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**SPORT AS A TOOL OF IMPERIALISM.
CRICKET IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

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I. PURPOSE AND MOTIVES

Sport has great value and power. Its global scope and remarkable potential make it only comparable to religion in magnitude (Redeker, 2008). Nearly everyone in the world has taken up some sort of sport activity at some point in their lives, and it is now virtually impossible to completely escape from sport-related news or discussions.

Despite this worldwide presence being accentuated in the last decades by globalization and capitalism, sport has been integral to society and culture for millennia. Its origins date back to those of humankind, and it has since functioned as a reflection of society itself and as an expression of the prevailing values and ideals (Perkin, 2007). It is here that lies the great importance of sport as a source of analysis. As Perkin states, “the history of societies is reflected more vividly in the way they spend their leisure than in their politics or their work” and “sport in particular is much more than a pastime or recreation” (2007, p. 145).

The realization of the importance of sport as an area of academic study was brought to my attention during my experience as an international exchange student at The University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Australia, spanning six months in 2022. Prior to enrolling in the program, I had harboured a fascination for sport as a pervasive and potent global phenomenon, and was keen on acquiring a scholarly understanding of it. As such, when the opportunity presented itself to enrol in the course titled ‘Sport and International Relations’, instructed by professor Dr Anthony Hughes, I seized it without hesitation.

During my time in Australia, I noticed that sport was central to the identity, culture and lifestyle of its citizens, and this prompted my curiosity. I wondered how sport had become so essential to this society and why its significance was so unquestionable. I was also intrigued by the fact that popular sports such as soccer, football, or basketball were not as favoured in this region as they were elsewhere; but instead, cricket and rugby held a prominent position in the country’s sporting culture. I was interested in discovering why these sports –and not others– were so widely supported, and why they shared a passionate following with nations like India, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. Soon, it became apparent to me that the various questions I had posed all had a common root cause: the British Empire.

Ultimately, my decision to select this topic was motivated by my belief that the instance chosen serves as a perfect illustration of the role that sport plays in International Relations, and its enduring influence on the relations between nations worldwide. In addition, I consider this topic to be of immense value as it provides an opportunity to delve into critical issues such as the politicisation of sport, its utilization as a tool for domination, and its symbolic connotations. Finally, I consider that a more extensive examination of the role of sport in International Relations is of paramount importance, particularly in light of its growing significance in this domain.

II. INTRODUCTION

The British Empire is renowned as the largest empire in history. Its origins can be traced back to the beginning of the 17th century (Firth, 1918), though it was not until the 19th century, with the reign of Queen Victoria, that it reached its heyday. During this period of splendour, known as “Britain’s Imperial century” (Lloyd, 2007), the Empire underwent a process of significant territorial expansion, gaining control over numerous regions across the world. As a result, a fourth of the world’s land surface and a fifth of its population became under the control of the British (Lloyd, 2007).

The Empire’s decline eventually occurred in the mid-20th century, but it managed to remain relatively stable and peaceful until that time. Incidents did take place, but they were rare and of a comparatively small scale (Stoddart, 1988). The main reason behind this, according to Stoddart (1988), is that the power of the Empire laid not only on the military and official diplomatic tools, but also on the cultural power it held.

As defined by the author, the term ‘cultural power’ is to be understood as “the set of ideas, beliefs and conventions concerning social behaviour that was carried throughout the empire by such British servants as administrators, military officers, [...] settlers, educators and advisors of various kinds” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 650). The result of this process was the transfer of culture, ideals and values from the British to the colonies through a system of informal authority (Stoddart, 1988). This helped to create a common ground of understanding between the British and the subjugated populations, which ultimately facilitated their coexistence and the continuity of the empire. Furthermore, it allowed for cordial relations to develop among the former colonies and the British after the dissolution of the Empire (Perkin, 2007). The means through which this process of

cultural transfer was carried out were, namely, the spread of the English language, and sport (Stoddart, 1988).

This paper aims to focus on the latter, and analyse sport's role as a cultural power tool in the context of the British Empire, with a specific focus on cricket as the prominent English sport during the era. To this end, the state of the arts and theoretical framework will first be presented, including a review of the relevant literature and a conceptual framework to guide the investigation and address the research questions. Following this, the research objectives and questions will be outlined, along with an explanation of the methodology used in the study. Part VI of the paper will focus on Great Britain as the core of the Empire and its associated context and circumstances. The subsequent section will concentrate on analysing the role of sport, specifically cricket, as a significant cultural force in the colonies. The analysis will further delve into the use of sport by the colonised populations as an instrument for resistance. Finally, the findings and conclusions of the research will be presented.

III. STATE OF THE ARTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. STATE OF THE ARTS

In order to develop this paper, I conducted an extensive examination of the primary literature pertaining to the subject being analysed. In doing so, several noteworthy aspects emerged. Firstly, there exists a considerable body of literature that thoroughly describes the concept and nature of sport and connects sports with International Relations in a broad sense. I utilized this literature to construct the 'theoretical framework' section.

When delving into the concept and nature of sport, two authors stand out as pivotal: Guttman (1987), who explores the intricacies of sport, differentiating it from other concepts like play, games, and contests; and Huizinga (1950), who directs attention to the inherent nature of sport and its remarkable evolution into a distinctive and influential entity.

Regarding the undeniable connection between sport and International Relations, it is to be noted that it is a recognized field of study and a course offered in numerous universities worldwide, including the University of New South Wales in Sydney, where I studied for five months. Moreover, extensive research and reputable sources

consistently emphasise the pivotal role of sport in politics and diplomacy and its functions as a prominent tool of soft power, enabling states to enhance their image and forge connections with other nations and global actors –though it may also be a potential source of crisis–. This viewpoint is supported by scholars such as Freeman (2012), Redeker (2008), and Murray (2013), among others.

Similarly, the recognition of sport as a tool of cultural imperialism within the British Empire is firmly supported by the works of Guttman (1994), Tobin (2020), and Tomlinson (1991; 2012). These authors highlight the fundamental idea that, within the imperial context, sport served as a mechanism for acculturation and the transfer of culture, a notion that will be further explored in subsequent sections.

Moreover, extensive research and scholarly literature have examined the role of sport within the British Empire, shedding light on its connection to colonial rule. Notable contributions from authors such as Stoddart (1988), Hughson (2009), Dominic (2013), Fletcher (2011), and Horton (2009; 2014), among others, have significantly contributed to this subject. Consequently, it is firmly established that sport held great significance in the British imperial context, with cricket emerging as the foremost sport within the colonies during that period.

Nevertheless, the existing articles focus on specific aspects of the relation between British imperialism and sport. There is a lack of comprehensive analyses that provide a global perspective of the subject and specifically elucidate the intended promotion of attitudes, values, and behaviours among the indigenous population, as well as their reactions to such impositions. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to offer a comprehensive viewpoint from the perspective of International Relations, presenting a global understanding of the aforementioned aspects within the context of the British Empire's sporting influence.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the majority of existing literature on this subject primarily originates from the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. The subject under investigation holds significant interest and importance within the realm of International Relations, as it offers valuable insights into contemporary global dynamics and the relationships between Britain and its former colonies. It also serves as a foundation for investigating other intriguing aspects, such as the significance attributed to sport in Anglo-Saxon nations or the United States' emphasis on culture, including

sport, as part of its pursuit to maintain its hegemonic position on the global stage. With this in mind, my intention is to revive this area of study, as I think it holds great potential.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the paper aims to undertake an analysis of various concepts that will help us fully understand the subject matter under study. It begins by examining the concept and inherent nature of sport, with a specific focus on tracing its evolution and elucidating its contemporary characteristics. In this context, particular attention is given to the phenomenon of sport's politicisation, which represents a significant transformation in its essence, and provides a basis for exploring the impact and relevance of sport in International Relations. The analysis continues to specifically scrutinize sport as an instrument of foreign policy and diplomacy, with a particular focus on sport diplomacy and soft power. Finally, a particular look at the subject of study follows, framing the use of sport by the British Empire as an instrument of colonisation within a conceptual framework that encompasses the aforementioned concepts and aspects. It is in relation to this last section that we will look at the concept of smart power and cultural imperialism.

2. 1. Conceptualization of sport: definition

To fully understand and accurately define the concept of 'sports', it is crucial to differentiate it from other similar yet distinct concepts. As such, this section shall initially clarify the meanings of "play", "games" and "contests", before directing attention to sports.

According to the definition provided by Guttman (1987), the term 'play' refers to any form of physical or intellectual activity that is engaged in purely for enjoyment and that lacks practical utility. Unlike work, play is characterized as a domain of liberty, with self-contained or autotelic properties, indicating that it is complete within itself and does not require a supplementary reward or objective. Ultimately, it is an activity undertaken for no other purpose than 'itself'. This definition encompasses a wide range of activities, including, but not limited to, gambling, blind man's bluff, chess, and football; on the other hand, it excludes hunting for food or participating in basketball as a physical education requirement (as external motives are present in them). In reality, however, the motivations behind play can be multifaceted, involving multiple factors (Guttman, 1987). For

example, an individual may engage in playing tennis both for enjoyment and to enhance their physical fitness.

The notion of play can be categorized into two groups: spontaneous play and organised play, with the latter being commonly referred to as ‘games’. A significant portion of play comprises of games, which although nonutilitarian, are regulated and governed by rules. Consequently, some of play’s inherent spontaneity may be forfeited in games, favouring the maintenance of an orderly play environment (Guttman, 1987). As a result, games remain devoid of material necessity, yet contain specific rules that must be adhered to, often resulting in more complex actions. Many argue that games are intentionally designed to be “inefficient”, as participating in them entails striving towards a pre-defined goal utilising only the methods allowed by the rules, which often limit the use of more efficient means in favour of less efficient ones (Suits, 1967). Rules are acknowledged and followed because they enable the activity to take place. For instance, if golf players were allowed to pick up the ball with their hands and insert it in the hole, no game would take place.

The aforementioned pre-defined goal is commonly associated with the notion of wining, but this is not invariably the case. Consequently, another distinction arises between games that are self-contained and those that are incomplete without a conclusive win-lose outcome. In some games, the participants are not directly competing against each other, but collaborating to achieve a common goal. An example of this is Japanese *Kemari*, a game that focuses on elegance and skill and promotes the collaboration between participants to maintain a ball in the air for as long as possible (Guttman, 1987).

Other games, however, require participants to compete against each other and result in some of them becoming winners and others becoming losers. This category of games is referred to as ‘contests’, and holds a significant place in modern society. Contests come in many forms, with examples including chess and basketball, but also legal contests and warfare, which cannot be categorized as games because they lack their autotelic nature. As a result, it is important to note that, while not all contests are games, the focus will, hereinafter, be on those contests that are a subcategory of play, that is, on playful contests (Guttman, 1987).

Finally, “sports” can be defined as playful (meaning, nonutilitarian) contests that involve a significant combination of physical and intellectual abilities (Guttman, 1987).

According to this point of view, chess and other non-physical activities are contests, but they are not to be considered as sport, since they lack the required physicality. However, this view is not universally accepted, as some argue that the physical element is not essential to the definition of sport. The International Olympic Committee, for instance, recognises chess as a sport –though not as an Olympic sport (IOC, n. d.)–, while the extended opinion is the exclusion of chess from this category (Kobiela, 2018). Similarly, there is no consensus on the level of physicality necessary to classify an activity as a sport, leading to debates about the inclusion of automotive contests or horse riding as such. In this discussion, we will align with the prevailing opinion that physical activity is a prerequisite for considering an activity as a sport, as it distinguishes it from a mere contest (Kobiela, 2018).

In this section, we have examined the concepts of play, games, (playful) contests, and sport, with each concept being a subcategory of the preceding one. Play has been portrayed as the broadest term, encompassing the others. According to this perspective, sport falls under the category of play and possesses an autotelic nature, meaning it is self-fulfilling. Sport is also seen as a game because it is regulated and organised, and as a contest because it involves a win-lose outcome. However, it is important to acknowledge that this perspective represents the concept of sport in its pure essence, while in reality the term has experienced a transformation that has altered its very nature and attributes (Huizinga, 1950).

2. 2. The nature of modern sport

As it has been mentioned in the previous lines, as a contest, a game and a type of play, sport has three main attributes: it is incomplete without a win-lose result, it is rulebound, and it is spontaneous and autotelic. These characteristics, however, have been altered, and amongst them, it is the latter (its spontaneity and autotelic nature) that has been greatly affected and blurred through the process of change sport has gone through. In the following lines we will look into the several factors that have contributed to this transformation of the nature of sport.

2. 2. 1. Organised sport and professionalism

The first factor to be highlighted is the organisation of sports and the shift from amateurism to professionalism. Initially, sport was performed by amateurs who lacked an

organisation and played spontaneously, for pure enjoyment. The transition from occasional amusement to organised sports –with clubs and matches– took place when permanent teams were formed. This process started spontaneously with village against village and school against school sporting contests, and it took hold in England in the 19th century. Thereafter, the desire to win over adversary teams and clubs resulted in sport becoming increasingly serious and competitive, with strict rules and records being set at higher levels. This led to a loss of the pure-play quality that sports once had, as the spirit of play was replaced with over-seriousness and a focus on “technical organisation” and “scientific thoroughness” (Huizinga, 1950, p. 199).

A direct consequence of this shift towards organisation and competition is the transition from amateurism to professionalism, which further diminished the playful nature of sport. As originally conceived, Sport constituted the antithesis of work and the realm of freedom (Guttman, 1987); however, this changed drastically with the implementation of professionalism and the introduction of payments to the sportsmen, as sport suddenly became a subcategory of work. In addition, the professional spirit lacks the spontaneity and carelessness of true play (Huizinga, 1950).

2. 2. 2. *Sport as a business*

With the emergence of paid professionals, came the surge of economic interests in sport. Teams and clubs soon embarked on campaigns designed to stimulate interest in games, with the intention of attracting paying attendees to matches (Balding, 2012a). This catalysed a self-perpetuating cycle, in which greater sums of capital were invested and more spectators were targeted.

The result of this process was the blurring of the line between play and business, which led to the notion of ‘sport as a business’. In recent times, the relationship between sport and business has been intensified by external factors, such as the spread of technology and communication, the influence of propaganda, and the growth of commercial and trade interests in sport. The reality is that, as sports and athletics become increasingly serious and tied to commercial interests, they move further away from the play-sphere and become a unique entity, something *sui generis* that is “neither play nor earnest” (Huizinga, 1950, p. 197). True play is an aim in itself, not driven by propaganda, advertisement, or commercial interests.

2. 2. 3. *Sport and Politics*

A third factor that has contributed to the jeopardising of the pure nature of sport is politics. As “one of the greatest passions of this century”, sport serves as a very powerful political tool (Espar et al., 1998). The attention it receives is unmatched, and its media coverage is equally outstanding. In this sense, questions arise regarding the reasons behind its captivating force and power.

Sport is completely void of content: it can be reduced to a mere celebration of “the cult of brand names and the law of the strongest” (Redeker, 2008, p. 495). Thus, it is not sustained on rational or intellectual premises, nor is it based upon spiritual postulates (like religion is); instead, the value it holds resides entirely in the emotion it prompts. It is a powerful tool because it elicits in people an array of intense feelings –including passion, anticipation, and pride– which are challenging to replicate through any other means (Freeman, 2012). As a consequence, sport has the capacity to unite people in “almost tribal” ways; but it can also be a source of conflict, controversy and division (Espar et al, 1998).

Political elites have long realized the potential sport holds and, for millennia, sport and politics have been closely related. As mentioned by Murray, “when sport provides a useful function, it is usually co-opted by politics” (2013, p. 584). Until recently, however, sport remained politically neutral at its core, and while the policies in place may have affected sport indirectly, no political messages, symbols or ideologies had a place in it.

For instance, in the context of the Ancient Olympiad –which was originally created to honour Zeus and later became a sport-based competition– the Truce served as a way to sublimate conflict, granting immunity and sanctity to the Games –as it meant the suspension of all military operations for the duration of the event (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021). The Olympiad would later be abolished during the Roman Empire (Murray, 2012), in accordance with the anti-Pagan policies that were implemented from the last half of the 4th century onwards and which aimed at the imposition of Christianity as the sole religion of the empire (Cortés Copete, 2023). In these cases, the sporting event was impacted by the political decisions implemented, but the essence of sport remained untouched, as its focus was purely on the activity itself, leaving any external factors outside of the playing fields.

In the 20th century, nonetheless, we witnessed a shift towards the politicisation of sport, which further prompted an alteration of its very nature (Benoit, 2008). Due to the particular relevance of this factor and its notable interest to our study, we will allocate a dedicated section –following this one–, to examine it in depth.

2. 3. The politicisation of sport

The politicisation of sport refers to the process by which political issues and ideologies intersect with and shape the practice and experience of sport. This politicisation can take many forms: from athletes using their platform to make political statements, to governments using sports as a tool for political purposes, or to the ways in which issues such as race, gender, and nationalism play out in the sporting world (Murray & Pigman, 2013).

In this sense, the shifting point was the 1908 Olympic games, the first ones in which athletes competed as members of national teams. This led to a sense of national rivalry amongst teams and created an urge to win, ultimately promoting the shift towards professionalism that had started in Britain (Anatomy of Football, 2014). Globalization and capitalism have increased competitiveness, resulting in the phenomenon of mass Sport (Benoit, 2008). Subsequently, sport has become not only a business, but also “a focus for national prestige”; and commercialism, money, nationalism and propaganda have become key attributes of it (Anatomy of Football, 2014), altering its very nature.

One of the most prominent examples of this shift is the politicisation of football during the Interwar Period. Prior to World War II, football had become the most popular sport in Europe and a part of the daily lives of millions of people in the continent. Soon, the fascist leaders realized its potential and started using it as a means to promote their interests. Football was thusly used both as an image-building tool –showcasing the alleged physical and moral superiority of the intended regimes– and as a pacification tool in the occupied territories (Benoit, 2008).

Another way in which sport has been utilized in the context of politics is, ironically, to achieve an apolitical society, whereby the citizenry is too engrossed in and diverted by sport to scrutinize the decisions made by those in power. This approach was one of Mussolini’s primary objectives concerning football: his intention was to keep the masses amused and occupied, enabling him to act without fear of reprisals (Benoit, 2008).

This practice is still present today and reminiscent of the expression ‘*panem et circenses*,’ which Juvenal coined in *Satire X* to denounce the political situation he witnessed in Ancient Rome, which involved providing the populace with food (*panem*) and entertainment (*circenses*) to satisfy their basic needs and prevent them from challenging the emperor’s authority.

The connection between sport and politics manifests itself at both domestic and international levels, but it is within the latter context that the link between them acquires greater importance. The reason for this is that it is common for states to leverage sport as a means to advance their interests on the international stage and in their interactions with other nations; that is, sport is a usual focus of foreign policy. Consequently, it becomes necessary to examine the role of sport in the context of International Relations, a matter that shall be explored in the subsequent section.

2. 4. Sport in IR: sports diplomacy, soft power and smart power

Redeker defines politics as “the pursuit of power –power being any reality that amplifies liberty of action, the condition of independence and also of security” (2008, p. 496). When this pursuit of power occurs beyond a state’s borders and in relation to other nations, it can be included in the array of foreign policy. As such, foreign policy refers to a state’s objectives beyond its borders, and “where foreign policy concerns a state’s *ends*, the practice of diplomacy is the *means* to achieve them” (Murray, 2012, p. 578).

Diplomacy has been traditionally referred to as “the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means” (Bull, 1977, p. 156). It is important to note, however, that this traditional concept has witnessed a decline and experienced a transformation following the emergence of new actors in the international arena. Diplomacy is no longer practiced exclusively by a state’s official agents, but also by non-state actors (such as international organisations). These new and emerging actors cooperate daily with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental actors in diplomatic matters (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021). With this in mind, diplomacy can be defined as a predominantly political activity in which both state and non-state actors participate to achieve their own foreign policy objectives (Berridge, 2022).

In the context of sports, various international sports organisations and governing bodies have emerged, becoming important actors in the global arena. Prominent examples of such entities include the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). When sporting entities engage in diplomatic activities, or when states use sport or sports-people to further their interests on the international stage, the concept of ‘sports diplomacy’ comes into play (Murray, 2013). This notion pertains to

[the] conscious, strategic, and regular use of sports, athletes, and sports events by the state and non-state actors to engage, inform and create a favourable public image of itself, with the ultimate goal to shape perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending group’s desired goals (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021, p. 422).

Taking this into consideration, we can state that, if diplomacy is understood as the means to a state’s foreign policy ends, sports diplomacy is “one of the means to the means of those ends” (Murray & Pigman, 2013, p. 5) –meaning it is also a tool of foreign policy.

According to Murray and Pigman (2013), there are two different categories of sports diplomacy (as it has already been hinted). In the first category, the main actors are state-based, as it refers to the employment of sport by governments as a diplomatic instrument. This is the better-known type of sports diplomacy and it comprises various policies such as, but not limited to: using athletes to promote a specific message, exploiting sporting events in favour of a state’s foreign policy interests, and using sport as a way to ease tensions in deteriorating diplomatic relationships or to simply evaluate public opinion concerning a possible policy shift (Murray & Pigman, 2013).

The second category of sports diplomacy is “international-sport-as-diplomacy” (Murray & Pigman, 2013, p. 2), a notion that comprises both the effects of sports on diplomacy, and the diplomacy carried out by non-state sporting actors –such as the ready-mentioned entities (FIFA & IOC)– to make international sporting competition happen. When participating in diplomatic negotiation or representation, these actors are to engage with both traditional state actors and non-state ones (Murray & Pigman, 2013).

Once we have analysed the concepts of diplomacy and sports diplomacy, we shall focus on the notion of soft power –which ultimately belongs in the realm of diplomacy. This term was first coined by Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to Lead* (1990), and it refers to the ability to shape the behaviour and preferences of other nations through persuasive

means. Ultimately, it is a way to make others want to do and ultimately do as you please without using any force or coercion, but persuasion (Nye, 2009; Abdi, et al., 2019). It is in the realm of soft power that sport diplomacy and cultural exchanges are often included.

Sport and, particularly, sporting events have long been used as tools for mediation, consolidation of political power, or image and trust-building (Murray and Pigman, 2013). As previously mentioned, sport possesses a remarkable capacity to unite individuals through shared emotions and fervour. Consequently, its affable and harmonious nature has often been embraced and portrayed as compatible with the principles of diplomacy. However, it is essential to acknowledge that sport can also function as a divisive force, contrary to the aforementioned perspective.

Sport carries a potent symbolism, often intertwined with a strong and not always positive sense of competitiveness. The language employed to describe sporting competitions frequently evokes imagery of warfare, with athletes and teams battling to emerge victorious. Feelings towards opponents may encompass animosity and rejection and, as a consequence, it is not uncommon for physical or verbal confrontations to arise among players or even amongst spectators. Similarly, sport have occasionally been the cause of the worsening of relations between countries (Murray, 2013). For instance, in 1932 a diplomatic crisis between England and Australia emerged over a cricket game played in Australia. England won the match, but the tactics employed during the game, including throwing the ball at the body of the rival players, infuriated the Australians and led to a discontent that escalated to a diplomatic dispute (Stoddart, 1988). In this regard, sport diverges from the principles of diplomacy, which entail the pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation, positioning itself as the antithesis of war (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021).

Moreover, when considering the growing influence of non-state actors, particularly athletes and other globally recognized figures, in the realm of diplomacy, an element of unpredictability emerges which, united with the risks presented, has the potential to pose challenges (Akhmetkarimov & Aminova, 2021).

Nowadays, the use of soft power tools by states is increasing throughout the globe as a way to achieve their goals without resorting to coercion, force or economic payments. However, according to Nye (2009), the use of soft power mechanisms is not enough to fulfil one's objectives: soft power needs to be combined 'smartly' with hard power tools

in order to develop efficient strategies; and *vice versa*, a state is not to achieve its ends solely through hard power policies. This mutually reinforcing combination of soft and hard power mechanisms is referred to as ‘smart power’ (Nye, 2009).

Smart power strategies need to be designed considering the unique circumstances and contexts of each situation. What may constitute a “smart” strategy in one instance may not necessarily be as effective in another. At its core, smart power involves the deliberate orchestration of both soft power and hard power mechanisms, aligned to advance a specific objective. By leveraging a combination of persuasive and coercive tools, smart power strategies aim to reinforce one another and collectively contribute to the achievement of a set goal (Nye, 2013).

2. 5. Theorising the use of sport by the British Empire: cultural imperialism

There are several aspects that need to be highlighted in relating the preceding sections to the use of sport by the British in their imperial quest. Firstly, the changes in sport and its nature that happened in Britain were inevitably reflected in the colonies. These modifications comprised, as mentioned, a shift towards professionalism, an influx of business interests, and the politicisation of sport.

Secondly, the British carried out a colonisation process that relied upon two primary pillars, as previously mentioned. These pillars included the utilization of conventional diplomatic means, such as military and bureaucratic power, and the establishment of an informal authority through cultural power mechanisms that facilitated the transfer of British values, ideals, and lifestyle to the colonies via language and sport (Stoddart, 1988). While the former can be deemed the execution of hard power mechanisms by Britain, the latter refers to the employment of soft power tools by the Empire. This combination of hard and soft power mechanisms to peacefully dominate the colonies can be regarded as the exercise of smart power by the British Empire.

Nevertheless, the mentioned concepts of soft, hard and smart power originated in the 21st century and are therefore more recent than the historical period being examined in this paper, which focuses on the 19th and 20th century British Empire. These concepts could be applied retrospectively; however, it may be more appropriate to analyse our chosen instance of study through the lens of cultural imperialism.

The concept of cultural imperialism refers to the process by which a dominant community imposes different aspects of its culture (like its values, beliefs, practices, religion, traditions, social and moral norms, or way of life) onto another community, with the aim of exerting control or dominance over it (Guttman, 1994). This cultural influence can manifest through means such as language, education, media, art, sports, and other cultural expressions; and its main consequence is the extension of “the authority of its way of life over the other population” (Tobin, 2020, n. p.).

The term was not formally theorised until the 1960s (Tomlinson, 1991), but practices of cultural imperialism have a long history. Initially, this phenomenon was mostly related to military activities and conquests. For instance, during the Roman Empire, cultural imperialism was key to the *Pax Romana*, a period of relative stability and peace. Peace and stability were achieved through various means, including the implementation of a common legal system or the introduction of technological developments. However, it was the process of ‘acculturation’ of the different cultures under the empire’s influence that significantly contributed to the maintenance of peace (Tobin, 2020).

More recently, the term has been associated with the economic and political influence exerted by more dominant nations over less powerful ones. For instance, since the 20th century, the United States has been associated with the implementation of cultural imperialist strategies in order to attain worldwide influence, power and economic control by generating a demand for American goods and services on a global scale. This process, often referred to as “Americanization”, is said to occur when the widespread exportation of American movies, music, fashion, and cuisine to other countries poses a risk of supplanting local products and eradicating traditional aspects of their way of life (Tobin, 2020; Petras, 1994).

Within the scope of this paper, however, what is particularly important is how cultural imperialism assumed significant relevance within the context of colonisation. In the beginning of a colonisation process, military power was undeniably important; however, its full effects were realized through instruments of cultural imperialism. Driven by a conviction in the supremacy of their own lifestyle, colonisers employed methods such as legislation, education, and military might to impose elements of their culture onto the subjugated population. While partly motivated by a quest to eradicate what they

deemed as primitive and uncivilised practices of the local inhabitants, colonisers also recognized that minimizing resistance from the colonised required the elimination of any remnants of their previous way of life (Tomlinson, 2012). The case of the use of sport by the British Empire is a clear example of this, as sport was used as a way to inculcate in the subjugated populations certain values, behavioural models, and social and moral ideals and norms (Stoddart, 1988). This will be further analysed in Chapter VII.

IV. OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the role of sport, specifically cricket, within the framework of the British Empire. The main objective is to demonstrate that sport served as a tool for domination, facilitating the imposition of cultural, lifestyle, values, and ideological norms. Furthermore, the opposing perspective of colonised populations will be examined, with a focus on how they adopted and reshaped sport to employ it as a tool for resistance and to establish cultural supremacy.

The analysis of these matters will require the examination of issues such as the importance given to sport by the British, the privileged position cricket held in the imperial quest, or the lack of importance of football in this context even though it was a very popular English sport. Similarly, we will look into the ways in which the British carried out the process of cultural transformation through sport and the effects and responses this had in the colonies. Finally, we will briefly address the impact this process of cultural homogenization had on the relations between the Empire and its colonies, and determine whether this had an effect on the aftermath of the Empire and the relations amongst its former colonies.

V. METHODOLOGY

This paper is the result of a comprehensive study focused on analysing an extensive range of secondary sources concerning the topic of sport within the context of the British Empire. The research process involved a thorough exploration of academic platforms and databases, with particular emphasis on ICADE's digital library as the primary source for retrieving relevant academic articles and journals. Supplementary information was also gathered from the digital database of the University of New South Wales. In addition, valuable insights were obtained from the websites of significant sport

institutions such as the ICC, as well as various open access sources (like Encyclopaedia Britannica). Finally, as an exchange student enrolled in UNSW's 'Sport and International Relations' course, access to pertinent class materials has proven indispensable for the development of this paper. These materials include audio-visual resources like the film "Anatomy of Football" and journalistic articles, such as the BBC podcast series titled "Sport and the British", which offers valuable perspectives on the importance of sport in Britain and its expansion into the colonies. The podcast features interviews with key figures from Rugby School, highlighting its pivotal role in the growth and development of organised and rule-bound sports.

Based on my research, I have organised the analytical section of this paper into three main chapters, denoted as chapters VI, VII and VIII within the overall structure. The first chapter explores the topic of sport in Britain, examining the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the ideology of muscular Christianity. The second chapter, provides a general overview of sport in the colonies, setting the ground for a more detailed examination, which specifically focuses on cricket as 'the imperial sport'. The third and last chapter focuses on the use of sport by the colonised populations. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and conclusions drawn from the research.

VI. SPORT IN BRITAIN

Sport is fundamental to the British culture, and correspondingly, Britain is crucial to the worldwide sporting culture (Huw, 2005). The history of sport and that of Britain are deeply interconnected, since modern sports, as we understand them today, are the result of an inventive and revivalist process conducted in England during the Victorian era (Dyreson, 2011) –which roughly spanned from 1820 to 1914 (Steinbach, 2023)–.

This process has been referred to as the "games revolution" (Stoddart, 1988, pp. 652-653) and it consisted of the invention, transformation and revival of a variety of sporting activities (Watson et al, 2005). It also included the regulation, codification and institutionalization of these activities, and ultimately led to the organisation of football, tennis, cricket, golf, horse racing, athletics, and even skiing, in their present form (Veliz, 1993; Perkin, 2007). In this process, Britain emerged as the "world's game master" (Watson et al, 2005, n. p.) and, coherently with this position, it was the British who, through their worldwide presence and influence, taught the world how to play (Horton, 2014, p. 173).

The sports formed during this historical period in Britain have attained an undeniably popularity and importance and, today, the vast majority of popular sports throughout the world are sports whose origins or modern conception can be traced back to Britain. Moreover, most of their rules became universally recognized and accepted through this process in the 19th century (Huw, 2005). Many now claim national sport status in countless countries, to the extent that it is difficult to think of any nation whose most popular sports are not of English origin (Veliz, 1993). In addition, they have also inspired the creation of other sports such as baseball and American football in the United States, which are inspired, respectively, by English cricket and rugby (Dyreson, 2011; Perkin, 2007).

This section aims to analyse the context in which this revolution of games took place in England and how it unfolded, with the intention of achieving an understanding of the factors that contributed to the significance attributed to sport within the Imperial contest, as well as the underlying ideology behind this phenomenon. Specifically, we will explore the sporting landscape in Britain prior to the Industrial Revolution and examine the transformative impact of the industrialization process on both society and sports. Furthermore, we will delve into the concept of ‘muscular Christianity’ as the pivotal ideology driving the growing importance of sport in societal structures and youth education, ultimately resulting in the expansion of British sport throughout the empire.

1. SPORT PRIOR TO THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Before the 1st Industrial Revolution –which took place between 1760 and 1840 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023)– and specifically until the early 19th century, games in Britain lacked organisation, as no consensual rules were in place or standardised (Perkin, 2007). The social context was that of social stratification and was widely acknowledged in England.

The aristocracy –favoured by the monarchy– regarded themselves as occupying a distinct social class separate from the peasants and craftsmen. Their desire for wealth and expansion was coupled with a belief in their inherent superiority due to their noble lineage, that they felt entitled them to a proper balance of work, leisure and recreation. Their pastimes included hunting, equestrian sports and weaponry, which were deemed appropriate for their social status (Huw, 2007).

In contrast, the working-class laborers had limited opportunities for leisure: they were acutely aware of their position in the social hierarchy and did not aspire to participate in the same activities as their social superiors. Blood sports involving animals were a prevalent pastime –particularly in rural areas–, including “bull and bear-baiting, dog and cock-fighting, and rat-killing” (Perkin, 2007, p. 146). Similarly, sport’s defining feature was violence, and wrestling, running, dancing, juggling, throwing games, and football were considered permissible activities for the common man (Huw, 2007).

The absence of well-defined rules resulted in a state of evident chaos prevailing in games during this period. There was a lack of clear understanding regarding what actions were permissible on the playing field, and no maximum player limit was specified. Among the sports mentioned, football emerged as particularly popular. However, due to the absence of standardized rules, there was no singular version of the game. Instead, various versions were played on a daily basis, featuring fluctuating player numbers and rule sets. According to Perkin, football matches at Rugby School –an institution that played a significant role in shaping the importance of sport after the Industrial Revolution and imperial expansion– could involve up to 300 players (2017, p. 146).

Eventually, two predominant versions of football emerged, which would later be known as rugby football and association football (also referred to as soccer). Once again, these versions originally lacked universally (or even locally) accepted rules, but exhibited some distinguishing characteristics. For instance, in rugby football, players were allowed to handle the ball with their hands, while in association football, this action was prohibited (Balding, 2012b; Jyoti & Bhalla, 2020).

2. SPORT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

As it has been previously stated, the 1st Industrial Revolution took place between the years 1760 and 1840 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023) and it had profound socio-economic consequences. The latter half of the 18th century in Britain was characterized by a remarkable leap in the country’s economic progress, driven by a wave of inventions and technological advancements that revolutionized both the working and leisure lives of people (Huw, 2005). In this context, two major shifts are of interest to our study: first, what has been referred to as a leisure revolution (Watson et al, 2005); and second, the so-called moral revolution –also called the rise of Victorianism– (Perkin, 2007).

Regarding the first, the Industrial Revolution brought about a process of urbanisation whereby large masses of the population migrated from rural areas to urban centres. This resulted in reduced space for relaxation and leisure activities, constraining individuals in engaging in such pursuits (Perkin, 2007). Moreover, the automation of industries associated with the revolution derived in a sedentary lifestyle for many, accompanied by unfavourable working and living conditions, as well as demanding schedules that left limited opportunities for exercise, rest, and leisure. As a direct consequence of these circumstances, the risk of contracting diseases experienced an upsurge. Thusly, society's worry on health saw an increase, and developments in psychology in the 19th century that pointed towards a connection between the mind and the body furthered the willingness to exercise (Watson et al, 2005). These factors would contribute to the leisure revolution that took place in England in the 19th century, as it will later be discussed.

With regard to the second, the revolutionary period witnessed a shift towards genteelness and refinedness. Societal conventions changed and manners assumed greater importance (Huw, 2005). This prompted an increase in sensitivity and a consequent aversion of the rowdy and violent nature of blood sports –which had been especially popular among the lower social classes–. They would ultimately be entirely outlawed by the late 1860s (Perkin, 2007).

On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution altered the societal structure of Britain, as it meant the surge of a new upper middle class composed of wealthy merchants and entrepreneurs. The British aristocracy, while seeking to differentiate themselves from the lower strata of society, approached social class distinctions with pragmatism, especially in the realm of education. Thus, with the emergence of the new middle class, the young members of this social group were allowed to join the young aristocrats in public schools (which in reality were private boarding schools only accessible to the wealthy upper middle-classes (Perkin, 2007)). This fostered a mix of upper-class individuals within British society (Huw, 2005).

The forms of recreation of the upper echelons of society also experienced a change, particularly in the context of schools, where space was limited and schedules tightly organised. Traditional pastimes popular among the aristocracy, such as hunting or shooting, were challenging to pursue in such confined environments and were often

costlier. Thus, the introduction of new games became necessary to provide students with opportunities for leisure and, especially, exercise (a requirement in line with the Victorian obsession with health and with muscular Christianity, an ideology we will thoroughly study below) (Perkin, 2007).

As a result of the new interest in health, the willingness to exercise, the moral revolution that put an end to blood-sports, and as a consequence of the practical impediments to foster traditional forms of sports for the wealthier youth, new sports emerged that were in line with the rational, orderly and civilised inclination of the Victorian society (Perkin, 2007). In the following lines we will look at how these sports emerged, how they came to be organised, and what their characteristics were; but first, the ideology of muscular Christianity needs to be examined, as it plays a crucial role in the evolution of sports.

2. 1. Muscular Christianity

Muscular Christianity is a Victorian concept that emerged during the 1850s in Britain and has significantly influenced the evolution of modern sport and the relationship between sport and religion, particularly Christianity. At its core, this ideology asserts that engaging in sports fosters the cultivation of Christian morality, physical well-being, and traits associated with manliness. Its impact is still noticeable in the present days (Watson et al, 2005).

This ideology originated in the context of the changes prompted by the Industrial Revolution, which, as it has been stated, increased society's focus on health and, thus, exercise. As described by Hailey, there was no subject that occupied the mind of the Victorian society more than health (1987). The ready mentioned medical advances in psychology and the body-mind connection they pointed at were also relevant in the development and advancement of this ideology, as well as the threat of war resulting from the situation in Europe, which, as contemplated by the adepts of muscular Christianity, made it imperative for strong, manly and well-educated leaders to rise for the protection of the empire (Watson et al, 2005).

From a religious point of view, muscular Christianity arose in response to the belief that sport helped achieve a harmony between "mind, body, and spirit" (Watson et al, 2005, n. p.), so in line with the Victorian focus on psyche and body (Perkin, 2007). In

this line, physical training was considered to be essential for men to protect the weak and uphold just causes, reflecting Christian values (Watson et al, 2005).

Its adepts and promoters were mainly members of the Protestant elite, among which Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes stood out. The former was especially important in the development of the Christian concept of ‘manliness’, as he believed that sport was a means through which a manly character would be developed, a virtue closely associated with godliness and an “antidote” for the “poison” of effeminacy and for the sin of homosexuality (Watson et al, 2005, n. p.; Johns, n. d.). Furthermore, sport was conceived as a way of substituting “gratifications for sexual desire”, preventing other sins such as masturbation, as boys occupied their minds and time with exercise (Watson et al, 2005, n. p.). According to Kingsley:

through sport, boys acquire virtues which no book can give them, not nearly daring and endurance, but better still, temper, self-restraint, fairness, honour, an envious approbation of another’s success, and all that give and take of life which stands a man in good stead when he goes forth into the world (Balding, 2012b).

Thomas Hughes, on the other hand, had been a student at Rugby School, one of the most influential public schools at the time and birth place of the rules of games like rugby and football (as we will examine in the next section) (Balding, 2012b). Hughes is the author of the book *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857), which he wrote inspired by the figure of the headmaster, Dr Thomas Arnold, who has been frequently described as an enthusiast for the role of sport in moral education (Veliz, 1993). He instilled in his students “a strong religious faith and loyalty in Christ”, while highlighting the importance of sport in forming their character (Watson et al, 2005, n. p.). The book tells the story of a boy whose character was developed through participating in sports at Rugby School, and it was crucial to the integration of muscular Christianity in Public Schools, where sport became central to education and achieved great importance (Stoddart, 1988). Thus, it is said that Arnold drafted the fundamental rules of the pedagogical value associated with sport, and his methods influenced other public schools (Veliz, 1993).

In fact, the main effect of the implementation and advancement of muscular Christianity was its influence on the educational system, as manifested in the introduction of compulsory sport and physical education in public schools (Watson et al, 2005). This advancement was also reflected in the educational systems abroad and, according to

Kaufman and Patterson, this was “the only contribution of the English educational system of the nineteenth century to the general education of Western civilisation” (2005, p. 85). But before this happened, the games or leisure revolution took place with the organisation of sports.

2. 2. The organisation of sports

In the preceding section, we examined how the Industrial Revolution brought about various transformations that heightened the emphasis on health in Victorian Britain, gave rise to muscular Christianity, and altered the landscape of games across different social strata (with the prohibition of blood sports and the difficulties linked to the traditionally aristocratic pastimes). These factors collectively contributed to the development of new organised sports through a gradual process that unfolded from the mid 19th century onwards. The setting in which this shift occurred was primarily within the public schools attended by the new middle class and the aristocracy, with particular significance placed on the former (Balding, 2012b).

The football games, in the various forms in which they took place, continued to be popular after the Industrial Revolution. In public schools, they were introduced by the middle classes, and their popularity spread rapidly. However, the Victorian tendency towards orderly and civilised practices and genteelness contrasted with their inherent chaotic nature and, thus, it soon became apparent that rules were needed. In this sense, both the aristocrats and the members of the middle class had vested interests in formulating a universal set of regulations for the emerging sports. The aristocracy, on the one hand, saw it as an opportunity to differentiate themselves by exhibiting superior conduct and demeanour in sporting competitions. The merchant and entrepreneurial classes, on the other hand, considered this to be a chance to prove themselves equal to the ruling elite (Huw, 2005).

In Rugby School, Thomas Arnold had been appointed headmaster in 1828, a position he assumed with the purpose of reforming the educational system. His main aim was to help boys develop character, and to allow them to become strong leaders, with a strong moral purpose. To that end, he implemented a system wherein freedom was granted to boys to rule the activities that took place in school outside of lessons, amongst which were games. In this context, students assumed responsibility, and it was them who took the initiative in organising games.

In 1845, a committee of three boys drew up the first ever written code of rugby football (Balding, 2012b), the version of football particularly favoured and promoted by Arnold, who believed its particularly violent and physical nature contributed to the creation of manly (in the muscular Christian sense), strong boys who would later become leaders, leaving those who showed any sign of softness or weakness aside (Watson et al, 2005). Violence played a significant role in Victorian sports including, but not limited to, rugby. Cricket was similarly violent and it was favoured in the educational context of other prestigious public schools like Eton (Stoddart, 1988)

The phenomenon of organising sports was not limited to Rugby School but was observed in various educational institutions. In 1848, groups of Cambridge undergraduates developed rules for both rugby football and association football in order to facilitate intercollegiate matches (Perkin, 2007). As the popularity of these games grew, new teams emerged outside of schools and universities. To enable inter-group play, different groups from public schools and universities came together and adopted the Cambridge rules for football (1863) and rugby (1971), leading to the establishment of Football Association and Rugby Football Union. This trend also influenced the drafting of rules for boxing and other sports in Britain (Perkin, 2007).

Team sports were particularly encouraged in the educational context, in line with the muscular Christianity tenets. These sports provided a platform for participants to learn about “teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 653). Engaging in sports also fostered self-confidence, courage, discipline, and self-reliance among young individuals, teaching them how to gracefully handle defeat (Perkin, 2007). Playing cricket, for instance, was believed to instil values of honesty, uprightness, and “accepting conformity within the conventions” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 653). The belief was that character was shaped through sports, and the most valuable lessons in life were to be learnt on sporting fields rather than in class (Balding, 2012b). In this sense, sport concentrated an outstanding social value (Stoddart, 1988).

The students of public schools and institutions, and particularly the middle class, thusly became especially important in spreading the games both nationally and internationally (Perkin, 2007). At a national level, members of the working class soon began to play the newly organised games; while at an international level, the influence of

the public-school ideals was key in the imperial quest. As stated by Balding, the strength of the British Empire was forged on the playing fields of Rugby School, as “the values and ideals that shaped the British empire were expressed by every public-school boy who kicked or passed a ball” (2012b, n. p.). In the following section we will delve into the role these students played in the spread of British sports and Victorian ideals throughout the empire.

VII. SPORT IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

During the period in which the games revolution unfolded (19th century), Britain was at the pinnacle of its strength and influence, experiencing an unrivalled global dominance as the leading economic and maritime power (Balding, 2012b). The size of the Empire progressively increased and three concentric circles of British influence were formed: the informal empire (Dominic, 2013) –also referred to as the widest circle of the empire; the formal empire; and the innermost circle (Perkin, 2007).

The widest sphere encompassed lawful self-governing nations, that offered stable trade relations to Britain and had a remarkable British presence (though they were not part of the empire) (Dominic, 2013). This circle included nations like Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. The formal empire, on the other hand, primarily comprised British dominions, like Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Lastly, the inner circle consisted of territories that had been conquered and were under direct British rule, commonly referred to as colonies. Nigeria is one example of the latter. From this perspective, Britain’s worldwide presence and influence reached almost every corner of the globe, making it unmatched (Perkin, 2007).

This section of the paper aims to focus on the formal empire and the colonies in order to study the paramount importance of sport within them. Our focus will be on the role of sport as a tool of cultural imperialism, examining the key agents involved in the introduction, selection, and control of sports, with special attention given to cricket and rugby as the primary sports favoured in the imperial agenda. Finally, we will dedicate a specific section to cricket, aptly known as ‘the imperial game’, exploring its profound impact on shaping morality, behaviour and society throughout the empire.

1. CULTURAL IMPERIALISM: SPORT

During the mentioned era of expansionism (19th century), the British Empire sought to establish dominance through cultural imperialism rather than relying solely on traditional methods like militarism –a distinctive approach that set Britain apart from other imperial powers such as France and Germany– (Hughson, 2009). Within the framework of cultural imperialism, sport emerged as a pivotal tool, enabling the dissemination of British social norms, beliefs, and attitudes abroad (Horton, 2014). It was believed that sport could “create a climate of relations that would bind the Empire together” (Holt, 1990, p. 212), as it created shared beliefs and attitudes between the colonised and the colonising; however, it simultaneously shaped social relations and reinforced the social distance between them (Stoddart, 1988). The reason behind this is that cultural imperialist approach led to the formation of societies that often mirrored the way of life in the core of the empire (Horton, 2014). We will analyse this in detail in the following lines.

1. 1. Exposing the colonised populations to sport: important agents

Cultural power and the shared values associated with sport were disseminated mainly through educational institutions and the church. In the colonies, the educational systems mirrored that of Britain, and sports like cricket and rugby union were incorporated into the curricula of elite schools in territories such as Australia, New Zealand, and Barbados as potent educational and moral-forming agents. The majority of staff members in these educational institutions were British, and they regarded sports as highly important and sacred (Stoddart, 1988, p. 655).

On the other hand, the church had developed a strong association with both sport and education in Britain, especially with the emergence of muscular Christianity, which highlighted the link between physical activity, Christian values, and moral growth. Similarly, in the colonies, clergy and religious figures recognized the importance of sports in instilling Christian principles, teaching life lessons, and promoting overall well-being (Balding, 2012b). They actively supported and promoted the ideals of muscular Christianity, participating in and introducing the sports they themselves followed or played, thus sharing their beliefs with the local communities they engaged with (Stoddart, 1988).

In addition, across the empire, where two or more Britons coincided, they engaged in the games they had learned at home –home being England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland (Horton, 2014; Horton, 2009). Horse racing, golf, tennis, and football soon became universal, and books and magazines around the world informed about how the British games were played, what to wear, how to behave and, overall, how to comply with the social models coming from Britain. Manuals were written by British authors regarding the techniques and styles of each sport, and British sports were followed all around, especially in the colonies, where interest in results was outstanding (Stoddart, 1988). Finally, British sporting icons played a crucial role in reinforcing the perceived superiority of the British and upholding the existing order, and they also served as moral exemplars for both the British and the colonised populations.

As a result, British cultural forms were firmly integrated into the cultural institutions of the colonies (Hughson, 2009) and, by the end of the 19th century, British sports were well-established all around the empire “with their social purposes widely accepted and understood” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 659).

1. 2. Sport’s selection and control

The introduction of sports in the colonies was closely supervised to ensure that the selected games promoted desirable social traits among the subject population. Consequently, certain sports that were closely associated with gambling (such as horse racing), were restricted from the participation of the colonised populations. This limitation was based on the belief that the subjugated communities lacked the necessary self-control and financial means to engage in such activities without falling into debt. As a result, participation in these sports was primarily reserved for the colonising agents (Huw, 2007).

Similarly, access to participation in sports was not granted to every social group. In some cases, this exclusion was deliberate and involved explicit discrimination against certain social classes. Sport, in this regard, served not only as a form of leisure and education, but also as a way to perpetuate class distinction. In this sense, local elites within colonial societies were drawn to sports as a means of setting themselves apart from the rest of the subject population, using it to maintain their status and demonstrate their alignment with British ideals. Consequently, the selective nature of sport participation reinforced social hierarchies (Stoddart, 1988; Hughson, 2009).

On the other hand, the control exerted over sports was characterised by a centralised and hierarchical administration, with its core in London, that held comprehensive authority over various sports activities, emphasising the predominant influence and power of Britain. Each sport had a governing body responsible for designing rules, establishing behavioural standards, and maintaining control over the specific game code. These governing bodies also served as arbiters in resolving any disputes that arose within their respective sports. Finally, sporting tours along the empire were commonly organised from Britain, and they soon became very common (Stoddart, 1988).

Nevertheless, the power sport held was not solely derived from this centralised control; instead, it stemmed from the underlying set of beliefs and values that people unconsciously acquired through their engagement with sports. When the British arrived in the colonies, they carried with them a cultural baggage, including certain beliefs and attitudes that they considered to be the appropriate signs of civilisation. This baggage was reflected in sports and subtly transmitted to the populations participating in them. It was this subconscious element, the subtle indoctrination and civilisation through sport, that made it such a powerful tool (Stoddart, 1988; Balding, 2012b).

1. 3. Cricket and rugby: the chosen sports

In the formal empire and the colonies, the students of public schools played a particularly relevant role, while those present in the rest of the world were rarely ex-public-school boys (Perkin, 2007). Many of the public-school boys grew to become “servants of the empire” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 654), occupying the major educational, religious and military imperial institutions (Dominic, 2013). Educated under the values and tenets of muscular Christianity, they were highly enthusiastic about everything they had learned through sport and, upon leaving, they carried with them a deep sense of evangelism for Thomas Arnold’s vision and a deeply rooted acknowledgement of the social power and relevance of games. Thus, they actively shared and promoted the learnt sports and their values and ideals to the populations they encountered across the world. (Watson et al, 2005).

Cricket and rugby were the sports that most captured the interest of ex-public-school boys, who –as mentioned– primarily belonged to the aristocracy and upper middle class. There were several reasons behind this preference. Firstly, these sports gained

immense popularity in British public schools, where they were widely embraced and supported by school authorities due to their recognized educational value and association with important ideals. As a result, students who attended these schools developed a strong affinity for these sports and the values linked to them. Particularly, rugby and cricket were said to promote teamwork and loyalty among players, which in the context of the British Empire, played a role in fostering cohesion among the white community overseas, nurturing loyalty to the homeland, and establishing a bond between the colonised and the colonising (Hughson, 2009). Thus, these sports served a very important role, not only in the lives of those who served the empire, but also in transmitting British values to the colonies (Johnes, n. d.).

Secondly, cricket and rugby were regarded as games suitable for their privileged social status, as most players remained amateurs and unpaid professionals, demonstrating their financial independence and wealth. This stood in contrast to football, which initially originated in public schools and was dominated by amateurs (also referred to as gentlemen) but eventually evolved into a working-class sport with the introduction and dominance of professionalism in 1885. The tension between amateurism and professionalism also had a notable impact on rugby, resulting in the split between Rugby Union (strictly amateur and associated with the middle class) and Rugby League (which embraced professionalism and became a working-class sport) in the late 19th century. The former would gain greater importance in the empire (Stoddart, 1988). In cricket, a compromise was reached: professional players were accepted but amateurs remained in charge and occupied the key playing positions (Perkin, 2007).

In the formal empire, the organisation of games was relatively easier compared to other contexts. This was primarily due to the larger presence of British individuals and the greater availability of land and resources that they controlled. As the British population grew in places like India, they introduced various aspects of European culture, including the game of cricket. Similarly, cricket found its way into other territories such as Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies or South Africa. Rugby, on the other hand, gained popularity particularly in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Fiji (Perkin, 2007). Because of the special relevance cricket held in the colonial context, in the following lines we will focus specifically on this sport.

2. CRICKET

Cricket played a vital role in the imperial quest, as it emerged as the most prominent sport in the empire (Fletcher, 2011). Referred to as ‘the Imperial Game’ (Dominic, 2013; Sandiford & Stoddart, 1988), cricket is frequently described as “an integral part of the Empire” (Birley, 2000, p. 95), and considered to be the “quintessential English game” (Dominic, 2013, p. 48). According to Mangan, it served as the “umbilical cord of Empire linking the mother country with her children” (1986, p. 153).

The impact the game had in the empire is outstanding and reflected in the fact that, nowadays, cricket is still popular and active in most Commonwealth countries, –though there are some exceptions like the United States and Canada, who rejected the game–. In fact, colonies like India or the West Indies are now dominant in the sport, despite having a painful history with regard to colonisation (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). Thus, the relevance of the game is undeniable, making the analysis of this sport imperative.

During the initial stages of colonisation, cricket spread primarily due to its status as a familiar recreational and entertainment activity among British emigrants (Fletcher, 2011). Engaging in cricket provided migrants with a sense of normality in an otherwise unfamiliar and unwelcoming environment; it helped them maintain morale, reduced their sensation of isolation and created a feeling of closeness to home (Holt, 1990; Fletcher, 2011). Thus, the initial spread of cricket was merely the continuation of the existing cultural practices and traditions of the British in the outposts of the empire, with no evident signs of the intention to share cricket or to use it as a way to mould the behaviour of the colonised populations (Hughson, 2009; Dominic, 2013; Fletcher, 2011). Ultimately, it was the manifestation of the cultural baggage the British brought with them to the empire. As such, in the subsequent years of the colonisation process, cricket evolved into a symbol of unity, loyalty to the monarchy, and commitment to imperial aspirations for the British residing abroad (Dominic, 2013).

Nevertheless, the games revolution at home had an undeniable impact in the conception of the sport in the colonies. The reinvention of cricket during the 19th century gave the sport an undeniable social and educational value, positioning it as a “pastoral, peaceful and patriotic” means of shaping character and moulding behaviour (Dominic, 2013, p. 55). This perspective became deeply embedded within the British educational system, and subsequently, cricket began to carry the same connotation in the colonies as

well. However, in the imperial context, cricket assumed an additional function: it was a symbol of Englishness (Dominic, 2013), as we will analyse in the following section.

2. 1. Shaping morality and behaviour through cricket

The game of cricket was mainly carried throughout the empire by the public-school educated boys, who had been specifically trained through sport and the tenets of muscular Christianity to serve the empire (Stoddart, 1988). In Britain, cricket had become a national game, generating and symbolising “English national character” and emerging as a synonym for “Englishness” (Dominic, 2013, p. 48; Fletcher, 2011, p. 20). As stated by Fletcher, “a good cricketer was also thought to be a good all-round Englishman”, embodying positive qualities like “loyalty, self-sacrifice, unselfishness, cooperation and *esprit de corps* and a sense of honour” (2011, p. 20). These were the traits that the British believed to be representative of the English character and ones they aimed to promote on a global scale.

As such, and as part of British colonial policy, Britons intentionally carried the game with them to the colonies (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005), recognizing its potential as a tool to transfer the “appropriate British moral code” to the encountered populations (Stoddart, 1988, p. 658). They also intended to transform the ‘baser instincts’ of these civilisations, whom they thought lacked stamina, were lazy and feminine (Bateman, 2009, p. 126; Dominic, 2013). Through cricket, Victorian gentility and manliness were to be inculcated and a strong English character was to be formed, while the sport was considered to promote team work, self-reliance, courage, obedience, calmness and respect for ‘fair play’ (Fletcher, 2011; Dominic, 2013). Education and the church were key in the spread of cricket, especially with the introduction of British secondary schools in the colonies and due to the pedagogic functions assumed by the clerics and religious actors (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005).

Cricket was viewed as a ritual that perfectly showcased the British and the desired behaviour in the populations, as well as the standards and the appropriate public and private moral codes coming from Britain. In fact, compliance with the moral guide proposed through cricket was seen as a sign of preparedness to assume responsibility (Stoddart, 1988). “Cricket was [...] about social instruction, decorum, and respectability” (Stoddart, 1988, p. 663). The fact that cricket was being played in the colonies was used

by the British to portray their success in their mission to transfer their values to the subject populations and to integrate them into British cultural norms (Dominic, 2013).

This perspective was influenced by the growing prominence of Social Darwinism theories in Britain. It was believed that the white English, considered racially and morally superior, had a duty to educate the less civilised populations (Dominic, 2013). The underlying goal was to propagate a moral framework rooted in the notion of white supremacy and the dominance of masculinity (Fletcher, 2011). In this sense, cricket symbolised superiority and encapsulated moral imperatives that showcased and justified imperial ambition and accomplishments (Mangan, 1986).

2. 2. Shaping society through cricket

As described in previous sections, cricket in Britain fostered social division and stratification. Since its reinvention and codification during the 19th century, cricket became a mainly upper-class sport. Amateuism was the norm, and professionals pertaining to lower social strata were only partly allowed to play the game by occupying the less prestigious and unimportant roles. It has also been stated that colonial societies often mirrored life in Britain, and this was indeed the case with social divisions. In fact, it has been argued that it was the close association between cricket and social divisions that facilitated the game's integration and contributed to its popularity in the colonies (Dominic, 2013).

This was evident in the case of Indian princes, who found the intricate social divisions associated with cricket to be quite appealing. It is crucial to note that the adoption of the sport proved advantageous for certain colonised groups, who actively worked towards its implementation and promotion. In India, the colonised elites viewed cricket as a means to establish closer ties with the British colonisers and to differentiate themselves from the lower social classes among the colonised population. Notably, the Parsees in India quickly embraced the game and predominantly kept it to themselves as a way to demonstrate to the British their suitability and dependability as collaborators (Dominic, 2013; Stoddart, 1988). This further facilitated their role as intermediaries between the British and Indian populations, reinforced the authority of both elite groups, and provided a platform for social interaction between them (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005; Stoddart, 1988). In the West Indies, the position of local elites was similar (Hughson, 2009); and even in other colonies in which the indigenous elites did not actively promote

cricket, the game was still permitted by them, as they too saw it as a means of education and civilisation. In doing so, they also accessed certain benefits (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005).

Around the empire, lower strata populations –including the non-whites– were frequently prevented from accessing the game, though sometimes encouraged to take part in it. When the latter happened, the subjected populations participated along segregated lines or assuming the most irrelevant and unattractive roles, similarly to what happened in Britain. The reason behind this is that the elites aimed to maintain social dynamics and a distinct social hierarchy that was deemed respectable (Stoddart, 1988; Horton, 2014).

Thus, when it came to interracial play, the teams and clubs were segregated, yet games between racially different teams were punctually allowed (Fletcher, 2011; Stoddart, 1988). This was possible due to the lack of physical contact between players in cricket. Contrastingly, in deeply segregated colonies, contact sports like rugby were either ignored, limited to the white elites, or played in strictly segregated terms (meaning interracial games were not allowed). In interracial games, the whites occupied the role of the umpire, whose decision was undisputed and unquestionable (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005).

Regarding the integration of working-class professionals into the game, bowling and wicket-keeping were roles reserved for those pertaining to lower social strata, while the batsman, captain and umpire were invariably the British amateurs or gentlemen. They also had different changing rooms and were to enter the playing field through different entrances (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). The elites continued to control the game and held the captaincies well into the 20th century (Stoddart, 1988).

On the other hand, enthusiasm towards the game was widespread. For lower social classes, cricket provided a means of symbolic competence by allowing them to compete against upper class individuals; for all colonised groups, it was a means of revindication of their capability and equality to the British, as it provided a unique scenario in which the colonised could face the British and emerge victorious in their encounter (Dominic, 2013). We will see this more precisely in the following section.

VIII. THE USE OF SPORT BY THE COLONISED POPULATIONS

As thoroughly examined in this paper, sports were introduced in the colonies with a significant cultural dimension. The export of sport to the colonies went beyond the game itself and encompassed a range of associated connotations; it was a vehicle for displaying British attitudes, behaviour, morality, civilisation, and social structures as superior and attempting to impose them upon others. In essence, it served as a medium through which culture, values, and ideals were to be transferred. The idea was that, if one desired to participate in British games, one must adhere to the code of Englishness (Fletcher, 2011). The aim was not to achieve a mutually respectful society in which the different cultures had a place, but rather to achieve a sense of homogenisation and sameness that favoured unity, increased the connections to Britain, and facilitated British rule (Blanding, 2012a).

However, the receiving populations were far from passive and uncritical in this process of transfer of culture, as they frequently resisted or re-made the cultural elements associated with imperial sports (Fletcher, 2011). Fletcher describes this situation by referring to cricket: “the story of imperial cricket is really about the colonial quest for identity in the face of the colonisers’ search of authority” (2011, p. 20). In this sense, it is important to note that the sporting experiences vary from one colony to another, as both during the colonial and post-colonial eras indigenous peoples within the colonies have reinterpreted and adapted the games to their own cultures so that they would better align with their own values. Thus, they have managed to preserve their particularities and to establish a unique sporting culture and identity (Horton, 2014; Hughson, 2009). As mentioned by Hughson, sports were not “merely handed down by the British and compliantly absorbed by the local inhabitants of Empire” (2009, p. 82).

In the West Indies, for instance, the local population took cricket and made it a crucial part of their culture and identity. A unique ‘black’ style was developed in this territory that contrasted with that of the colonising elites and was characterised for being fluent and attacking (Hughson, 2009). Similarly, in New Zealand, the native Maori team created a unique playing style, and traditions, such as the performance of the ‘haka’, were incorporated into rugby. This ritual began to take place (and continues to do so) prior to the matches and it frequently caused the confusion and disapproval of the British (Hughson, 2009).

In Fiji, rugby developed into an “indigenous game” and became integral to the culture, education and lifestyle of Fijian people (Schieder & Presterudstuen, 2014). The physicality linked to the game, its religiousness and its characteristics (including mutual respect, contact, strength, loyalty, discipline and teamwork) were aspects Fijians were already familiar with, so it was easily incorporated into their lifestyle and traditions. Furthermore, rugby helped preserve the communal lifestyle in which each individual has a role that they accept, as part of an intricate hierarchical society (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013). Finally, it helped create a shared sense of belonging and identity among the populations of Fiji and other islands, such as Tonga and Samoa.

On the other hand, there was (and still is) a common desire amongst the majority of the colonies to beat the British at their own game, as the symbolic meaning this held was quite powerful: it directly dismantled the notion of British superiority inherently linked to colonisation, cultural imperialism and Englishness (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). After all, sport can be referred to as “war minus the shooting” (Dyreson, 2011, p. 2430).

In the cases of Australia and New Zealand, the introduction of cricket provided the elites with an opportunity to cultivate a sense of Englishness, establishing a connection to the motherland and fostering unity. This created a sentiment of love towards the game; however, cricket also served as a source of rivalry between the colonies and Britain. Australia, in particular, continuously endeavoured to overcome a sense of inferiority stemming from its origins as a British penal colony, resulting in a longstanding and fervent rivalry between the two nations that persists to this day. The sense of inferiority and the subsequent drive to continually demonstrate their worth against the British were also present in New Zealand, motivating its people to consistently strive for the prestige associated with winning (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). Ultimately, “Cricket’s strong identification with English imperialism made it attractive to both those who cherished the ‘mother country’ and those who wished for nothing more than symbolically to defeat it” (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005, p. 105).

Similarly, in South Africa, the Afrikaner community took rugby football and appropriated and redefined it, as a means to symbolically and literally surpass the British and assert their own cause. Rugby swiftly became an integral part of Afrikaner culture, characterized by distinctive elements that set it apart from the version of the game

introduced by the British. Furthermore, a powerful sense of national sentiment became intertwined with the sport (Horton, 2014).

Cricket arrived to the empire as the game of the British, while nowadays cricket's popularity lies primarily beyond Britain, and its national relevance is in decline (Fletcher, 2011). Meanwhile, in former colonies like India or the West Indies, cricket has come to be the national passion (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). Similarly, rugby is now considered to be the national sport of Fiji, New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa, all of which were first introduced to the game by the British (Jyoti & Bhalla, 2020).

Thus, despite Britain's attempts to impose cultural assimilation, these cultures, communities, and people have staunchly maintained their distinctiveness and resisted acculturation efforts, preserving their particularity. In the post-colonial scenario, the taught games have been repeatedly embraced by the indigenous populations as a means of expression, resistance to Englishness and of forging a unique and personal identity (Fletcher, 2011).

IX. CONCLUSIONS

Cultural imperialism and, particularly, sport were key to the British imperial quest. During the 19th century in Britain a games revolution unfolded that led to the creation of a strong bond between education, religion and sport. The latter became the means through which the character of future imperial leaders was formed, imprinting morality, genteelness, strength and masculinity to the young students of prestigious public schools like Rugby and Eton. The majority of modern sports were created, reinvented, revived or codified during this period in Britain.

This leisure revolution coincided with British imperial century, marked by an expansionism that brought the British “everywhere” in the world (Perkin, 2007, p. 149). The importance sport had acquired at home was matched by its increasingly relevant role in the outside, as it came to be a primary element for domination. In the imperial context, sport emerged as a symbol of Englishness, civilisation and superiority, and became a vehicle through which a transfer of culture for the British to the colonies took place. British games and this process of cultural homogenisation were to create unity and solidarity amongst the empire through the development of a strong bond with the colonial

metropolis, ultimately facilitating British rule. In this context, cricket became particularly prominent and began to be known as the imperial game.

In this sense, sport played a significant role in maintaining relative peace within the empire, contributing in part to the establishment of a sense of harmony. However, this was not solely due to the process of homogenization that fostered a sense of sameness among the populations; instead, while sport aimed to promote unity and assimilation, it also provided indigenous communities with a means of self-expression. Sport strived to cultivate a sense of Englishness, yet paradoxically became a vehicle through which identity and nationalism found expression. Thus, subjugated populations embraced sport, transforming and adapting it to their own unique styles and traditions, while still adhering to the British moral code.

Moreover, sport emerged as a potent and symbolic medium for the colonised populations to confront their colonisers, as it provided a unique arena where they could compete against the British and emerge victorious. In this sense, sport served as an outlet for the colonies to channel their complex love-hate relationship with the colonial metropolis. While expressing their admiration for sports and acknowledging the influence of British legacy, they also metaphorically defied British authority through sporting competitions. In a way, sport held a cathartic role, as even though it was not a proper confrontation to colonial power it did symbolically and metaphorically acquire this meaning, especially for the subjugated populations. Thus, an immense amount of emotional capital was involved in games, as the colonies aimed to beat the British at their own game.

The reality is that matches between the colonised and the colonising did take place, and the British did in occasions lose, especially as the colonial era advanced. In this sense, Perkin (2007) suggests that had a psychological impact on both the British and the colonies, as it served as a preparation for the eventual dissolution of the empire. Sport taught both sides the virtues of winning and losing gracefully, and losing against colonial teams helped the British come to terms with the emancipation of the colonies. Conversely, winning gave the colonies a sense of self-confidence and prepared them for their eventual independence, fostering mutual respect between the two sides. In this way, sport played a role in granting a sense of independence and autonomy to both the colonisers and the colonised.

As a result, sport is believed to have played a significant role in fostering unity and confidence between the colonies and Britain, contributing to a smoother transition towards independence. It facilitated an amicable process of decolonisation (compared to other instances in world history), ultimately leading to the transformation of the British Empire into the Commonwealth of Nations, which stands as the sole example of a great empire that has willingly restructured itself into a community of states based on political equality and freedom. Given the significance and intriguing nature of this transformation, it would be worthwhile for future studies to explore the specific role of sport in the formation and development of the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that sport holds great value and power, as exemplified by its profound influence within the context of the British Empire. Sport possesses the remarkable ability to shape character, behaviour, morality, and society, serving as a tool for forming individual and collective identities, fostering the development of essential virtues, and transmitting cherished ideals and values. In the realm of International Relations, sport plays a pivotal role as a diplomatic instrument of soft power, projecting a desired image to the global community and facilitating improved inter-state relations. Furthermore, sport stands as a critical tool of cultural imperialism, as evidenced by the historical case examined in this study and more recent examples, such as the United States' keen interest in sports. As such, it is imperative that we do not overlook the profound influence of sport nor dismiss it as trivial or inconsequential. Instead, we must fully recognize its enduring relevance, continue to study its multifaceted dynamics, and elevate its position to one of central importance, appreciating its potential to shape societies, bridge divides, and foster harmony.

X. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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