

## **Maidens and Man-kads: Gendering Cricket Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century**

### **Abstract:**

In CLR James' *Beyond a Boundary* he opined: 'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?' One might add: 'What do they know of cricket who only **men's** cricket know?' This article reviews the current global historical and sociological literature on female participation in cricket, female spectatorship and fandom, and cricketing masculinities, concluding that these subjects are still in their infancy - a fact which should concern all scholars of cricket. I argue that the key problem with current scholarship is that women's and men's cricket are examined as separate entities: fully gendering cricket scholarship requires a more integrated approach. Here I offer 3 strategies to achieve this: a restructuring of our work; a more interdisciplinary approach, with historians and sociologists working closely together; and the need to bring intersectionality into the heart of our work, to ensure the experiences of non-white female cricketers are more fully understood.

### **Introduction**

In early 1971, women's teams from the islands of Trinidad and Jamaica participated in a triangular series against an England team captained by Rachael Heyhoe-Flint. The matches were two-day affairs, with teams competing for a silver salver donated by businessman Jack Hayward. Of the 3 sides, it was Trinidad who triumphed in the final, held at Port of Spain on 25 February 1971, by 62 runs. Women's cricket in the island nation was, it seemed, alive and well.

A mere eight years earlier, in 1963, Trinidadian Marxist CLR James had published his magnum opus, *Beyond a Boundary*. In the book - part memoir, part social commentary - James describes the critical importance of cricket to Trinidadian and West Indian society, unraveling the ways in which cricket had created and continued to contribute to both racial and classist divides. Within the text, his own campaign to elevate Frank Worrell to become the first ever black man to captain the West Indies men's cricket team

serves as a metaphor for the struggle of his home nation to transition from colonialism to independence. 'In the inevitable integration into a national community,' he writes, 'sport, and particularly cricket, has played and will play a great role' (2000: 252).

*Beyond a Boundary* has been described as the most important cricket book ever written: James was recently dubbed 'Cricket's Philosopher King' (Renton 2007). Yet despite the apparent thriving nature of women's cricket on his own home island, James is wholly silent on the difficulties facing his female compatriots. His focus on race (and class) blinds him to the double-bind faced by black women in their attempt to break into a sport constructed as not just white, but also as masculine. Captained by a black man, West Indies men's team would go on to rule the world in the 1980s, a dominance witnessed by James himself. Yet at the time of James's death in 1989, West Indies Women were still 24 years away from reaching their first ever global tournament final - the West Indies Cricket Board failing to provide any significant funding until the introduction of central contracts in 2010. Such were - and are - the inequities between the men's and women's games.

These inequities are reflected in global cricket scholarship. The fact that James ignores issues of gender completely is entirely representative of the broader literature: even today, it is still the norm for major texts on cricket to be published with no reference to women at all. Bateman and Hill's 2011 *Cambridge Companion to Cricket*, for example, does not contain a single chapter on the women's game. I know of only 16 books **ever** published on the subject of women's cricket, while an Amazon search for cricket books published just in the past 12 months returns over 3,000 results. The academy's lack of focus on the women's game is an indictment to all concerned, and should be of genuine concern of all those writing about and / or researching the subject of cricket. To James's famous battle cry - 'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?' - one might add: 'What do they know of cricket who only **men's** cricket know?'

Given the above, this article aims to do two things. Firstly, I will review the fledgling global historical and sociological literature on female participation in cricket, as well as female spectatorship and fandom. The emerging literature on cricketing masculinities will also be examined, given its central importance to understanding women's exclusion from cricket and cricket scholarship. It will be argued that the key

problem with current scholarship is that women's and men's cricket are examined as separate entities, with the women's game relegated to separate chapters or books. Fully gendering cricket scholarship will require a more integrated approach: the second half of this article is devoted to offering three suggestions as to how scholars of cricket can work towards this more integrated approach. Throughout, practical examples from my own research will be offered to illustrate both the current problems with cricket scholarship and possible solutions.

### **Existing Scholarship: Ladies vs Lords**

The literature on cricket is so diverse and extensive that it seems remarkable that so little has been written on female participation in the sport. Nonetheless, it remains the case that cricket scholars - both historians and sociologists - have in their own way done much to obfuscate women's central role in the sport's development. Cricket's most famous works of history - Birley's *A Social History of English Cricket*, Guha's *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, as well as the aforementioned *Beyond a Boundary* - simply take for granted that cricket was a masculine pastime. This overlooks numerous historical accounts of women's participation, from fourteenth-century nuns playing a prototype bat-and-ball game, to the pioneering efforts of Christina Willes - rumoured to have developed round-arm bowling in the early nineteenth century - to the formation of the first governing body for women's cricket in the world in 1926, the English Women's Cricket Association (Joy 1950; Heyhoe Flint & Rheinberg 1976; Morgan 2009).

Of course history itself has traditionally been a masculine enterprise, written by men, about men.

Nonetheless even the onset of women's history in the 1970s, which sought to recover the 'hidden histories' of women and restore their importance to history (Rowbotham 1973), has done little to dislodge the obsession of cricket writers with the men's game at the expense of female cricketers. Over the past 40 years the global historiography on women's cricket has barely developed. Richard Cashman and Amanda Weaver were the first to attempt a national history of the sport in their history of Australian women's cricket, *Wicket Women*, published in 1991; no one else would follow suit until the input of journalists Karunya Keshav and Sidhanta Patnaik in 2018 with their study of the Indian context, *The Fire Burns Blue*. It took until 2019 for the first comprehensive overview of female participation in England to be published (Nicholson 2019).

Though there has been some fledgling work done on the development of women's cricket in the Caribbean (Beckles 1995), South Africa (Odendaal 2011; Nicholson 2018), and New Zealand (Ryan 2016), this has tended to be focused on specific tours or time periods, and has therefore been very limited in scope. The same goes for the majority of studies of the English context, which are overwhelmingly focused on the period before 1939 (Threlfall-Sykes 2015; McKie 2016). We still know surprisingly little about the history of female participation in a number of nations where cricket can be considered the national sport, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Stephen Wagg's recent (2018) global history of cricket contains a chapter dedicated to the women's game, but it is overwhelmingly focused on events in England and Australia. In any case Wagg's account is essentially a synthesis one, and the chapter contains very little primary research. Similarly, Isabelle Duncan's *Skirting the Boundary* (2013), which posits itself as 'a history of women's cricket' across the world, appears to be produced entirely from secondary material and newspaper accounts, and is primarily descriptive, with much of the text taken up by accounts of matches and profiles of current players.

As female participation in cricket has grown and become more visible in recent years, so the sociological body of work on the sport has begun to develop. However, as with the historical literature, this has largely come in the form of individual articles which aim to highlight the contemporary inequalities shaping the lives of female cricketers. For example, studies have shown that since the amalgamation of separatist men's and women's cricketing organisations to form new integrated governing bodies, which occurred across the 1990s and 2000s culminating in the ICC's formal takeover of women's cricket in 2005, women have lost much of the voice which they previously had in the governance of the sport, with the ICC (as of March 2020) having just one female director on its main Board (Stronach and Adair 2009; Velija et al 2014). Men retain hegemonic control of both the structures and the culture of cricket, with a 'normative priority' placed on the men's game, while women's teams struggle to access resources (Lusted and Fielding-Lloyd 2017: 62). Women's cricket still receives relatively little media coverage, even from national media outlets at a time of World Cup success (Biscomb and Griggs 2012). Additionally, sociologists have demonstrated that even with the recent 'normalisation' of cricket for girls in countries like Australia, where women and girls now make up one-third of all participants in the sport, the ideological 'baggage' surrounding women's cricket has not

disappeared: cricket remains an arena for the performativity of gender, with girls subject to ‘cultural scripts’ that render them ‘different’ to their male teammates (Mooney et al 2019).

English sociologist Philippa Velija is one scholar who has developed a more extensive theoretical conception of women’s cricket, building on an ethnographic study of English women cricketers originally conducted in the mid-2000s. Velija utilizes a figurational, Eliasian analysis, arguing that contemporary female cricketers ‘remain “outsiders” in the cricket figuration. That is to say, through a variety of processes, they remain on the margins of male cricket’ (2007: 213). For example, women's cricket clubs still suffer from poor facilities, a lack of coaching, and a sense of long-term instability; while female cricketers continue to experience negative reactions to their involvement in the sport, and as a consequence their identities as female athletes remain insecure (Velija and Malcolm 2009). Velija has recently (2015) broadened her analysis to incorporate the global game, concluding that the inequalities she found in England a decade ago are still entrenched across the world. Nonetheless, women’s cricket remains - especially in comparison to football - a severely understudied sport.

If the literature on female participation in cricket has been lacking, the literature on female spectatorship and fandom has been even more so. This reflects a broader neglect: Stacey Pope has recently written that ‘the experiences of female sports fans have been largely marginalised in academic research to date’ (2017: 2). In relation to cricket, scholars have recognized that ‘true’ fandom has been constructed as male throughout the sport’s history; discourses surrounding female spectators centre on their ignorance, hyper-emotionality, and inability to grasp the finer points of the sport (Banjeree 2004; Naha 2012). Pope notes that sports fandom has since the 1970s become increasingly ‘feminized’, with women now making up ‘an integral component of the sports crowd’ (2017: 9); yet Sudeshna Banjeree and Kim Toffoletti dispute the idea that women are now unproblematically accepted into the cricket fan community. Toffoletti uses a transnational feminist cultural studies paradigm to analyse a marketing campaign for the 2015 men’s Cricket World Cup, in which the Australian fan is depicted as a ‘typical Aussie bloke’, while female fans from South Africa, Scotland, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies are portrayed as the multicultural ‘other’: the campaign, she concludes, does nothing to overturn established notions of the typical Australian cricket fan as both male and

white. To these critiques I would add the notion that the 'ideal' cricket fan is not just male but is exclusively interested in men's cricket. There is a total lack of work on fandom in women's cricket.

Masculinity, then, is a recurring theme in much of the cricketing literature; this makes sense given sport's long-established status as a 'male preserve' (Dunning 1986) and as an institution where hegemonic masculinity was cultivated (Connell 1987). Surprisingly, though, it is only relatively recently that the gendered nature of cricket, and its relationship to national(ist) conceptions of manhood, has been explicitly described and analysed by scholars. Much of the focus has been on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period when cricket became intricately linked to the ideology of muscular Christianity and viewed by British imperialists as a means of cementing their global dominance (Mangan 1981; Allen 2011), while also - latterly - helping to challenge that dominance. Geoffrey Levett's recent (2018) analysis of newspaper coverage of colonial cricket tours of England in the Edwardian period demonstrates how an increase in sporting contact between the colonies and the metropole, and the success of a number of visiting teams, helped generate wide-ranging debates on imperial manhood, highlighting the key relationship which had developed between sport, manliness and imperial identity; while Dominic Malcolm's account of the development of cricket since 1800 suggests that 'the perception of cricket as a manly game [was] fundamental to sustaining the association between cricket and the equally gendered concept of Englishness' (2013: 158). Patrick McDevitt has shown how, by the 1930s, cricketers in the colonies and dominions of the British Empire had begun contesting imperial masculinities: debates about 'bodyline' tactics among the Australians and West Indians teams were about more than just cricket - 'defending their definition of cricket became equated with defending their very manhood' (2004: 74). However, though work is being done by sociologists on the ways in which masculinity has played out in specific contemporary contexts such as Bangladesh (Hossain 2019) and Australia (Wade 2019), we still lack an understanding of the ways in which cricket contributed to the transition from colonial masculinity to postcolonial masculinity in former British colonies.

Additionally, the physicality of cricket has received much less attention from scholars than the ideological baggage surrounding it: the emphasis has generally been on how ideas of 'fair play' became integral to hegemonic colonial masculinity. Much work remains to be done about the ways in which cricketers

experienced or cultivated their masculinity in *corporeal* ways, while participating in a sport which is essentially graceful, and which lacks the physical aggression of rugby or soccer. My own work has begun to apply corporeal feminist critiques to cricket, arguing that the aggression of female cricketers was a bodily, physical resistance to existing gender ideologies (Nicholson 2019: 228); Bateman's suggestion that the 'bodily practice of cricket' formed an integral part of 'national masculinity in performance' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (2010: 78) demonstrates that this could be a fruitful line of analysis for those examining men's cricket too.

Overall, the above provides what is hopefully a useful summary of current scholarship surrounding women and gender in cricket. It is a scholarship which has two key shortcomings. The first is the paltry amount of literature on this area, which is dwarfed by the sheer volume of books and articles written entirely about the men's game. However, there is a more significant issue, concerning the very structure of cricket scholarship: women's and men's cricket are always (without fail) examined as totally separate entities, with the women's game relegated to separate chapters or books.

A good example of this is the recent work of Stephen Wagg. Wagg has been widely praised by reviewers for his decision to include a chapter on women's cricket in his recent history of cricket since 1945 (see for example Nicholson 2020). However, not only does this mean that of a 300-page book, just 26 pages are devoted to women's cricket, it also means that outside of this chapter Wagg ignores the impact of women and ideologies of gender on wider developments within cricket as a whole. Wagg is following in a rich tradition of similar works (Davies and Light 2012; Williams 1999) which, while giving a nod to the existence of the women's game, fail to allow this to fully permeate their work. One could equally argue that my own work on women's cricket history falls into a similar trap in its tendency to overlook key developments in the men's game.

Crucially, this means that *we as cricket writers are 'othering' female cricketers with our very praxis.*

Additionally, by structuring our work in this way, we overlook several important questions:

- What was the relationship between women's and men's cricket?

- How did and do female fans / players interact with male fans / players, and what can this tell us about the meanings of cricket as a sport for fans and participants, both male and female?
- How did and does the construction of cricket as masculine affect the lives of women attempting to play the sport? To what extent was / is it possible for female cricketers to resist these gendered constructions?

As contemporary gender theorists argue, masculinity and femininity are relational constructs and need to be considered in tandem (Kimmel 2000). In short, we cannot understand hegemonic masculinity, and thus hierarchies of gender, without an understanding of women / femininities and where they sit within that hierarchy: masculinities are always constructed in opposition to femininities. This is no different when writing about cricket. In research terms, this means that we cannot divorce research into men's cricket from research into women's cricket; we cannot write effectively about the construction of cricket as an imperial, white, masculine sport without also writing about the groups who were excluded from these definitions. Velija describes this, in figurational terms, as the 'asymmetrical power relations that continue to impact on the perceptions of female cricketers (the outsiders) in comparison to male cricketers (the established)' (2015: 8); she argues that we cannot understand the marginalisation of women's cricket without reference to the 'established group', i.e. men's cricket. Fully gendering cricket scholarship, following the example of Velija, will therefore require a radically different approach: our aim should be a cricket literature which enables us to fully understand the history, development and contemporary relationships between the men's and women's games. The remainder of this article offers some important recommendations as to how this could be achieved.

### **Gendering the Cricket Literature: 3 Approaches**

Women's historians have long warned of the dangers of seeing women's history as a mere 'add-on' to the men's history mainstream. 'The best women's history... does not study women's lives in isolation; it endeavours to relate those lives to other historical themes', writes Louise Tilly. 'Women's historians need

to... show how their results contribute to the explanation of other, more general problems' (1989: 447). As outlined above, it is profoundly unhelpful to divide writing on cricket into two distinct categories - a women's cricket literature and a men's cricket literature. We need to place the role of women, and relatedly discourses about gender, front and centre in order to reevaluate our entire perspectives on cricket. Three possible strategies towards achieving this are outlined below.

### *1) Restructuring our work*

Many of those who consider themselves to be cricket writers, or academics who specialise in the history or sociology of cricket, are actually **men's cricket** writers. By that I mean a) that the act of participating in cricket is assumed by them to be a masculine endeavour, and b) that this assumption runs throughout the author's entire body of work, usually implicitly.<sup>1</sup> Men's cricket is thus the 'default setting', in much the same way as cricket's major global tournaments are known as the World Cup and the Women's World Cup (despite the fact that ours came first!) I have always, therefore, been careful in my popular cricket writing to refer to myself as a 'women's cricket writer', to avoid falling into the same trap.

I have come to see, however, that within academic scholarship this distinction is thoroughly unhelpful, and one that we need to escape from if we are to advance the field beyond its current state. None of us should be confining ourselves to just considering 'men's cricket' or 'women's cricket'. This is made more complex by the fact that sport has itself been constructed in a binary way: cricket remains divided 'from playground to Test arena' along gendered lines. Yet as Anderson (2009) argues, this institutional codification of gender difference is a means whereby sport's gatekeepers maintain existing power structures: surely our work should be a challenge to power structures, not a reinforcement of them? To continue in the same vein as we have been is simply replicating the socially constructed category of gender in our own work.

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<sup>1</sup> An example would be Dominic Malcolm, who argues that cricket is a 'male preserve' and that it is therefore unnecessary to consider female sporting experiences when writing about the sport's development (2013: 11).

Deconstructing binaries through the restructuring of our work would have an important impact on the state of cricket scholarship. In practical terms, it would mean that women's cricket would no longer sit at the edges in separate books or chapters, but would be incorporated fully into texts, with - say - the Women's Cricket Association given equal prominence to the Marylebone Cricket Club in any work on English cricket.

Substantially more would therefore be written about women's cricket as a sport. It would also be important methodologically. Here are some examples of what it might look like in practice:

- In her 2015 work *Women's Cricket and Global Processes*, Velija considers the development of women's cricket in relation to the men's game, focusing particularly on the shift in power between the two groups over time. This is useful but could be taken a step further: her work is still focused on understanding women's cricket in the context of the men's game, and not vice versa. I would suggest that Velija's figurational, Eliasian approach to looking at women's cricket would be greatly enhanced by a concomitant ethnographic study of those running or playing the men's game *in relation to women's cricket*. How do they experience their identities differently to their female counterparts? What does their habitus look like? Does this differ amongst those who are coaching or playing alongside women? How do positive or negative interactions with female cricketers affect the habitus of male players?
- In his work on the construction of sport as masculine, McDevitt hints at the fact that male subaltern freedom through sport 'came at a cost to the women of Britain and the Empire, whose exclusion from yet another realm of public contestation and nation building could only have had detrimental effects on women's drive for equality in society' (2004: 140). Yet this is a mere throwaway line in his work. The approach I am positing would see him extend his analysis to look in more detail at the lives of the women at this time who were pushing against the ideologically-imposed boundaries of imperial sport. How did they experience these discourses in their day to day lives, and how was it that some women were able to push back against these boundaries, while others could not?
- My own work on the history of women's cricket within England features oral history interviews but only with women, not men. This could only take my analysis so far. I was missing a central part of the story -

namely how the WCA interacted with the governing bodies of men's cricket. How, for example, would ECB Chief Executive Tim Lamb's perspective on the merger with the English WCA have differed from the story told by female cricketers? I could have learned so much more about power structures in cricket this way.

- One of the few scholars to have already adopted this gendered approach is Janelle Joseph. In an article from 2015 which explores gender performances in the context of cricket in the Caribbean diaspora in Canada, Joseph utilizes interviews and ethnographic observations to construct a compelling portrait of recreational cricket in Canada, whereby girlfriends and wives of players score, cheer and prepare meals but never play the sport, thus bolstering the masculinity of their menfolk on the field. Joseph's key point is that in this context, 'men's and women's gender performances... are interdependent and relational' (2015: 169): she could not describe one without also describing the other. This gets to the essence of what I am proposing.

Joan Scott writes that feminist researchers must challenge 'the accuracy of fixed binary distinctions between men and women in the past and present, and expose the very political nature of a history written in those terms' (1988: 26). If our future scholarship on cricket is to increase understanding of and help to overcome the oppression faced by cricketing women - and I believe this should be our aim as researchers - then it needs to help break down binaries, not reinforce them.

## **2) *Collective endeavour***

One aspect of research on cricket which I found intensely frustrating when writing my PhD thesis was the lack of interdisciplinarity in the field. Histories of contemporary British society fail to address sport, while feminist sociologists recognize the central importance of leisure space / time to women (Wimbush 1986; Deem 1986; Green, Hebron and Woodward 1987) but are totally ahistorical, ignoring the fact that contemporary inequalities are always rooted in in the past. My own work has thus attempted - not always successfully - to synthesise two very different literatures.

The critique that UK historians and sociologists of sport have failed to work together is not a novel one. In an article published in 2004, historian Martin Johnes writes that British sport history 'has not engaged with sport studies in the way that it has in Australia or the US... there would be benefits for both sport history and sport studies in a greater engagement between the two areas' (2004: 144, 157-8). The ferocious debate in the *Sport in History* journal which raged from 2005 to 2008 between historians Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew on the one side, and sociologists Graham Curry, Eric Dunning, Kenneth Sheard and Dominic Malcolm on the other, was perhaps not quite the 'engagement' which Johnes had in mind: Collins and Vamplew accused their sociological counterparts of failing to ground their work in 'historically reliable evidence' (Collins 2005: 299), and of having 'false notions of how to do history' (Vamplew 2007: 169), while the figurationists responded by implying that Collins had not even read the work of Norbert Elias, let alone understood it (Curry et al 2006: 120). This unhelpful interaction aside, it appears that little has progressed in the 15 years since Johnes penned his call to action. As a crude measure, the British Society of Sports History includes very few sociologists amongst its ranks.

The benefits of working more closely together would be the same as those outlined by Johnes more than a decade ago. Cricket historians have been slow to adopt the theoretical approaches utilized by sociologists, which could help to provide 'a framework or hypothesis against which ideas and data can be tested and probed' (Johnes 2004: 151). For example, a poststructuralist feminist reading of cricket history could help to challenge the dichotomy between femininity and masculinity which this article critiques. One former England player told me in an oral history interview that the aspect of cricket which most appealed to her was that: 'as a fast bowler the fact that I knew I could frighten people' (Nicholson 2019: 229). This is at odds with societal ideas about women as 'naturally' non-aggressive, and suggests to me that far from notions of 'cricket as masculine' being fixed, there was room for women to challenge existing discourses about the sport, and to carve out a new space for 'cricketing femininities' through their sporting lives.

Concomitantly, sociologists who work on cricket would benefit from disregarding their 'deeply rooted tendency towards today-centred thinking' (Maguire 1995: 8) by giving more space in their work to a consideration of historical context. Methodologically, sociologists might also usefully explore primary source material themselves, rather than relying on secondary accounts by historians. This was a bone of

contention in the Vamplew-Malcolm debate referenced above, which centred around whether cricket can be considered to have undergone an Eliasian 'civilising process', with Vamplew accusing Malcolm of an over-reliance on secondary sources (2007: 163). Malcolm rejects this view, arguing that cross-referencing between a variety of secondary sources is a reasonable way for sociologists to corroborate their data (2008: 269-70). However, it seems to me that in the context of women's cricket, Malcolm's argument has limited applicability. There is so little secondary literature which deals with the women's game that any informed analysis of its development must of necessity draw on primary source material.

A richer understanding of the gendered aspects of cricket therefore requires historians and sociologists to work together in dialogue. By that I do not mean continuing to communicate through exchanges in academic journals in which we question each other's academic integrity; that kind of performative oneupmanship strikes me as profoundly unhelpful. But why are we not attending each other's conferences, and / or joining each other's academic societies, and thus generating opportunities to communicate with each other? It is also perhaps surprising that, since the Cricket Research Centre at the University of Huddersfield fizzled out a decade ago, we have not seen more conferences or seminars which centre around cricket research. If the outcome of this special issue were to be a new Cricket Research Network which works across disciplinary boundaries, that would certainly be a positive step forward.

I would suggest as well that, from a historian's perspective, we might advance scholarship further if we were to point sociologists towards relevant primary material, rather than berating them for not consulting such sources. Again, this is particularly crucial for women's cricket, where primary sources have not always been readily available: much of my PhD research required me to 'play detective', digging out documents which were being kept privately by female cricketers in attics, spare rooms, garages, and even a cow shed. Without access to this material, it is inevitable that those scholars who have attempted to discuss the history of the women's game have made errors. Velija, for example, includes two chapters on the historical development of women's cricket in her recent work, but grounds her analysis in secondary accounts. Arguably, her suggestion that the International Women's Cricket Council (IWCC) wanted to 'mimic the [men's] game... in an attempt to be a legitimate group' (2015: 93) would need revisiting in the light of an examination of the (privately held) IWCC minutes, which consistently reveal the Council's desire to demonstrate 'that women

are playing cricket for themselves - not trying to be like the men' (IWCC Forum, 30 July 1993). Similarly I might dispute her argument that the WCA's desire to play cricket in skirts was evidence of 'internalising the view that women's cricket was secondary to men's cricket' (2015: 105). One could equally argue - and indeed I was told pointedly in several oral history interviews - that the reason for women playing cricket in skirts was as a deliberate marker of difference with men's cricket, to avoid comparison between the two. None of these points mean that Velija's scholarship is somehow invalid, or that it is 'wrong' to apply an insider-outsider figurational analysis to the relationship between women's and men's cricket. But it does mean that access to the historical material which I have uncovered could help enhance and refine her analysis. Similarly I am sure she would argue that my work has not paid adequate attention to power relations within cricket, which has been her predominant focus. The point is that collaboration and communication would advance **both** our scholarship - and this could be facilitated by encountering each other more frequently at interdisciplinary conferences and seminars.

Johnes concludes:

The division between studying the past and the present is... misleading. Where does one end and the other start? Thus the dichotomy between sociology and history is artificial and rather arbitrary... If sport history and sport studies take more account of the perspectives of the other, the questions they ask should become more searching and the answers they give more considered (2004: 158).

Particularly when examining neglected areas such as women's cricket, its relationship with men's cricket, and the gendered nature of cricket as a whole, Johnes's call to unity seems as relevant now as it was in 2004. All scholars of cricket would benefit from working more closely together in a spirit of constructive unity.

### ***3) The importance of intersectionality***

Dividing women's cricket into a separate section of the literature also ignores the fact that gender is often not the primary factor at play in the lives of female cricketers. The English Women's Cricket Association, for

example, was founded by elitist, upper middle-class women whose ideas about the 'correct' way to play cricket often alienated working-class women (Threlfall-Sykes 2015: 166). More pertinently, as I have argued elsewhere, within English women's cricket pervasive racist discourses were at work throughout the twentieth century, polluting cricketing spaces and giving superior meaning to the idealized 'white' female sporting body (Nicholson 2017). Many non-white women were prevented from accessing official WCA-run clubs, while also being excluded from the separatist Asian and Black men's clubs which have been lauded by sports sociologists as an arena of cultural resistance (Carrington 2002). Thus gender, class and race intersected in complex ways to curtail female participation in cricket.

Discussions of race and imperialism are ever-present in the cricketing literature (Sissons and Stoddart 1984; Sandiford and Stoddart 1998; Mangan 1981). 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. During the twentieth century, men's cricket and imperialism 'became mutually supporting ideologies', helping to promote a 'white' British national identity (Williams 2001). Yet 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' (2001: 1) - 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. The extent to which the literature on cricket fails to interrogate the interactions of racist-imperialist and gendered ideologies is striking.

There have been several useful discussions of sport and intersectionality since Scraton first called for sport to be 'acknowledged as a key institutional site' (2001: 171) in the relational processes of racialization and engendering (Collins and Bilge 2016: 4-12; Carter-Francique 2017). Most recently Rankin-Wright et al, in a piece on the underrepresentation of BAME women coaches in British sport, conclude that these coaches have 'complex but under-theorized identities... "race" and gender... must be understood as interlocking systems of domination and power' (2020: 1122-25). Similarly, we need to ask: What does it mean to be a black or Aboriginal woman playing cricket in an apparently post-colonial era, and how can we foreground

that experience as distinct from a white woman's or a black man's experience? These are difficult questions to answer but ones which the cricket literature has not yet even attempted to grapple with.

We are back where we started: with the critique of CLR James offered at the outset of this article, in which I noted that in his analysis of West Indian cricket he fails to address the exclusion of West Indian women from the sport, focusing on racial identities at the expense of gendered ones. What would he make of the recent description by Ebony Rainford-Brent, the first ever black woman to play for England, of being dogged throughout her career by not just racial slurs but by 'the trope of the "angry black woman"' (*The Telegraph*, 26 August 2019)? Would he recognize the impact of the different intersecting identities of being black, female and a cricketer on her life experiences?

We need to do better than James. We need to bring intersectionality into the heart of our research, ensuring that discussions of race and imperialism also feature issues of gender. If we do not, we are missing a key part of the story.

## **Conclusion**

Cricket is a sport that has proven ripe for socio-cultural analysis, loaded with the baggage of its historical associations with racism, imperialism, social class and spurious ideals of 'fair play'. Scholars of cricket have hardly been unquestioning evangelists for their subject; nonetheless, partly because they have largely been male, they have often overlooked the fact that cricket as a sport is inherently gendered. Kimmel writes that masculinity is 'invisible':

When you are 'in power', you needn't draw attention to yourself as a specific entity, but, rather, you can pretend to be the generic, the universal, the generalizable.... privilege is invisible (2000: 7).

This is equally true of the literature on cricket. There has been a powerful assumption in the academy - propagated by CLR James among so many others - that 'cricket' equals 'men's cricket', and that it is possible to write a history or a sociology of cricket without women being present. This is, of course, nonsense.

In this article, I have tried to do two things. Firstly, I have drawn attention to the huge gaps in the extant literature on the subjects of female participation, female / women's cricket fandom, and cricketing 'femininities' and 'masculinities'. Secondly, I have suggested three ways in which we might seek to incorporate women and ideas of gender into cricket scholarship going forward. In summary, I have argued that writing about cricket needs to be more unified, more collective, and more intersectional.

The approach that I have outlined here is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is undoubtedly the case that the overwhelming focus of scholars on men's cricket has served to render women's role in the development of cricket invisible, and to perpetuate the myth that cricket has been a masculine undertaking. Current administrators have bought into this myth: ECB Director of Women's Cricket Clare Connor, on the eve of the Women's World Cup final at Lord's in 2017, told one journalist that cricket had until 1998 been 'a sport played by men and run by men' (*New York Times*, 21 July 2017). Reshaping these narratives is imperative if we want the contemporary game to become a more inclusive space for girls and women, helping them understand that cricket has never been an exclusively male space. A second, related point is that a focus on intersectionality can help to promote diversity by exposing some of the very specific ways in which racism operates within women's cricket, as distinct from the men's game - an issue that has gained particular potency in the light of the recent Black Lives Matter protests. As Rainford-Brent has recently stated, the lack of diversity in women's cricket has largely 'gone under the radar' in the focus on men's players and pathways (*The Cricket Monthly*, 28 June 2020). This is despite the fact that the contemporary women's game in England (certainly at the elite level) remains almost entirely white. Understanding the complex sociological and historical factors at play here is crucial in order to build a more diverse sport going forwards.

Finally, it seems to me that too often, academic scholarship on cricket continues to rehash what I might term (to coin a phrase) 'male, pale and stale' debates, centred around, for example, the class conflict between

(male) amateurs and professionals, the reasons why (men's) cricket did not take root in particular nations, and / or the extent to which particular (male) cricketers can be seen to 'represent' their nation. That is not to say that these are not worthy areas of study, but that by failing to consider any of these areas through the lens of gender, we are closing off much more interesting and useful avenues of research. Too often I have asked cricket scholars how women fit into whatever subject they are currently investigating, only to have my question dismissed as irrelevant. The more integrated approach that I am proposing has the potential to generate genuinely **new** knowledge about not just women's cricket, but about the relationship between the women's and men's games, inclusion and exclusion within cricket, cricketing masculinities, the gendered nature of imperialism in the context of cricket, the ways in which male hegemony was exercised through sports like cricket, and the broader importance of cricket (and sport more generally) to women's lives as a way of challenging discourses surrounding female frailty. It seems clear that our understanding of cricket would advance further if we were to collectively acknowledge that our scholarship has perpetuated an inaccurate version of cricket's history, and vow to do better in future. Indeed it is hoped that this article will serve as a 'call to arms' for scholars of cricket, as we work together to ensure that our work better reflects the gendered nature of our sport.

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