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## **Negotiating their right to play: Asian-specific cricket teams and leagues in the UK and Norway**

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The cultural significance of 'ethnic-specific' cricket teams and leagues has received limited scholarly attention, despite increasing evidence of their various social functions. This paper aims to contribute to this under-researched area by drawing upon two individual case studies of Pakistani Muslim cricket teams; the first is based in the UK and the second in Norway. In this paper we argue that leisure and sport are key spaces for the delineation of social identities and hierarchies. We identify how cricket represents a significant social network within both the British and Norwegian Pakistani communities. In particular, we articulate the role of cricket in establishing and maintaining friendships and relationships, bolstering a sense of belonging, initiating diasporic sentiments, as well as being significant in the development of social capital, and resisting institutionalised white privilege.

Key Words: Cricket, Diaspora space, Muslims, Pakistanis, Racism

### **Introduction**

We situate this paper from the perspective that racism is embedded and institutionalised within the sport of cricket. This perspective emphasises that racism is contingent upon the sport's history with inequality and marginalisation. In other words, to understand the historical legacies of 'race' and racism within cricket, we must situate these within broader discourses of Empire, 'Englishness' and 'whiteness'.

Cricket developed most significantly under the watch of the Victorians. At this time cricket was viewed as an institution wholly symbolic of Empire, bourgeois English nationalism and elitism. In this fiercely nationalistic era, the English regarded cricket as an extension of the nation, and as a theatre for articulating their cultural supremacy. For Williams (2001) cricket is (or at least was) an institution expressing a distinctively English set of ideologies and was important for understanding how the English imagine themselves. Playing the game, it was widely believed, helped inculcate many of the qualities fundamental to Victorian gentility, namely: temperament, strategy, diligence, hard work, pride, respect and 'manliness'. Crucially, the 'Englishness' depicted through cricket is imagined: idyllic, unspoiled and, conspicuously white (see Fletcher, this volume).

Since the dismantling of the British Empire, cricket has become a strong cultural marker for (post-)colonial identities. Within the (post-)colonial context, the reason(s) why minority ethnic groups participate in cricket continues to be linked to the sport's colonial past. Some sports, such as cricket, possess colonial legacies, and therefore take on different personal and political connotations to sports which hold little resonance with colonialism and (post-)colonialism (Burdsey et al. 2013). For Carrington (2010) sport is fundamental to diasporic communities for mobilising cultural resistance and emphasising their 'indigenous' cultural identities within the (post-)colonial era. Cricket in particular is embroiled in everyday negotiations of cultural identities for many minority ethnic communities, including Pakistani Muslims. Within these negotiations, white people are engaged in emphasising their inherent domination and 'authenticity', while minority ethnic groups compete over their right to occupy this traditionally white cultural space.

Thus, the experiences of diasporic communities can act as a resource for explaining contemporary political struggles over what cricket means, how it should be played, and its place within wider society.

The cultural significance of 'ethnic-specific'<sup>1</sup> teams and leagues has received limited scholarly attention (football notwithstanding), despite increasing evidence of their various social functions. This paper aims to contribute to this by drawing upon two individual case studies of Pakistani Muslim male cricket teams; the first is based in Yorkshire, UK, the second in Oslo, Norway. The paper begins by documenting the evolution of both clubs amidst wider considerations of South Asian settlement. We then move on to examine the meaning(s) British and Norwegian Pakistani Muslim men attach to the game of cricket. Finally, we account for how cricket is used as a form of cultural resistance to the (imagined) hegemonic white masculinity of both regions. We do this by examining the views of both British and Norwegian Pakistani Muslim men towards their acceptance within a sport that occupies a markedly different status amongst the white host community in each country.

### **Pakistani migration to the UK and Norway**

Daniel Burdsey (2009, 708) contends that the formation of Asian-specific sports teams needs to be contextualised within the social climate facing migrants in the 'immediate post-migration phase' and must account for the 'racial politics – both parliamentary and popular – of this era'. This is however, not to say that their formation and subsequent growth are necessarily linked to the wider trajectories of race relations at the time. Instead, what Burdsey is suggesting is that these teams represent far more than just a team (in the literal playing sense), and that their significance can only be fully articulated if the wider social, cultural, political and economic contexts of their evolution are accounted for.

South Asians began to settle in Britain in significant numbers as a result of British colonial rule in India. Mass migration began in the post Second World War era. Their settlement was consistent with the process of 'chain migration'; facilitated by specific kinship networks. Due to its burgeoning textile industries, Yorkshire (the site for Fletcher's study) was a popular settling place. According to the population census in 2011, Yorkshire and the Humber region was home to over 226,000 residents of Pakistani origin (Office for National Statistics 2012). Of that number, 22,107 – 4% of the city's total population – were resident in Sheffield, where Fletcher conducted research.

The impact of South Asian migration to the UK is well documented (see Modood and Salt 2013), and there not space to discuss it at length here. There was a widely held belief in Britain that during early phases of migration South Asians were introducing irreversible changes to the social composition of Britain, in that they provided competition for jobs and housing, had excessively large families, and were reluctant to integrate. Consequently, for many migrants, life was initially very challenging, and cricket proved to be a valuable cultural resource for negotiating their ethnic identities. In subsequent years there have been a number of events, such as the Rushdie Affair (1988/89), 'northern riots' (2001), 9/11 (2001) and 7/7 (2005) which have further problematised the existence of South Asians in Britain. In many parts of the UK, the legacy of these events continues into the present day, and has led to the marginalisation and exclusion of many South Asians. According to Alexander (2005) the dominant reaction to these events was to depict South Asians as Britain's newest 'folk devil': a unified (and harmful) and predominantly Muslim, 'Other'. Thangaraj (2012, 991) summaries this view in the context of the USA; he states that, 'With the conflation of

Muslim, terrorist, Arab, Middle Eastern and South Asian ... the racial formation “Muslim looking” ... denies full citizenship by associating these communities with terrorism’.

Pakistani labour migration to Norway began on a small scale in the late 1960s (Tjelmeland and Brochmann 2003). Post Second World War society had been remarkably homogenous, and as such these ‘foreign workers’ represented a new phenomenon in Norway. Migration increased in 1971, following restriction on immigration enforced in neighbouring Denmark (another popular destination), and in the succeeding months, a substantial number of Pakistani men came to Norway instead. This introduced some ethical, practical, political, and cultural challenges to the host white community. Despite the relatively small number of Pakistani labour migrants (1,240 in 1972, compared with a total population of approximately 3.9 million) they were clearly visible in public spaces. Media reports documented how they were living under terrible conditions, many in over-crowded spaces, with poor hygienic standards. Restrictions on immigration similar to those of Denmark were extended to Norway in 1975, and subsequent migration was mainly through family reunification. As of 2013, out of a total population of 5 million, 710,000 are immigrants or born of immigrant parents (Statistics Norway 2013). Though currently outnumbered by Polish migrants, for a long time Pakistanis were the largest migrant group in Norway. In 2013 there were 33,634 persons of Pakistani descent in Norway (ibid.); most of whom live in the Oslo region, where Walle’s study took place.

Ever since different migrant communities began processes of global migration, sport has been an integral feature in how we conceptualise and experience the notion of being part of a diaspora (Burdsey et al. 2013). One conduit through which the interplay between old and new homes was reproduced was through the love of sport many brought with them (Fletcher and Spracklen 2013). For many members of the South Asian diaspora, there exists a continuation of ethnic solidarities and attachments to the symbols of national belonging and continuing investment, emotionally, economically and culturally in the ‘homeland’. For the men in both studies, cricket facilitated their diasporic consciousness. Indeed, as Raman (2014) argues, ‘Cricket connects South Asians to one another, creating an ‘affective economy’ of relatedness...through difference’.

### **Researching the clubs**

Data for this paper were collected via two separate projects into ‘Asian-specific’ male cricket teams in Britain, known as Aylesworth, and Norway, known as Aker. Both clubs and all players have been assigned pseudonyms. These projects were conducted between 2007-2010 and 2003-2010 respectively. A comparative analysis of these clubs is offered in this paper in order to illuminate the experience(s) of Pakistani Muslim men playing cricket in two very different contexts. Cricket is popular in the UK and is played by a number of different ethnic groups. As of 2014 30% of the 908,000 playing cricket over the age of 14 in England and Wales are of South Asian origin (ECB 2013). In terms of the number participating as players, coaches and umpires (amateur and professional), and who govern and regulate the sport, white people (mainly men) are dominant. In contrast, in Norway, cricket is not a mass-participation sport and is certainly not ethnically diverse. Excluding a minority of white Norwegians, Indians, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis, the sport is organised and played almost exclusively by Pakistani Muslim men.

Our studies were ethnographic. We both conducted interviews and undertook extensive observations with players and club members; attending matches, training sessions and social gatherings. Interviews addressed topics including ethnic identities, belonging, community, family life, gender, religion, (anti)racism and ethnic privilege. They

took place at a variety of locations, such as training grounds, players' homes, cafes/restaurants and bars. Our backgrounds in the sport differed considerably. Fletcher was socialised into playing the sport from a very early age, progressing through the junior academy ranks at his local County Club. His background and skill as a player allowed him to access and maintain a relationship with his respondents relatively easily, particularly as he was able to 'play' the game to a level that gained him some level of credibility and respect (see Fletcher 2013 for further detail). In contrast, Walle's research did not involve him actually playing much cricket. Access to the men was facilitated via his family background. Though not apparent by his phenotypical appearance, Walle is the son of a Pakistani migrant. Thus, his credibility as a researcher was strengthened more on the basis of this family background, and his personal knowledge of Norwegian Pakistani migrant history(ies) than it was on his capacity as a cricketer (see Walle 2010 for further detail).

Although the ethnic composition of the clubs presented here was similar, the reasons why they were established (and thus why they are compared in this paper) differed. Aylesworth is based in Northern England. The club was never intended to be a club exclusively for South Asians. Unlike other ethnic-specific clubs, for example the Aker club in the second case study, or the Caribbean Cricket Club (Carrington 1999), Aylesworth was already established by the time migrants began to settle in the area in significant numbers. In fact, it has only been since the turn of the twenty first century that Aylesworth began to attract South Asian players in greater numbers than white players. Most of the men involved in this analysis were British-born, although some had migrated from Pakistan at a young age. A very small minority had 'mixed' white and South Asian parents. All were from a Pakistani Muslim background. The club participates in a high level 'mainstream' league. Other teams in the league are predominantly ethnically white. Thus, locally, Aylesworth is known as an 'Asian' club.

Cricket was introduced with minor success in Norway in the late nineteenth century. However, it was through the efforts of Pakistani labour migrants that cricket was established as an organised sport in the country. Cricket has been played by Pakistani migrants in Norway since the late 1970s/early 1980s, but uptake of the sport amongst ethnically white Norwegians remains low. At the time of fieldwork approximately 800 men were participating in organised cricket. This number has increased in recent years, and is now estimated to be in excess of 5,000 – the majority of whom are of Pakistani descent. Notably, this number now includes female participants. During the research period there was a national league with two divisions and a national team which competes in European tournaments. Norway has been an affiliate member of the International Cricket Council since 2000. In 2007, cricket was formally recognised by the National Confederation of Sports in Norway, which has facilitated its growth.

The context in which the respondents in each study began to play cricket varied considerably. While Pakistani Muslims in the UK were struggling to be allowed into a space already established by the white majority, Pakistani Muslims in Norway were facing a very different struggle. They were not negotiating inclusion within an existing 'white' space; they were *creating* a space. Nevertheless, Walle (2013) notes that cricket was never intended to be a sport only for (Norwegian) Pakistanis. In Norway cricket is promoted as an 'inclusive' sport. Indians, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshi's, not to mention a handful of white Norwegians, do play the sport. Over the years however, Pakistani Muslims have increased their numerical dominance, meaning that cricket represents a tightly knit social network for these men.

Aker is one of the largest, longest serving, and most successful clubs in Norway. Aker was established in the 1980s by a group of Pakistani migrants, led by its then team captain, Shoaib. Shoaib and his family were also

influential in establishing cricket elsewhere in Oslo. Members of the club were all Muslim men of Pakistani descent; most were born in Pakistan, while some younger members were born in Norway to Pakistani-born parents.

### **Playing together: cricket and ethnic identities**

The establishment and development of ethnic-specific sports clubs in the UK is, to some extent, addressed in the literature (Burdsey 2006, 2009; Johal 2001). However, currently there is no research into their establishment and development in the Norwegian context. In his examination of the development and social significance of British Asian football clubs Burdsey (2006) identifies four broad roles, three of which are applicable here. Firstly, they act as symbols of community and cultural resistance; secondly, they facilitate contingent and cultural integration; and thirdly, they provide spaces resisting racism and circumvent the normalisation of 'whiteness' in mainstream sporting structures.

Appadurai (1996) argues that cricket holds political significance amongst, and can be empowering for, certain diasporas; particularly those of former British colonies (e.g. Pakistan, India and the West Indies). Different diasporas use the aesthetics of the sport to assert their (post-)colonial identities, reaffirm their self-image, and promote national pride; often in 'new' migrant spaces. For Werbner (2002) cricket is a means of empowering young British Pakistanis; through which they can exert their notion of 'transnational co-responsibility'. Cricket is also one major vehicle for invoking Pakistani national pride among young British Pakistanis.

We conceptualise cricket within Asian-specific teams and leagues via Avtar Brah's (1996) notion of the 'diaspora space'. According to Brah (1996, 208), diaspora space is:

Where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition.

In other words, the diaspora space provides diasporic communities with the opportunity(ies) for resisting the processes of exclusion and therefore, must be conceptualised at the intersections of power and positionality. Central to Brah's analytical frame is the acknowledgement that one can live in a space without totally subscribing to the dominant national discourse of that space: 'Diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of "us" and "them", are contested' (ibid., 8-9). Thus, diaspora space possesses both creative and transgressive potential in that, within these spaces, ethnic minorities are able to 'continually challenge the minoritising and peripheralising impulses of the cultures of dominance' (ibid., 210). In the context of sport then, diaspora space(s), in the form of Asian-specific cricket teams and leagues may facilitate the challenging of dominant racial tropes of South Asian Otherness and superiority of 'whiteness', whilst also providing minority ethnic players with the opportunity to demonstrate their performative proficiencies and ethnic identities. The significance of cricket to the overall migratory experience was affirmed by Aylesworth's Taz:

They [Pakistani Muslims] love to play cricket and they've got to play somewhere. I think a lot of them played cricket in Pakistan before they came over. Obviously, over there, the team was eleven Asians...eleven Pakistanis playing in a team. So maybe, it reminds them a little bit of 'back home'.

Thus, cricket would represent normalcy post-migration, and given its cultural significance on the subcontinent, promoted a wider diasporic consciousness. The origins and personalities of clubs, therefore, reflect the ensuing socio-economic and cultural context of the time.

Explanations for the emergence of Asian-specific leagues and teams varied amongst respondents in both studies. In the UK context, Aylesworth's Taz suggested that, as these leagues often operate outside of 'mainstream' cricket, and are not usually affiliated to any formal governing bodies, they offer opportunities for anyone to establish a team and compete. This view was supported by Aylesworth's Jimmy, whose father used to compete in a well-known Asian-specific league in Northern England:

This type of cricket is just another opportunity [for British Asians] to unite together and play some cricket. My dad used to play in [the league] with a bunch of friends and work mates...They were playing for themselves...People who play in [the league] do it for a game of cricket and that's it.

Jimmy's interpretation of Asian-specific teams and leagues constituting nothing more than a bunch of lads getting together to play cricket is somewhat ahistorical and, in some ways, undermines their cultural and political significance. There are a number of competitions throughout Britain that were originally established by, and for the benefit of, ethnic minorities. Johal (2001) suggests that these teams and leagues represent safe, de-pressurised sites that are free from white racism and which facilitate participation amongst ethnic minorities when, otherwise, they may not have done. Aylesworth's Zico commented how playing in an Asian-specific team offered him a sense of belonging and could act as an escape from 'everyday' racism(s):

It's like a big fuck you to all those people who have abused us in the past. They might still abuse me, but at least this time, they'll be eleven of us kicking their arse.

Given cricket's marginal position amongst white Norwegians, many of the Pakistani Muslim men believed that the sport functioned independently from wider sporting structures. This 'independence' had two juxtaposing impacts. Firstly, it meant that cricket was effectively invisible to white Norwegians, ensuring that the men rarely experienced overt racism(s). Secondly, in contrast, they believed that their 'Otherness', in the eyes of the white majority, restricted them access to the same rights and resources that white Norwegians took for granted in other sports, most notably football. For these men football functioned as a symbol of the majority white community. Some of the men had experienced racism in football, and had subsequently turned to the (perceived) 'safer' space of cricket, which they said was largely free from overt racism. Aker's Yousuf described his experiences:

I used to play football, but my impression was that it was not particularly welcome to have Pakistanis on the otherwise white team. We were discriminated against...So I started a football club together with some other

'foreigners'. But then it was like the [white] Norwegians were playing against the foreigners. After I started cricket, I didn't have to deal with those problems.

In the Norwegian context, cricket provided an escape from harmful experiences of Othering. A number of studies in the UK have shown that, through playing sport, British South Asians show a determination to maintain their ethnic identities, and endeavour to retain social ties with people from similar backgrounds (Burdsey 2009; Fletcher 2011; Williams 2001). In Fletcher's study the Pakistani Muslim men consciously used cricket as a form of cultural resistance to the sport's perceived 'whiteness'. Cricket was uniquely placed as a site for hegemonic struggle between themselves and the white majority. Similar to the Black male cricketers in Carrington's analyses, the competition between Pakistani Muslim men and white men within this context became a symbolic and real contestation of masculine and racial pride, and a way of (re)asserting a unified sense of self, and of rejecting, (albeit temporarily) the notion of their physical and cognate inferiority (Carrington 1999, 288).

On the basis that Norwegian Pakistani Muslims are not competing with white people for representation, the men in Walle's study were empowered through cricket differently to the men in Fletcher's study. Cricket may be seen as a predominantly Pakistani activity, something that they were 'born into' as Pakistanis. However, when employing cricket as a means of resistance against experiences of Othering, the association to Victorian gentility – and consequently its inherent 'whiteness' and 'Englishness' – was frequently used as an asset to substantiate claims that cricket was more complex and far superior to any 'mainstream' Norwegian sport (Walle 2010). Turning the colonial structure of amateur (white) batsmen and professional bowlers on its head (see Malcolm 1997), Aker's Javed argued that it is batting that distinguishes not only a good player from a mediocre one, but also cricket (Pakistani Muslim) from football (white Norwegian):

Bowling and batting demand very different skills from the player. Everyone is able to bowl, although not all know how to give a good delivery, of course. Batting is more difficult. Cricket is a highly technical sport, and batting is the most technically demanding. In cricket, if you make one mistake you're instantly punished. In football, a mistake isn't that critical.

While people may gravitate towards sport, first and foremost because they are passionate about it, involvement in sport has social benefits that may help to rationalise the resources and time that are invested in it. For the men in Walle's study, cricket provides an additional mode of belonging that facilitates a tightly knit network, and establishes and sustains particular bonds of loyalty and co-responsibility. Membership in this network provides access to resources that are scarce, and they become engaged in a structure of mutual dependency. Moreover, there were instances where participation in cricket served as a site from which ethnic leadership and political influence was established (Walle 2010).

The men in Fletcher's study identified a number of very different contemporary roles of sport; the most 'impactful' of which was thought to be related to young people and criminal activity. According to Addy, Asian-specific teams and leagues offer essential distractions for Britain's South Asian youths, many of whom he believed, turn to crime and anti-social behaviour due to a lack of legitimate opportunities afforded to them by the white majority:



A lot of the kids I used to go to school with have turned into drug dealers, or have criminal records...Why couldn't they have turned to sport? I'm sure if there had been opportunities they would have taken them up. Cricket got me and others off the streets.

A similar view was expressed by Aker's Kamran:

Cricket is important, because it helps to keep [the kids] away from the street.

Addy was referring specifically to the situation he faced in the 1980s when there were few (if any) social or community centres for young British Asians to attend. Sport is widely believed to provide a valuable alternative to crime and anti-social behaviour (Dacombe 2013). Indeed, many of the Pakistani Muslim men in our analyses have turned to cricket and the security of Asian-specific teams and leagues for direction, a sense of belonging, and safety from white racism(s). However, sport is not a social panacea – that is to say that sport certainly has a role to play in minimising inequality, but it cannot solve society's ills independently. Sport must form part of a series of wider processes, which aim to tackle the root(s) of inequality through, for example, social reform.

Continuing this argument, many of the men in Walle's study described how, through playing cricket, they aimed to challenge debilitating stereotypes of Pakistani Muslim men as criminals or militant radicals, which have dominated Norwegian media representations over the last two decades (Lindstad and Fjeldstad 2005). Aker's Shoaib commented how:

I started a "gang"<sup>2</sup> several years ago, but not the kind of gang they [the media] are thinking of. They're not interested in writing (about) issues other than crime...But the [Pakistani Muslim] people playing cricket don't get involved in such things – they don't have time for it [laughs].

Here Shoaib presents cricket as an activity and a social arena that is fundamentally different from the way Norwegian Pakistani Muslim men are usually depicted in the media. However, he notes with regret that the media show little interest in cricket, or even in the quotidian aspects of Norwegian Pakistani Muslim life. They prefer instead to emphasise the problems associated with immigration, and frequently rely on Orientalist representations which depict Muslims as radical fundamentalists. bell hooks (1992, 174) summarises the influence of 'whiteness' on these representations: 'I think that one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening Other is always a terrorist. This projection enables many white people to imagine there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorizing.' Indeed, accounting for the 'whiteness' of Norwegian media, many of the men in Walle's study believed that the level of negative publicity they received was disproportionate to other ethnic groups. Aker's Yousuf emphasised how:

Every group has its problematic individuals – that goes for [white] Norwegians as well as Pakistanis. The difference is that if a Pakistani does something wrong, he is taken to represent all Pakistanis.

Yousuf is referring specifically to the post 9/11 tendency to homogenise Islam and 'Muslimness' with radicalism and terrorism. According to Stephenson (2006) the resulting anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia

throughout this period has resulted in the stigmatisation and dehumanisation of all Muslims, regardless of which country(ies) they are citizen of and/or their level of adherence to Islam. Ewing (2008) sees this stigmatisation as part of a wider moral panic in Europe, causing renewed emotional investment in a national imagery amidst experiences of terror and social upheaval. Ewing (2008, 3) adds:

stigmatization of Muslim masculinity is a form of abjection, in which the Muslim man's sense of self and honour are represented in European national discourses as an uninhabitable way of being...But the Muslim man is not simply other to specific...national imaginaries. His abjection is reinforced by his positioning in a transnational imaginary in which the "modern" is constituted in opposition to the "traditional" as abjected other.

Although all of the men in Walle's study and the vast majority of men in Fletcher's study considered themselves to be Muslims, cricket was a secular space. Nevertheless, the way Islam figures in the current debate affects the men personally, as they identify with Islam in its broader cultural sense. Consequently, the fact that they are seen as Muslims by a majority white society that has little knowledge of the complexities and the multitude of ways of being a Muslim results in a situation where the men fall prey to the majority society's periodic hysteria about Islamic fundamentalism. For the men in Walle's study in particular, cricket represented the opposite of what is seen to constitute the values and ideas of the radical and militant Islamist movements like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Walle 2010). Cricket was integral to the men's self-perception as Pakistanis in the world, and was a means for expressing resistance against their marginalised position in society (Walle 2013).

### **Pakistani migrants and cricket clubs in Britain and Norway**

Evidence from our analyses demonstrate that ethnic-specific teams and leagues can be interpreted as a determination amongst minority ethnic groups to retain their ethnic identities in the face of, and in resistance to, indifference and/or hostility from the host white community. Writing about America, but in terms equally applicable to our analyses, Thangaraj (2012, 989) argues that sport can be empowering in the context of exclusion: 'Whereas mainstream popular culture is a site where "Muslim-ness" and "South Asian American-ness" are positioned as irreconcilable with American-ness...sport opens up opportunities for marginalised communities to perform their renditions of self'. According to Cashman (1998) an indication of this empowerment is that when communities from the Indian subcontinent settle in another country, they will often join or form culturally-specific sports clubs.

Over the last two-three decades the UK has witnessed a steady rise in the number of Asian-specific cricket teams and leagues. According to Johal (2001), given the extent of wider public antagonisms between white and South Asian communities throughout the nineties and since the turn of the century, the formation of these teams and leagues was inevitable. He suggests that with the 'indigenous' white community harbouring a great deal of hostility and resentment towards 'foreign immigrants', penetrating the symbolic boundaries of certain sports was a 'near impossible and often perilous endeavour' (ibid., 162). Thus, 'The establishment of all-Asian leagues...represents an important political statement in that they offer ways of resisting racism, exclusion and normalisation of "whiteness"' (Burdsey 2006, 488) in mainstream amateur cricket structures. Respondents in both studies cited the uneasy

relationship between the dominant white community and Pakistani Muslims as fundamental to the formation of Asian-specific teams and leagues. Ayleworth's Addy cited the influence of white racism:

White people are always like, 'this is our game; you're invading our game'. So Asians have made their leagues and whites have made their leagues. I have no hatred for white people, but when I was growing up I did because white people had hatred for me...or for us (Pakistani Muslims)!

The situation in Norway inevitably contrasts with these narratives because Pakistani Muslims are numerically dominant and therefore, they have not had to negotiate access in the same way. However, we must caution that numerical representation does not signify the eradication of racism; nor is it the equivalent to acceptance and integration. Whilst Pakistani Muslims may outnumber white people in Norwegian cricket, this does not necessarily mean that their participation is 'normal'. It is one thing to play the game, it is quite another to have an 'undisputed right to occupy the space' (Puwar 2004, 1). For example, each study cited poor relationships with the local authorities as being symptomatic of their marginalised position as ethnic minorities; though the situation in Norway was worse. Many said that the authorities tended to treat cricket differently from other (white) sports, mainly football. The men appreciated that some of their difficulties could be attributed to the marginal position of cricket in Norway, but mainly they cited the existence of institutionalised racism. Many highlighted the existence of deep-rooted divisions between Pakistani Muslims and white Norwegians. None were more evident than the resistance Aker members encountered from white authority figures when trying to establish the sport in Oslo. Aker's Yonis believed that local council representatives stonewalled their attempts to access both land to play and financial support to purchase playing equipment. He attributed this to white racism; stressing that football (at that time an ethnically white sport) consistently got priority access to council finances and facilities.

This is not an issue isolated to Norway. In the UK a number of studies have identified how minority ethnic teams experience prejudice from white communities, including: higher levels of vandalism, unequal league entry criteria, unfair treatment from umpires, and both overt and covert forms of racism (see for example, McDonald and Ugra 1998; Fletcher 2011). Players from Aylesworth spoke of how their ground had been subjected to graffiti and vandalism; with parts of the ground set on fire. The main cricket ground in Oslo had also been subjected to vandalism, and a general lack of respect shown to their ground by white Norwegians. There were cases of people from the white local community deliberately ignoring the markings of the field, trespassing over the boundary during matches or kicking a football in the direction of the pitch. On occasions these incidents had escalated into conflict between the Pakistani Muslim cricketers and members of the local white community. Such incidents suggest that the symbolic and material realities of racism are maintained, despite ethnic minorities securing formal access to white space(s). Stephenson (2006, 299) expands on this:

Despite possibilities for generating collective experiences, ethnic minority citizens still face threatening experiences and fearful encounters in white dominated places and spaces in Europe, particularly in instances where the intrusive nature of the white gaze displaces productive experiences...that is, rights to maintain their identities, lifestyles and social presence.

Both studies attributed racism and lack of respect from white people to be amongst the main driving forces behind the formation of Asian-specific teams and leagues. In the UK, Immy believed that the Aylesworth team was targeted by racists because their players were phenotypically 'marked' as being different within an otherwise white environment:

We get called all sorts... 'Paki this' and 'Paki that'. It isn't just one or two players...there's numerous [people doing it] in every team. Every game there's comments about us being eleven Asians and how we shouldn't be there. None of the other teams want us in the league...You ask me the questions, 'why is our team all Asians?'...because white people are racist towards us. We just want to play without all this shit!

Given that Pakistani Muslims are numerically dominant in Norway, rarely did the players note instances like those described by Immy; although some of the men held similar experiences of racism whilst playing other sports.

Rod Dacombe (2013) points out the propensity for sports to generate bonding social capital. He refers to the historic role of sports clubs in providing a focus for group action for people who share similar backgrounds. Essentially, the strong in-group bonding which can be generated by sports clubs can preclude social contact with people from outside the immediate group. The separate nature of many ethnic-specific clubs have been criticised for their (lack of) potential to offer any real challenge to racism. Respondents in Fletcher's study were well aware of this view, and many expressed concerns over the perceived segregation of Asian-specific teams and leagues. According to Aylesworth's Jimmy:

There's a lot of Asian people that have come into this club because of the [ethnic composition of] surrounding areas. This is the main club for the area, which just so happens to be dominated by Asians...We welcome white players...The problem is that our reputation means that the club will struggle to shake the 'Asian' label.

Jimmy's comments resonate with popular depictions of Pakistani Muslims as insular, isolationist and a 'community apart' (Abbas 2011). These views have been reflected in mainstream British cultural thinking and social policy, which have freely regressed to utterances of the Orientalism of the South Asian 'Other' who live 'parallel lives', completely lacking in shared identities (ibid.). Respondents in both studies believed that Asian-specific teams and leagues were viewed by other ethnic groups in these terms. It is wrong however, to assume that these divisions are solely the result of self-imposed segregation on behalf of Pakistani Muslims. Such an assumption ignores and distorts the wider structural and ideological challenges they face in an environment that simultaneously privileges 'whiteness' and questions their right to belong via subjecting them to the tyranny of the 'white gaze' (hooks 1992).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have argued that cricket provides a context from where British and Norwegian Pakistani Muslim men may negotiate their relative position vis-à-vis white majority society. We also suggest that cricket constitutes a social space through which these men develop a unified sense of their racial and cultural identities. In most cases they were unified around their resentment towards the ideologies and practices of white racism, but they also shared a sense of

being marginalised as Pakistanis in the world. 'Alternative' forms of the game, regardless of whether they pose any realistic threat to the traditions of (white English) cricket, have traditionally been viewed with suspicion, and/or rejected as inauthentic cultural adaptations. As Searle (1996, 9) asserts:

For cricket, this mythical and pastoral game so associated with the continuity and stability of the eternal mainstream of England...has for over a century been accepted as an emblem of what is pure and uncorrupted in English life, both at home and 'in the colonies'. Indeed, anything else simply wasn't and isn't cricket. Yet what had been accepted as symbolic and typical of the English ethos was, and still is, institutionally often fiercely hostile to new contributions and accretions, particularly... 'foreign'.

The sport of cricket is symbolic of 'whiteness' – white 'Englishness' in particular – although differently framed within a UK and Norwegian racialised context. What we mean by this is that a degree of everyday white privilege exists and is taken for granted, meaning that the (in)actions of ethnic minorities are marked and racialised. Goldberg (1996) observes how in 'whiter' spaces racialised bodies are placed under super-surveillance. Thus, in the white space(s) of sport, Pakistani Muslims, and other minority ethnic groups, are subjected to the 'terrorising white gaze' (hooks 1992); inscribing their position as objects of fascination. Indeed, writing about Black African Caribbean cricketers in the UK, Ben Carrington (1999, 283) argues that minority ethnic players, teams and leagues are subjected to a panoptic form of 'white governmentality' (Hesse 1997) that seeks to oversee, control and regulate their behaviour. Subsequently, participation in sport is underpinned by the constant threat of criticism and racial harassment, which may restrict some from 'attaining full rights to cultural participation' (Stephenson 2006, 299). However, occupation of traditional white spaces, including the cricket pitch, is not reserved for the politically impotent. On the contrary, as we have shown, belonging to such teams and leagues may facilitate resistance to, and protection from, white racism(s), as well as providing legitimate spaces for the celebration of their cultural heritage(s) and traditional activities.

The normalising of the (white English) way and the depicting of a South Asian way as 'deviant' serves two interdependent purposes. Firstly, it maintains a white (English) stranglehold on the dominant codes of the game, and secondly, aids in rendering the expressive traditions of minority ethnic communities as intrusive adaptations. Participation in Asian-specific teams and leagues could therefore, be interpreted as a way of resisting both exclusion and silence. The men in our case studies were frequently denied access to, and recognition within white spaces (including cricket) by the white majority community(ies).

The majority of our respondents demonstrated strong feelings of marginalisation, and believed they lacked status and recognition. The inability to escape stigmatisation within white space(s) may force ethnic minorities to reassert themselves as Other. Gayatri Spivak (1990) refers to this as 'strategic essentialism', arguing that at certain times, ethnic minorities will adopt deliberate and tactical measures to essentialise their identities in order to resist subjugation and exclusion. As a result, the teams in our case studies offer, in both a symbolic and real sense, protection from white racism. The reality is, however, that while cricket and sport more generally are popularly perceived as providing minority ethnic groups with equal opportunities, it is often overlooked that, not only is sport failing to integrate minority ethnic communities, it is actually being used as a mode for expressing ethnic antagonisms

and exacerbating social divisions. However, it is also the case that competing for an ethnic-specific team can provide individuals with the confidence to tackle 'everyday' instances of racism and marginalisation directly.

This finding mirrors that of Carrington (1998, 284) who found that the Caribbean Cricket Club 'transcended its sporting function' in that, in addition to providing a space to play cricket, it was also "a place where Black people could be themselves'. In our analyses cricket was strongly related to the men's perception of what characterises them as Pakistanis. As a result, the game (as contest), and cricket (as a social space), should not be dissociated from the men's identification with what is regarded as Pakistani. This identification as Pakistani may be central in constituting cricket as a particular space, and cricket is correspondingly an important source of ethnic pride in the men's encounters with others and in their expressions of resistance against processes of marginalisation, Othering, and racism.

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<sup>1</sup> We prefer to use the term 'Asian-specific' rather than 'Asian-identified' because respondents in both case studies challenged the accuracy of the 'Asian' team label and subsequently, did not necessarily 'identify' as themselves as belonging to an Asian team. We also avoided the term 'all Asian' team on the basis that, both clubs studied welcomed (and in the case of Aylesworth, already had) members from different ethnic groups.

<sup>2</sup> In the Norwegian language the term 'gjeng' (gang) has a dual and contradictory meaning. It can refer both positively to a group of friends and acquaintances that meet regularly, and more negatively to a group of trouble-makers or criminals.

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