding to them.

This is not to say that such statements are mapped out in a purely rational or conscious way. If they were, it would have been much easier for the NRL to overcome them. The increased connectivity that makes globalisation work facilitates public comparisons of local practices and cultures. It needs to be remembered, after all, that Souths and its supporters were seeking readmission to a competition on the strength of their claims to local particularity. With often long histories of being a fan, Souths' supporters are able to inflect rhetorical statements about local belonging and identity with intimate personal histories. I asked George about going to the football as a social occasion, and about how many of his friends attend games regularly:

In my circle of friends, perhaps ten or a dozen ... They had their season tickets as well, and they would just sit in them. They were covered seats. Just to give you some names: Frank, Adam, Sam, Joe — who's passed away now, bless his soul. Tina, Adam's wife, would come along; sometimes Frank would bring his kids, sometimes Frank's cousins would come, who are also Souths supporters. I mean, in the 70s when we used to go, 70s and early 80s, we'd meet on the hill at Redfern Oval, and there'd be twenty or thirty of us. We were single then, most of us, and we'd all congregate in the same spot every week. It was a good feeling.

Identification with a rugby league club is both a personal and social event that allows people to locate themselves in social networks, to develop a history of participation with others in a context that poses one locality against another. Returning to Robertson's argument that assertions of local identity occur in the context of 'the global terms of identity and particularity',<sup>26</sup> it is clear that attachment to a football club is inseparable from the opportunity it provides to share a specific emotional investment with others.

Matthew explains that the increasing affluence of people in the Sutherland area changed their politics and the character of the place:

Throughout the 80s [Sutherland] got washed over with a lot of development and got swallowed up by the big suburban mass of Sydney and then became a bit of an enclave for white people who didn't like wogs ... It's just this whole wanky, "we vote Liberal because we're rich now". What's sad from my point of view is that a lot of these people came from working-class backgrounds that benefited from Labor policies, got affluent from Labor policies, and then ratted on them and now become Liberal voters, for no other reason than because they're affluent they must vote Liberal.

By contrast, he explicitly associates Souths and South Sydney with Labor values of loyalty, integrity and community. Indeed, the main reason for Matthew's active involvement with Souths is that he thinks the local area it represents is opposed to expressions of cultural snobbery. Again, the particularity of the area — South Sydney's history as a site of manufacturing and working class culture — is tied to the club and used to provide substance to fans' claims that Souths stand for a

treasured set of values: belonging to a community, remembering one's social and political obligations, and pride in locality.

A binary model of the local and the global would set such 'localising' values against the destructive power of globalisation. The response of Souths fans, while it sometimes slipped into virulent localism, was largely more nuanced than this. The increased connectivity of places means that Souths could not plausibly argue for a return to a competition restricted to Sydney based teams (though this was suggested now and again). In today's highly mediated cultural environment, such a form of localism goes beyond nostalgia to unsustainability. As I outlined earlier, people, images and capital, while always located somewhere, move too quickly and diffusely to allow local institutions the luxury of refusing to engage with institutions from other localities.

Media personality and long time Souths fan, Andrew Denton, recognises this very well, arguing that Souths are a highly marketable club that stands to attract a great deal of commercial and popular success in the global sports marketplace. In an article published a week before Souths were excluded from the competition, Denton described the club as 'a marketer's dream', with 'sponsors lined up for the next three years and the most successful junior league'.<sup>27</sup> Supporters like Denton make a sophisticated argument for the place of South Sydney within a supra-local sports competition. They also argue for the specificity of the club and its importance in their lives: they are passionate about the club because it is local and, in a sense, theirs. The football club is characterised as an important object of identification that provides them with a sense of belonging. They maintain that it is only on the basis of this identification and attachment that rugby league as a cultural product will be purchased and consumed.

The mythologies of mateship, class and community articulated by the people I spoke to are extremely powerful narratives which help people position themselves in a sporting and spectating environment that is changing rapidly. Of course, sporting and spectating practices are carried out by people and cannot be isolated from the way these people live through changes in a broader social context. Massey suggests that the processes of globalisation produces, as one of its effects, a desire for greater community stability, arguing that this sense of loss of control is most keenly felt by those who once possessed it.<sup>28</sup> Courtney, for example, refers to his support for Souths as an 'anchor' in his teenage years when he felt powerless in other aspects of his life, and George relates how he uses Souths as an outlet for personal anxieties. These kinds of uses are emblematic of the dominant way in which Souths are imagined as a vital part of fans' subjectivity. South Sydney is a local club priding itself on a history of working class affiliations and correlating attitude towards using one's body, resisting authority and caring for the community. As traditional sources of working class employment move away from South Sydney, the locality, its people and institutions increasingly trade on this history in symbolic terms. In doing so, the club and its fans have been able to distinguish themselves to an audience that is at least national, if not properly global.

**Reclaiming the Game: Fandom, Community and Globalisation**

**Michael Moller**

- 1 David Rowe points to the vastly different meanings associated with sport and rock music. In the 1960s and 1970s especially, 'Sport's promotion of the notion of healthy minds, healthy bodies and self-imposed discipline was almost the antithesis of the dionysian ethic of rock culture'. See David Rowe, *Popular Cultures, Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure*, London, Sage, 1995, p 10.
- 2 This is brought out well in the film *Fever Pitch*. The protagonist in the film, a male school teacher in his thirties, is a lifelong supporter of the Arsenal football club. Alone, or without the support of like-minded fans, he cuts a fairly pathetic figure who has great difficulty in maintaining lasting relationships with people who don't share his passion for Arsenal (who happen, often, to be women with whom he is in a sexual relationship), largely because he is absurdly focused on the fortunes of the team. When with other supporters, however, he is represented as successful and contented, and it is amongst the crowd of jubilant Arsenal fans that he and his lover, recently reconciled, find a unifying symbol of their affection. The power and good-will of the crowd is used to justify his devotion to a football club.
- 3 The South Sydney area for the purposes of this paper is located immediately south from the CBD, stretching east to Coogee and Maroubra, south to Botany and Mascot, and as far as Marrickville to the west. The catchment areas of the St George and Canterbury clubs separate South Sydney from Sutherland which lies some twenty kilometres from the city centre. A rugby league team from the area, Cronulla, was not introduced into the then Sydney competition until 1967 whereas South Sydney had been part of the competition since its inception in 1908.
- 4 Mark Courtney, *Moving the Goalposts*, Halstead Press, Sydney, 2000, p 220.
- 5 See Martyn Lee, 'Relocating location: Cultural geography, the specificity of place and the city habitus', in Jim McGuigan (ed.), *Cultural Methodologies*, London, Sage, 1997, pp 126-141; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans Richard Nice, London, Routledge, 1984.
- 6 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'Mission Impossible: South Sydney Football Club', *Australian Story*, 1999.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 'Murdoched' refers to Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Limited, the company that drove the commercialisation and reorganisation of the Rugby League competition, which was primarily responsible for the removal of Souths from the rebranded NRL.
- 9 Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity', in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities*, London, Sage, 1995, p 26.
- 10 Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, p 2.
- 11 For a discussion of the multiple flows that constitute the movements of globalisation, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

- 12 The premier domestic rugby league competition began expanding in 1982 with the admission of teams from Illawarra and Canberra. They were the first non-Sydney clubs to take part in the NSWRL competition. The early to mid-1980s, a period of more general economic turmoil, saw a number of Sydney clubs go to the wall. Crippling debt and falling revenue saw inner-city clubs – Souths, Wests and Newtown – faced with the choice of making difficult, unpopular and uncertain decisions or being bankrupted. Chasing the working class families and young men who provided a potential fan base, Wests moved from inner-western Sydney to Campbelltown in 1983. In 1983, too, Souths’ neighbours, the Newtown Jets, collapsed. Then, in 1988, Brisbane, Newcastle and Gold Coast teams accepted invitations to be part of a 16 team competition. Between 1995 and 1997, a number of clubs from around Australia and New Zealand took part in one or more competitions, some of which are now part of the NRL competition. In 2000 and 2001, 14 teams competed in the NRL, only eight of which are partly or fully based in Sydney. Moreover, there remains significant pressure on Sydney clubs to amalgamate or relocate.
- 13 Tomlinson, op. cit., p 4.
- 14 See for instance Arjun Appadurai, ‘Globalization and the research imagination’, in *International Social Science Journal*, no 160, June 1999, pp 229-38; Doreen Massey, ‘Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place’, in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tickner (eds), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp 59-69; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994; Elspeth Probyn, ‘Travels in the postmodern: Making sense of the local’, in Linda J Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990, pp 176-89.
- 15 Kevin M Dunn and Pauline M McGuirk, ‘Hallmark events’, in Richard Cashman and Anthony Hughes (eds), *Staging the Olympics: The Event and its Impacts*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 1999, pp 18-32.
- 16 Robertson, op. cit., p 29.
- 17 *ibid.*, p 30.
- 18 See Saskia Sassen, ‘Globalization and the formation of claims’, in Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (eds), *Giving Ground: The Politics of Proximity*, Verso, London and New York, 1999, pp 91-3.
- 19 David C Rich, *The Industrial Geography of Australia*, Sydney, Methuen, 1986, p 161.
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 A few months after we met, Peter sold his house in Kensington and moved to the central coast himself.
- 22 see Massey, op. cit.; Frank J B Stilwell, ‘Australian urban and regional development in the late 1970s: An overview’, in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol 3, no 4, 1979, pp 527-41; and Michael Berry and Margo Huxley, ‘Big build: Property capital, the state and urban change in Australia’, in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol 16, no 1, 1992, pp 35-59.
- 23 Ian Heads, *True Blue: The Story of the NSW Rugby League*, Ironbark Press, Sydney, 1994, p 140.
- 24 In an article on the culture of English rugby league, Denham notes a tendency for clubs to market themselves in a way that does not restrict support and consumption to specific localities. See David Denham, ‘Modernism and postmodernism in professional rugby league in England’, in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol 17, no 3, 2000, pp 280-1. A similar trend can be seen in the Australian domestic competition with clubs detaching themselves from signifiers of district locality and foregrounding marketable mascots. Contributors to the Souths’ e-group routinely satirise such branding techniques, pointing to the historical/mythological rationale for Souths’ tag of ‘Rabbitohs’. The story of Souths’ players selling rabbits during the 1930s depression is upheld as an indication of the intimately relationship the football club has with the local community.
- 25 The Wests Tigers club was formed by the merger of two clubs — Western Suburbs and the Balmain Tigers — in July 1999. At the time the NRL had determined that only fourteen clubs would be taking part in the 2000 competition, down from seventeen in 1999. Other mergers between St George and Illawarra (in 1998), and Norths and Manly (in 1999), isolated Souths as the club most likely to miss out on a place in the NRL competition.
- 26 Robertson, op. cit., p 26.
- 27 Andrew Denton, ‘Souths’ execution — one man’s rage against the Murdoch machine’, in *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 8, 1999, p 37.

*Notes to pp 211-233*

28 Massey, op. cit., p 165.