

## **Confronting the ‘whiteness’ of women’s cricket: Excavating Hidden Truths and Knowledge to make sense of non-white women’s experiences in cricket**

### Introduction

Many feminist scholars have noted that ‘sport history remains the history of man’s involvement in sport’ (Vertinsky, 1994: 1; Osborne and Skillen, 2010); yet the extent to which sports history - particularly British sports history - continues to privilege a history of ‘whiteness’ by failing to interrogate racist *and* gendered ideologies is even more troubling. The absence of documented research on women’s historical experiences in sport exposes both the masculinisation of the sport, as well as the maleness of this documented history. As van Ingen (2013: 106) states when investigating the history of women’s boxing:

The lack of critical and nuanced historical inquiry on women’s boxing history is not solely the fault of poor historical sources. Rather, scholars have paid insufficient attention to how gender, racism, and white privilege have obscured various accounts of history within women’s boxing.

However, the absence of historical research on non-white<sup>1</sup> women is even more problematic, and more pervasive when it comes to the sport of cricket. Despite a wealth of research into ‘race’, racism and the imperial dimensions of cricket - to the extent that Jack Williams has stated that ‘[r]ace was at the heart of cricket throughout the twentieth century’ (Williams, 2001) - almost all of this literature has focused entirely on the men’s game. Experiences of female cricketers have either been sidelined or worse still, simply ignored. Indeed the whiteness and maleness of historical analyses of cricket in 20th-century Britain have formed the major rationale behind my own research. Research that focuses on unpacking the histories of English cricket all either deals with the women’s game in a brief and perfunctory manner (Williams, 1999) or ignores it completely (Birley, 1999; Bateman and Hill, 2011; Davies and Light, 2012). This is unsurprising given the maleness of both sports history and the game of cricket itself. It remains normal, for instance, for major historically-focused texts on cricket to be published with no reference to women at all, let alone ethnic minority women. What information we do have about the experiences of ethnic minority female cricketers in Britain comes from sociologists (Verma and Darby, 1994; Ismond, 2003), who have generally not been concerned with an interrogation of historical context.

According to postcolonial researchers, failing to acknowledge such information has historically allowed (white) ‘colonialist powers’ to retain and sustain their hold and power over ‘the bodies’ of non-white Others (Slemon, 1991: 3). It is a reminder of how the first world metropolis has produced and continues to police knowledge about non-white Others that is circulated, accepted, and embedded in western ‘institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles’ of knowledge exchange, as well as knowledge that is ignored (Said, 1978: 2). In the contemporary context, this absent knowledge and history is continuously used to explain away non-white women’s low participation in sport via-a-vis cultural myths and stereotypes. It is for this reason that it is important to critically interrogate such material so as to lay bare the many ways in which women’s cricket was constructed as white and middle-class. From the historian’s perspective it also points to the need to utilise less traditional archival material, including oral histories, to broaden the perspective offered.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘non-white’ is used throughout this chapter to refer to any cricketers whose origin was not predominantly European.

This chapter aims to uncover the previously hidden history of women's cricket in Britain. The central objective is to expose and deconstruct the racial mythologies which contributed to, if not corroborated, idealised perceptions of the female cricketer as 'white' and middle-class. The chapter utilises new sources including tour diaries written by white female cricketers between 1948/9 (the date of the first post-war international women's cricket tour) and 1960/1 (the date of the first ever women's tour of South Africa); oral history interviews with white and non-white female cricketers; and other written documents (prepared by white cricketing officials) found in the archive of the Women's Cricket Association (the governing body of women's cricket in Britain between 1926 and 1998).

### Uncovering hidden sporting histories: feminist desire and objectives

At the time my research was undertaken, this otherwise invisible archival knowledge was stored in the WCA archive, hidden away in several large boxes in a shed in a remote Lancashire hamlet, in the garden of a former (white) England cricketer. In this box I discovered press cuttings of overseas tours and a number of tour diaries written by white female English players in the 1940s and 1950s. More hidden truths, including the minutes of the International Women's Cricket Council (IWCC), the international governing body of women's cricket, which was founded in 1958 by England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Holland and represented almost entirely by white (middle-class) women, were found in a private collection, in the home of a former (white) WCA official. I gained access to these documents by contacting the head of the WCA's 'reunion body', the Women's Cricket Associates, who arranged for me to visit the aforementioned players.

Biographers, historians and literary scholars have long considered diary documents to be of major importance for telling history. More recently, sociologists have also taken seriously the idea of using personal documents to construct pictures of social reality from the actors' perspective (Plummer, 1983). For my research, I embraced these sources accepting that as relics of the past, they represented 'cultural artefacts of the moments that produced them' (Denning, 1996: 43). They conveyed details and information about customs, beliefs and cultures and perceptions of non-white women, especially non-white cricketers, which for me was powerful information that needed to be shared with the academy. Not overlooking the dilemma of ascertaining the legitimacy or authenticity of information contained in these sources, I consulted them knowing that they provided details prepared by privileged historical actors whose perceptions could reveal a lot about the gender, racial and class dynamics of cricket at the time. In this sense, they gave me access to a hidden world of knowledge so that I could gain a snapshot of how non-white female cricketers were depicted by their privileged white counterparts. It is important to clarify that I did not embrace these archival sources, especially the tour diaries, as 'pure data' awaiting interpretation; rather, I used them to make sense of and uncover the sets of racialised ideologies that worked to construct and juxtapose differences on the lines of gender, race/ethnicity and class, both to and for the white gaze.

More importantly, throughout my exploratory excavation phase of 'data collection' from the field, I was mindful of the fact that my own position as a white, middle-class feminist sports historian would impinge upon the various descriptions/interpretations, meanings and connotations I would draw from this archival data. I was conscious that I was writing without an insider understanding of racism in sport (or in society generally). Several researchers claim that using archives or historical relics means researchers interpret the past by relating it to cultural assumptions from today's standards, which can affect the 'distinctiveness' of original sources (Scott, 1990: 57). Recognising this point, I also conducted oral history interviews with 27 female cricketers who had all played either international or county level cricket: only one of these participants was a non-white elite

female cricketer of African Caribbean heritage. In this research I privilege both the testimonies of the non-white female cricketer, as well as the testimonies shared by the white female cricketers.<sup>2</sup>

Although numerous historians have asserted that oral testimonies must be treated with care due to the unreliability of memory (Thomson, 1994; Yow, 1997), in this research they allowed me to dig beneath the absence of non-white women from the archive, to attempt to fill the gap left by the lack of images or discussions of non-white female cricketers within the written archives. For instance, since my interview questions were based on interrogating white female cricketers' historical perception and encounters, I was able to gather sufficient information to both inform and enhance my understanding and interpretation of information contained in diaries. That being said, I was always very cautious and reflexive in my approach to interviewing, knowing for instance that my own whiteness could shape the dynamics of the interviews with the non-white participant. Nevertheless, I commit to this research knowing that it is my duty as an historian to interrogate issues of gender, race/ethnicity and class; because as Vertinsky (herself a white researcher) puts it:

Black feminists have something special to say about their distinctive experiences and about issues related to their bodies, their physicality, and their sexuality, but this does not release white feminists from the responsibility to inform themselves about these issues, to provide affinity, and to dialogue with colleagues of color through the act of 'hearing each other into speech' (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998: 536).

By consulting hidden knowledge and truth captured in these documents, the intention is to expose and unhinge this past. The hope is that my research will lay down an agenda which other sports historians - including those of colour - will continue to pursue.

It is important to clarify that the historical focus in this paper is on the period since the Second World War, since this period marked the onset of mass non-white immigration to Britain (Nicholson, 2015). What is troubling for me as a feminist sports historian is that despite the changing racial dynamic and landscape of Britain, women's cricket continues to remain a bastion of 'whiteness'. The scarcity of historical analyses of grassroots women's cricket in Britain makes it difficult to assess with any amount of precision the extent of ethnic minority participation in the sport, as does the lack of survey data on the subject (Nicholson, 2015). It is telling, though, that to date only one African Caribbean<sup>3</sup> woman (Ebony Rainford-Brent, between 2001 and 2010) and two South Asian<sup>4</sup> women (Isa Guha, between 2001 and 2011, and Sonia Odedra, in 2014) have represented England at international level; Odedra did so on a single solitary occasion. Certainly, the absence of non-white members from grassroots club photographs tells a striking tale: that of the absence of ethnic minority women from the game, or indeed the whiteness of the game that refuses to acknowledge or document the presence of non-whites. The latter point is particularly important given the breadth and depth of institutionalised racism in sport (Ahmad, 2011), especially cricket. Carrington and McDonald's (2001) study of English men's cricket highlighted that 'racism is both deeply rooted and pervasive in recreational cricket in England'. The implications of this on participation were clear: 'the culture of "English" cricket was used as a means of excluding black and Asian clubs from the official leagues', causing many of these clubs to lose their grounds and subsequently cease playing the sport altogether. However, for ethnic minority women, who are doubly marginalised on both racial and gender grounds, one cannot assume that their experiences

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<sup>2</sup> The players were aged between 27 and 90 at the time of interview; the oldest interviewee first represented England in 1948, and one of the interviewees was still playing for England at the time the interview took place.

<sup>3</sup> While 'Black' is also commonly used to denote women of African heritage, 'African Caribbean' is the term generally preferred in the British context and is used throughout this chapter for the sake of consistency.

<sup>4</sup> 'South Asian' here is used to denote someone whose origins are within the Indian subcontinent.

will be the same as their non-white male counterparts. Given the plethora of research on racism in sport and the extent to which a 'cultural deficit' model is often used to explain away low participation levels amongst ethnic minority women (Hargreaves, 1994: 257), there is certainly a need to expose and examine the hostile processes and dynamics that have, over time, contributed to British ethnic minority women staying away from cricket.

In keeping with the ethical sentiments of the relatively few feminist scholars who have interrogated the history of women's participation in sport to expose deep-seated forms of racial privilege and exclusion, this paper also seeks to privilege hidden stories to reveal concealed truths and knowledge about a 'coloured' demographic of women who matter to me. Like Vertinsky and Captain (1998: 352) who 'trace(d) the complex construction and perpetuation of damaging myths of racial and sexual "difference"' to uncover the extent to which the bodies of black female athletes had been ideologically coded to both uphold notions of acceptable white and black femininity, and undermine their accomplishments, my work also seeks to re-read and deconstruct the racial mythologies that have contributed to our understanding of non-white women's cricket.<sup>5</sup> For me, the excavation of women's cricketing history is informed by a feminist desire to make visible the complex gender, class and race relations involved in English cricket, while also exposing the enduring inequalities that negatively impacted the sporting experiences of ethnic minority women cricketers in Britain. As will be evidenced throughout this chapter, my discussion points to the different ways in which the women's cricketing community, made up of the constituent clubs of the Women's Cricket Association (WCA), operated in exclusionary ways to both consciously and unconsciously cultivate and uphold an environment that ultimately alienated and excluded non-white women from the sport throughout the twentieth century.

This research is both grounded in and informed by a postcolonial feminist lens. Over the last 30 years postcolonial feminism has made a crucial intervention in postcolonial studies, in its exhortation to consider gender issues and to reinsert women's experiences into the study of Empire (Chaudhuri and Strobel, 1992; Jayawardena, 1995; Sharpe, 1993). White middle-class Victorian women, it has been shown, played a key role in colonialism as well as in the construction of 'white' identities (Frankenberg, 1992; Brown, Gilkes and Kaloski-Naylor, 1999). However, as Scraton (2001: 178) highlights, this approach has often been lacking in histories of sport; there remains a need to 'disclose sport's historical role in the construction of white identities'. This chapter therefore seeks to explore the discourses surrounding non-white female cricketers, as expressed through written and oral accounts of touring in the postwar period. The first section examines the constructedness of white superiority during international tours, as presented in tour diaries and newspaper accounts. The second section examines the effect this construction of 'whiteness' had when non-white cricketers were encountered, with a particular focus on the construction of the non-white cricketer as 'masculine' because of her refusal to adopt white dress codes. Overall, an attempt is made to uncover the history of gendered, racialised myths of racial 'difference' that have arguably shaped the experiences of non-white female athletes right up to the present day.

### Sport, Colonialism and Cricket

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<sup>5</sup> Vertinsky and Captain's work was pivotal in bringing to light the extent to which black women's athletic abilities were uncritically linked to alleged ideas about their bodies - the linking of their work history as slaves to a supposedly 'natural' brute strength' which many, at the time, believed they acquired as a consequence of working as slaves. Not only did such perceptions trivialize black women's accomplishments but it also allowed them freedom to participate in track and field, while excluding them from other physical activities and creating 'a distinctive and profoundly disempowering composite image of black womanhood'. These narratives have continued to shape the experiences of African American women right up to the present day (Vertinsky and Captain: 553).

That the British strongly believed in the 'idealism' found in sport and the 'positive values' it provided to those who played along is well documented in the wider sporting literature (see Holt, 1989: 204; Sissons and Stoddart, 1984; Sandiford and Stoddart, 1988; Mangan, 1981; MacLean, 2010). Sport was embraced and championed as an 'honourable pursuit' that facilitated the construction of the Empire (Mangan, 1986). Colonial governors revered sports like cricket for transferring dominant British beliefs and moral codes regarding social behaviour and standards to the colonies (Stoddart, 1988: 652) as well constructing 'European (pseudo-scientific) theories of racial and cultural difference', particularly with regards to perceptions of the physical and biological inadequacies of the non-white female physical body (Burdsey, 2007: 20; Mills and Dimeo, 2003). Sport thus became an arena where the alleged flaws and inabilities of 'Other' races were not only manufactured, but further juxtaposed to construct an image of the British as civilised, superior, and capable when compared to their inferior indigenous counterparts (Dimeo, 2001, 2002). Not only did these racial ideologies create racial hierarchies, but they also established and maintained Britain's 'dominant patterns of social organisation and... power' over 'Other' races (Houlihan, 1991: 10). Between 1875 and 1914 white middle-class men were not only able to gain economic control over the colonies, but they were also able to conceptualise women and men in the colonies in a specific way that legitimated their domination. In many ways these ideologies continued to impact the sport of cricket long after the (formal) era of British imperialism. During the twentieth century for instance, men's cricket and imperialism 'became mutually supporting ideologies', helping to promote a 'white' British national identity (Williams, 2001). Incidents such as the animosity felt towards West Indian pace bowlers in the 1970s and the Pakistani team during their 1987 and 1992 series' against England, during which the Pakistanis were accused of cheating, contributed to a continued ideology of white superiority, which permeated men's English cricket decades after the Empire had formally concluded (Williams, 2001). Having already illustrated the extent to which much of the documented literature alludes to men's cricket, I turn my attention to unpacking how these ideas also infiltrated and influenced women's cricket.

A noteworthy place to begin this discussion is to look at the establishment of the WCA in 1926, which at the time, was a largely middle-class, white organisation. Generally, the sport required time and financial independence in order for women to purchase the correct equipment, pay club subscriptions, and travel to away matches. My own detailed research into the backgrounds of those women who represented England in the post-war decade suggests that this continued to be the case after 1945 (Nicholson, 2015). For example, of the 26 women who played at international level between 1945 and 1955, only one attended a council-run elementary school. Seven attended grant-aided secondary grammar schools; two attended private Catholic schools; one attended a voluntary-aided Methodist school; and six attended independent day or boarding schools, with five of these falling into the category of large 'public' girls' schools. In terms of occupation, 10 of the 20 women for whom data is available worked as teachers (eight of the 10 taught Physical Education), and another worked for the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR, a national body set up in 1935 to help local authorities with recreational provision). Two worked permanently after the war as officers in the newly-formed women's armed forces; three worked as civil servants; one worked in retailing; two were clerks and one a secretary. Additionally, given that women made up only 24% of the university population by 1958 and only 0.2% of working-class girls were able to attend university in these years (Dyhouse, 2001), the fact that five of the 24 gained degrees or diplomas and seven more attended physical training colleges indicates a certain level of privilege. Those women selected for international tours after 1945 were generally selected on merit, in accordance with their cricketing abilities, but until the 1960s all international women's cricket tours were entirely self-funded by players, and those who put themselves forward for selection thus tended to be from middle-class backgrounds. Having discussed, briefly, the cricketing history, it is to a closer analysis of how these white, privileged women used their cricketing tours to carve out and reaffirm a sense of white superiority on the lines of race, ethnicity and class that the discussion now turns.

### 'Ignorance of spirit and conventions'

As indicated earlier, many of the white participants of this study (n=26) were privileged economically. However, at home they were subject to discrimination on the grounds of gender, suffering from limited access to facilities and a lack of media interest in their sport. It was only when these white women participated in international cricket tours that they got to travel the globe, encounter non-white people, and experience different cultures and different ways of life, that a real sense of racial privilege emerged. This is unsurprising given that middle-class English women's sense of immense and absolute moral certitude, self confidence, superiority and assertion as a class was itself predicated on Empire. There is no denying that the Empire provided many opportunities for English women in areas that were otherwise not open to them in England at the time: opportunities to serve and act as missionaries, educators, nurses, doctors, and women preachers. Even as helpmeets of imperial men - as wives of powerful missionaries, political tract-writers, voyeurs, settlers or domestic workers, English women were no longer just 'victims of the bourgeois domestic ideology', but instead pivotal in carving out important niches for themselves in the social, political and cultural domains of the Empire. Through their various missions, they created very specific messages about Other men and women and transmitted these imperialistic messages back home to England and to English men in the colonies.

In my own research, the sense of opportunity that English women obtained from the Empire was apparent. Tour diaries from the early years of international women's cricket indicate that those involved at the top levels of the sports came to share, celebrate and perpetuate imperialist ideologies that were already so present in the men's game. Netta Rheinberg, the tour manager on the 1948/9 and 1957/8 tours of Australia and New Zealand, herself a secretary and the daughter of a wealthy export merchant, provides a good example of this. Her description of the large bungalow owned by the team's British host in Colombo in 1948, where they disembarked for a practice match en route to Australia, was as follows: 'beautifully and luxuriantly furnished... black Cingalese [sic] servants everywhere. One claps one's hands and there they are' (Rheinberg, 1948). Additionally on their tour of Panama City en route to New Zealand in 1957, she wrote:

Ended up at the Panama Hotel – glory me – what a place. £5 a day for a room in season excluding meals is the cheapest. Maids and servants are ten a penny and get paid about \$10-20 a month (Rheinberg, 1957).

Given the shortage of domestic servants in Britain in the postwar decade, the sense of envy in both these accounts is almost visceral.

Tour diaries such as Rheinberg's suggest that the act of participating in an international tour could create a sense of racial and imperial superiority, due to the fact that those selected acted as informal ambassadors for Britain while abroad. One player who toured Australasia in 1968/9, suggested that England players were treated 'like VIPs' (interview, 2014), and this appears to have been the case throughout the postwar years. The 1948/9 tourists socialised with politicians including the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers, and famous cricketers like Donald Bradman, and Rheinberg wrote in 1949 that 'High Commissioners seem to be two a penny!' (Rheinberg, 1949). Mollie Buckland, one of the players who participated in the 1960/1 tour of South Africa, wrote:

After a late night neither Ann [Jago] nor I were anxious to get up early. We woke about 9.0am, rang down and ordered breakfast in bed. There we were, like two titled ladies, waiting for the coloured waiter to bring up the menu, so that we could order (Buckland, 1960).

Within these tour diaries, female cricketers, who otherwise were working women in England, were now positioning themselves as 'titled women' - but only when confronted by non-white women who did not share their privileged position. A sense of power was engendered by the powerlessness apparent in the situation of the non-white women they encountered while on tour. A sense of Englishness was also created and retained in very specific ways as receiving breakfast in bed in a radically different landscape instills a level of gentility and bourgeois decorum. This Englishness provided the index against which colonised women were judged, and against which the white middle-class women judged themselves.

The contrast between the 'VIP' status of the England touring team and other groups which they encountered while abroad is emphasised in one striking passage from Netta Rheinberg's 1948/9 diary, which describes the England team's visit to a migrant camp in Australia in December 1948, whereby the effects of the 'White Australia' immigration policy (Carey and McLisky, 2009) were witnessed first-hand:

We were driven to an Australian migrant camp – where displaced persons from the Baltic countries are 'processed' and given jobs...The first thing the people learn is English – and they pick up the necessary in about 6 months. The various offices throughout Australia then apply for groups of workers of various categories and these are sent from the camp as requested. Each person is given certain freedom of choice and the whole thing seemed to me to be done on a democratic and broad-minded basis...

Mr Rees explained that there were three classes of immigrant required by Australia: 1) British, 2) European, 3) any other white race...We were all treated to free fizzy drink of vivid colours and departed to see the local canning factory (Rheinberg, 1948).

Everything about this passage points to the casual way which the England team, as national representatives and as privileged observers, accepted this racial hierarchy, with non-white races excluded as 'undesirable', as normal and natural. The settlers in the Australian camp are seen as benefiting from the civilising mission of the English who in addition to teaching them a civilized language, also give these Others 'freedom'.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the notion of an unfamiliar, inferior and uncivilised 'Other' is being strategically constructed by players throughout their diaries, and this discourse legitimates the unequal configurations of power apparent between the colonist and the colonised. 'Orientalising' (i.e., discursively constructing) an irrational and backward 'colony' has been shown by postcolonial theorists and historians alike to have been one of many ways through which the white (or Aryan) European civilisations and cultures were able to position themselves as rational, moral and superior (Jan-Mohamed, 1985). This kind of 'Othering' of non-white women is seen clearly by the end of Rheinberg's tour diary. On the voyage home in 1949, for example, the team disembarked at Curacao, and Rheinberg wrote an evocative description of the sights that awaited them that is tinged with casual racism:

These people are very dark skinned – negroid looking...We toured the streets...the women carrying baskets on their heads and some holding picanninies in their arms. I attempted to photograph some of them but they ran away every time – probably thinking it was the evil eye! (Rheinberg, 1949).

Thus African women in Rheinberg's diaries are represented according to racial stereotype as belonging to an 'unenlightened' culture which still believed in voodoo, black magic and non-scientific principles. Additionally, 'Arab' men are represented by Rheinberg as dangerous sexual predators, as evidenced when she tries to prevent any of the English team from disembarking at Port Said on the boat voyage to Australia:

I am not prepared to take the responsibility for the party unless we are escorted by males...It is dangerous to go too far afield for several reasons – a) anti-British feeling b) attractive females among Arabs (Rheinberg, 1948).

By contrast, Rheinberg emphasises in her diaries that British people in Australia are viewed as brave, kind and stoic, especially in the wake of the Second World War:

We constantly get the almost sob-stuff attitude of all we went through in the war and how magnificent we'd been – and they lay it on with gusto (Rheinberg, 1949).

Dichotomous notions of us and them, empire and colony (or Others) were thus made real for these women during tours abroad: they served as 'colonial encounters' that allowed white, middle-class female cricketers to be presented with the 'deepest, most recurring image of the "Other"', analogous to Said's (1978) analysis of the distortion by British and French colonists of non-European civilisations. Said (1978: 2) also argued that distinctions between the colony and coloniser were made real to the Western empire through a variety of literary, political, fictional, scientific writings, travelogues and artistic depictions of the colony and its indigenous cultures and peoples. Some tour diaries were published when players arrived home (see for example Joy, 1950); others were merely shared informally amongst the women's cricket community, being read by friends and relatives. Along with scrapbooks made by players on tour, featuring postcards, ticket stubs and other 'souvenirs', this kind of written representation of tours served to reinforce notions of 'Other' / cultural difference even once players arrived back home.

'Race', ethnicity and 'cultural differences' all operated as significant markers in juxtaposing notions of 'difference' between the European 'Self' (white empire) and 'Others' (non-white colonies). They also legitimised the mutation of unequal (hierarchical) power relations between 'Empire' and 'colony' (Fanon, 1965, 1967). Within women's cricket, this solidified itself through the formation of the International Women's Cricket Council (IWCC) in 1958, a supposedly worldwide organisation of women's cricket associations, formed 'for the furtherance of cricket among women and girls' (IWCC minutes, 1958). In actual fact, it was an organisation of the former white Dominions: four of the founder member associations were those in England, Australia, New Zealand and (white) South Africa, and at the 1960 meeting it was agreed to write to Canada and Ireland to encourage them to join – despite the fact that women's cricket in both these countries was almost non-existent. The process of British decolonisation may have been formally complete, but an informal process of exclusion founded upon 'racial difference' continued to operate in the women's cricket community. India, for example, was not issued with an invitation to participate in the inaugural women's World Cup, held in England in 1973.

Indeed women's cricket associations in India and the Caribbean were not admitted to the IWCC until 1973 and 1976 respectively, and even when they were, the racial-imperialist mentality of difference remained firmly in place. When England sent a team to play a triangular series against Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago in the Caribbean in 1971, for example, the English players were scathing about the inability of their hosts both to play in accordance with the spirit of the game, and to act as 'civilised' hostesses. After England fell short of victory in the second Test by a mere 3 runs, England captain Rachael Heyhoe-Flint wrote that: 'the frustration of being so near and yet so far from victory made me readily lose my temper with both the opposition and the Jamaican administrators'. The implication in her autobiography is that the Jamaican authorities deliberately prevented her side from being able to achieve victory, both on this occasion and later in the series: that England were cheated of the series win which was rightfully theirs (Heyhoe-Flint, 1978). Because players were no longer keeping tour diaries by this time, the 'Othering' process is less visible in written sources, but oral histories from those who were touring help to fill the gap. They



reflect the belief that the Caribbean compared unfavourably with the former white Dominions as a place to tour, as in the following interview with one of the players who participated in the 1971 visit:

RN: How did that [the 1971 tour to the Caribbean] compare with the 68/9 tour [to Australia and New Zealand]?

S: Couldn't really compare it at all! I mean in fairness they weren't used to doing tours, and didn't know what was expected. Some of the accommodation left a lot to be desired, certainly in Trinidad. Jamaica was okay. Although having said that there was quite a variety of accommodation. I was very fortunate with another one of our team mates, and we were in a wonderful estate, and we had a maid to look after us. And the owners had just left us with the maid, they went off all the while we were there. So we had a car, a swimming pool, we had a fantastic time. And yet two others were with an Indian family down the road, who were lovely, but they had to eat with their fingers and eat rice! So it was very different.

Once again, the non-white 'Other' in this account is represented as domestic servant and/or as uncivilised beings lacking basic eating etiquette.

Etiquette and 'cultural difference' were central to the WCA's notions of 'them' and 'us'. Hargreaves has argued that when studying ethnic minority women and sport, we need to consider the 'intersectionality' of their identities, with a focus on how multiple different oppressions curtailed their participation in physical activities (Hargreaves, 2000). As Vertinsky and Captain put it, 'female athletes are racial *and* gendered *and* classed, with each and/or all of these categories taking on a different importance in certain moments and particular contexts' (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998: 535). All evidence suggests that the WCA was not merely exclusionist in racial terms, but in class ones too. This doubly marginalised African Caribbean and South Asian women, who not only often lived in less affluent circumstances than their 'white' counterparts, but were unable to conform to the WCA's coding of class as a white sensibility, oppositional to the imperialist perception that women of colour simply could not understand the 'correct', 'civilised' way to play cricket.

Class was conceived of by the WCA in behavioural terms, with middle-class coded as 'desirable' and working-class coded as 'undesirable'. One editorial of the WCA's official magazine, *Women's Cricket*, stated:

Cricket for women, I am sure and thank goodness for it, will never rank among the mass movements of the country's history, because the Association has from its earliest days eschewed stunts and undesirable publicity (*Women's Cricket*, September 1954).

The WCA's ethos in the postwar years had its basis in an imperialist conception of cricket as being more than just a sport, but a set of rules and behaviours which needed to be followed both on and off the pitch. The WCA, wrote Pollard in 1947, would continue to be guided by the 'principles and standards' which had led the organisation through the 1930s, whether or not these might 'have made things seem more difficult or slow of development' in the past (*Women's Cricket*, May 1947). Thus, for example, the new WCA handbook contained a section on 'cricket etiquette', and *Women's Cricket* ran article series' on 'Courtesies'. Instructions included:

Play as one of the team.

If the backing-up batsman leaves his crease before you bowl, it is quite legal to run him out, but it is only sporting to warn him the first time.

Avoid sitting in front of the pavilion with your feet up on the rails or on the seat in front, since

it shows expanses of leg – if nothing worse.

Do something about your personal appearance for lunch and tea and put on a blazer or other extra garment (*Women's Cricket*, 14 May 1954 and 28 May 1954).

To WCA members, non-white women would have been unable to meet the criteria of this kind of imperialist class-based sensibility. The only representations of coloured women in writings on women's cricket during this time were those either in the tour diaries of the players, as uncivilised 'Other' / maid and servant - as with Rheinberg's descriptions of the 'darkies' in Curaco, and the 'black Cingalese [sic] servants' in Colombo - or in the WCA's Tour Reports which presented South Asian women as entirely ignorant of the 'spirit and conventions' of cricket. The idea that a non-white 'Other' would be able to participate in cricket was thus rejected in terms of class codes of the game.

This was apparent when the Women's Cricket Association of India toured England for the first time in 1986; a tour which fully reflected the WCA's continued belief in their own racial and cricketing superiority. Tensions between the two nations were rife throughout the tour; during one of the early tour matches against Middlesex, the Indian captain reportedly verbally abused the English umpires, and accused them of cheating. The breaking-point came during the first Test match at Collingham; on the final afternoon of the four-day game, England were chasing 254 in the fourth innings for a victory. The WCA's account is as follows:

A complaint was made [by the Indians] about the size of the Ground. During play numerous requests were made regarding the sight-screen, the reflection of the sun on various fittings around the ground and parked cars. The assistance rendered by the Ground Authorities to alleviate the problems was exemplary.

On the fourth day, the over-rate (7) in the penultimate hour precluded a result being achieved by either side. The acting Captain did not seem to have full authority over her players and the delaying tactics were to be deprecated (WCA, 1987).

According to newspaper accounts, after play was over, the WCA chairman entered their dressing room and told them privately that they would be ostracised in women's cricket unless they changed their ways. Several of the players were reduced to tears and the then Indian captain accused the WCA chairman of 'racial abuse'. A written apology was demanded and eventually granted, after the Indians threatened to return home without fulfilling the rest of their tour commitments. Yet the WCA's account of the tour concluded that:

Throughout the Tour, the tantrums of the team and flagrant gamesmanship signified an obvious lack of understanding of the Laws of Cricket and a complete ignorance of the 'spirit of the game'...Their ignorance of the spirit and conventions of touring abroad, namely to accept that one's hosts are doing their best to ensure that things run smoothly, caused antagonism among the membership (WCA, 1987).

One WCA official told the *Daily Mail* that the heart of the problem was that 'the Indians are a race who will always find something to complain about' (*Daily Mail*, 5 July 1986). The infantilization of the Indian team in these accounts is entirely in keeping with the representation of non-whites as too primitive to comprehend the English sport of cricket, an ideological positioning which was also at work in the men's game (Williams, 2001). The constructedness of white superiority and the 'Othering' of the colonial subject so present in player tour diaries may have been crude but it was also effective: it had worked its way into formal relationships between the English WCA and its sister associations in former colonies, and continued to hold sway even by the 1980s.

## Mythologies of race: Whiteness of Sports History

Vertinsky and Captain have highlighted the ways in which the stereotyping of African-American women in the interwar period allowed them to participate in certain sports (namely athletics), yet denied them entry to others:

Attitudes toward the African American woman's amazonian work capacity, and lack of physical and emotional sensitivity, flowed easily into notions about the natural strength and 'manly' athletic abilities of black women in running, jumping, and throwing activities (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998).

How did these kind of racial stereotypes manifest themselves within cricket? The previous section highlighted the way in which non-white female cricketers were presented as not embracing the ethics or the etiquette of good sportsmen. However, mythologies of race also developed in the postwar period around the bodies and athletic abilities of non-white cricketers.

As noted above, players were no longer keeping tour diaries by the time of the inaugural tour to the Caribbean in 1971. Newspaper coverage surrounding non-white cricketers, however, is revealing, such as the following passage from *The Observer* during the inaugural World Cup in 1973:

The West Indians are an oddly ungraceful lot on the field, prone to fall over when batting and to stumble up to bowl as if they're not sure which foot to put down last. But they do have some big, strong and very handsome cricketers, and nobody was hitting the ball harder at Lord's than the Jamaican batsmen. (*The Observer*, 17 June 1973)

In the cricketing context, describing players as 'ungraceful' is extremely significant: cricket has always been represented as a 'gentleman's game', requiring a refined and graceful approach, rather than sheer power and strength. The discourses surrounding women's cricket had particularly emphasised this aspect, because it legitimised female participation in the sport. This is apparent in the following extract from the foreword to the WCA's history of women's cricket, *Fair Play* (Heyhoe-Flint and Rheinberg, 1976), written by BBC cricket commentator Brian Johnston:

I have always supported the girls and think that they've got quite a lot to teach us men. First-class cricket tends nowadays to be rather dull and scientific or 'professional' as it's so often called. The ladies bring a touch of grace to what is essentially a graceful game. (Heyhoe-Flint and Rheinberg: 9).

Compare this with the description of the West Indian female cricketers above and it becomes apparent that African Caribbean bodies are being presented as comically unsuited to the graceful sport of cricket.

There is also an element of masculinisation in the description of Jamaican cricketers as 'big, strong and handsome'. The idea of non-white bodies as masculine was tied in with their inability to fulfil the correct 'etiquette' required of female cricketers, as outlined above. A good example is the WCA's continued attempts to enforce stringent dress regulations for representative matches. Before 1939, rules had dictated that teams must play in white dresses or divided skirts. While after 1945, the Executive Committee amended the rules to allow for 'shorts', the length – not shorter than four inches from the ground when kneeling – was still carefully controlled, and knee length socks were required wear (WCA Rules, 1945). Even by the 1990s, resistance to changing from skirts to trousers remained strong. A vote at the 1998 AGM of the WCA on the issue resulted in a reassertion of the rule that all players in domestic competitions should continue to wear skirts (*Wicket Women*, Spring 1998). Even when the new Women's Cricket Advisory Group, formed

when the merger with the ECB formally occurred in 1998, ruled in 1999 that trousers could now be worn at all levels of women's cricket in England, a compromise was instituted whereby clubs could vote themselves on whether they wished to introduce trousers, and for a few years matches took place whereby sides would play in skirts or trousers according to preference (*Wicket Women*, summer 1999). It was only as a younger generation of players came through and began to dominate domestic cricket, in the early 2000s, that trousers became the norm. This preoccupation with skirts was founded upon a desire to appear 'feminine', as my interview with a player who joined the WCA in the 1950s, confirmed:

they would never, never have worn trousers then. It was not the done thing...no way would you wear anything that looked male. No, never...because you were trying to keep feminine in a man's game.

Arguably, this image of the refined, decorous and 'feminine' female cricketer dressed in a skirt was deliberately cultivated in opposition to the women in India and West Indies who had always worn trousers to play cricket. Those women who chose to play cricket in trousers were somehow not 'real women', excluded as they were from the construction of the idealised white female cricketing body. An interview with England cricketer Sarah Potter in the *Daily Mail* in 1981, for example, included her description of West Indies Women at the Oval in 1979: 'They wore trousers and, at a distance, to my terrified eyes, they looked like men!' The interview concluded with Potter stating: 'If cricket made me muscular, I'd jump out of the window. I'd sacrifice a lot for the game, but never my femininity.' The wearing of trousers, while represented as an issue of decorum linked to social class, thus became yet another marker of racial 'Otherness'. This was sometimes explicit - the West Indian women who participated in the International XI in the 1973 World Cup were forced to play in white shorts 'in order to conform with the other [white] members of the team' (Heyhoe-Flint and Rheinberg, 1976) - but always served as a continuous marker of difference.

As well textual representations, racial mythologies based on the bodies of non-white women were also present in oral history interviews, such as those I conducted with senior WCA members who worked as PE teachers. The clearest example of this was in my interview with one former England player, who represented England between the late 1960s and the 1980s and taught at girls' grammar schools in London throughout this time:

RN: And were there many black or Asian women playing in this country...when you were playing?

W: Not many. No. Not many. And I still don't think there are many...At club level no, and England level no...even at school not many of the black girls - they'd play more netball and do athletics. It was interesting. Swimming, they were not very good at, the black girls, because their bone density, they tended to sink. But netball and athletics they liked. They didn't like tennis very much. And hockey and cricket were not games that they liked. It was really interesting to see that.

Given that a large number of female cricketers worked as PE teachers (Nicholson, 2015), it is concerning to think that this type of pseudo-scientific biological racism may have permeated large numbers of girls' schools where cricket was played in the latter half of the twentieth century. What does seem apparent is that the 'whiteness' of women's cricket was partly founded upon racialised bodily myths, tied in with class-based notions of correct cricketing etiquette.

Racialised myths were also present in my interview with a former player and Chairman of the WCA:

RN: What about if I was to say that there's this perception of women's cricket as quite white?

C: Yep.

RN: Yeah. You'd agree with that.

C: Yes. But you could say that about, well certainly men's cricket internationally...we had a lovely black girl called Celia who played a long time ago, an absolute hoot, but it takes a big step for them to come and knock on the door and say 'I'd like to play'. A big step...And I think apart from, well, certain inner-city clubs, I would say outside of the big cities cricket is very much a white sport. It's just when you get into London and I suppose Birmingham and Manchester, a lot of the leagues have got a lot of Asians. But yeah, why isn't men's cricket tapping into that talent? It must be huge.

RN: So it's a cricket-wide problem.

C: I think so, yeah.

'C' argued two things during our interview: firstly, that the 'whiteness' of women's cricket was simply something that carried over unproblematically from the men's game; and secondly, that it was felt to be the responsibility of African Caribbean and South Asian girls and women to 'knock on the door' of the sport, rather than the responsibility of women's cricket to alter its image and seek to actively recruit women from different backgrounds. Both these attitudes appear to have been pervasive, and this helps to explain why there was never any policy commitment on behalf of the Women's Cricket Association to attempt to increase participation in women's cricket by ethnic minority groups. Additionally, as Mike Marqusee observed, the English men's cricket authorities generally denied claims that racism existed within the game, creating a 'culture of complacency and denial' which presumably permeated across into the women's game (Marqusee, 1994).

Even more problematic was that this former player, who had a great deal of power in her role as chairman, refused to recognise in our interview that her own deeply-held racial stereotyping may have negatively impacted the ethnic profile of the sport. While she did partially accept the view that white spaces can be exclusionary, her argument that for non-white women participation in club cricket would be 'a big step' appears to be based on the ever-present view of South Asian women as both passive and unable to participate in sport due to cultural constraints (Scraton, 2001). Additionally her description of 'Celia', the only African Caribbean woman she had ever played cricket with, as 'an absolute hoot', fits only too neatly with the long-established Western idea of African Caribbean women as 'inept and comical domestic servant' (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998) - an image that Mae King (1973: 12) describes in the American context as a 'loser image' which has served to justify racial oppression. In this context, 'Celia' is being presented in a way that actually serves to reinforce the myth that non-white women are incapable of participating in cricket: much like the Jamaican cricketers described above, she is an object of comedy, not a serious competitor.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have examined multiple historical sources, including tour diaries, newspaper accounts and oral histories, and drawn upon post-colonial feminist thinking to expose the pervasiveness of imperialist discourses in women's cricket during postwar Britain. In doing so, I have demonstrated the many ways in which 'whiteness' and English middle-class femininity in particular, was predicated on the notion of a backward, inferior Empire. In the absence of detailed

accounts of the experiences of non-white cricketers, this research serves to highlight the types of racial mythologies that polluted cricketing spaces, and gave superior meaning to the idealised 'white' female sporting body.

In some ways, the focus on racialised imagery and mythology in this chapter reveals more about those in charge of women's cricket than it does about the reality of African Caribbean or South Asian experiences of the sport: the 'whiteness' of women's cricket was not a fixed reality, but something constructed by its participants. If non-white women were not participating in cricket - and much more work needs to be done into grassroots women's cricket before this issue can be fully understood - the problem was not with non-white communities but with the insidious forms of racism at work within the sport. Future research might usefully examine the experiences of non-white women themselves, to more fully understand the impact of the racial ideologies outlined above.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this chapter will serve as a call to arms for others working within sports history. Women's sport history, as Osborne and Skillen (2010: 189) seek to remind us, 'remains a peculiarly neglected area of academic research in Britain'; for historians shaping this new endeavour, there is an imperative to look not just at issues of gender but at the ways in which gender intersected with race (and class) to shape the experiences of women who sought to participate in sport across the twentieth century. We can only produce better histories as a result.

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