

FROM BRICK LANE TO WHITE HART
LANE? FOOTBALL, ANTI-RACISM AND
YOUNG, MALE, BRITISH ASIAN
IDENTITIES

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Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis investigates why British Asians are under-represented as professional footballers proportionally to their numbers in the overall population. Fundamentally, it is both an account of how young, male, British Asian footballers interpret and explain their under-representation in the professional game, and a critical analysis of the strategies and policies employed by the anti-racist football movement to overcome this phenomenon. The central problematic is that anti-racist football organisations are often out of touch with contemporary manifestations of “Asianness” and so the ideologies that underpin their schemes and initiatives are often in direct conflict with the attitudes and aspirations of young, male, British Asian footballers themselves. Using ethnographic research methods – namely semi-structured interviews with large numbers of professional and amateur British Asian footballers, professional football coaches and members of anti-racist football organisations, together with observations of matches, training sessions and social occasions involving British Asian players – this thesis seeks to overcome the previous “silencing” of British Asian footballers. It places *their* oral testimonies at the centre of the analysis of exclusion. Theoretically, this thesis examines how football interacts with issues of ‘race’, ethnicity, nation, class, locality, family, generation, religion, style and consumption to construct new articulations and experiences of “Asianness”. Consequently, the analysis calls for sociological frameworks that no longer essentialise and dichotomise “South Asian” and “British” cultures but that, instead, appreciate how, in the twenty-first century, these elements are actively fused to create specifically *British* Asian identities and lifestyles. In this regard, this thesis provides a sensitive and timely contribution to the fields of ethnic and racial studies, football and young people.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Published work arising from this thesis	ii
Abbreviations	iii
Chapter 1: <i>Both white and Indian but Geordie through and through: An introduction to football, anti-racism and young, male, British Asian identities</i>	1
Chapter 2: <i>Tales of the Unexpected: Personal reflections on the research process</i>	13
Chapter 3: <i>Did you hear the one about the Asian footballer? Popular explanations of the under-representation of British Asians in professional football, and the actual significance of football in British Asian communities</i>	45
Chapter 4: <i>Playing out of position? 'Race', nation, diaspora and the recruitment of British Asians as professional footballers</i>	80
Chapter 5: <i>One of the lads? Dual ethnicity and assimilated ethnicities in the careers of British Asian professional footballers</i>	124
Chapter 6: <i>The New Visitation: Discourses of 'race' in contemporary English football</i>	153
Chapter 7: <i>Paint it Black? Identity, difference and conflict in British Asian communities: the implications for football and anti-racism</i>	194
Chapter 8: <i>Keeping the customers satisfied? A critique of British Asian football schemes</i>	231
Chapter 9: <i>Full-time: Concluding thoughts on football, anti-racism and young, male, British Asian identities</i>	279
References	291

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Published work arising from this thesis

Some of the material from this thesis is published in Burdsey (forthcoming, 2004a: forthcoming, 2004b).

Abbreviations

AGARI	Advisory Group Against Racism and Intimidation
AIFF	All India Football Federation
ANL	Anti-Nazi League
APSA (London)	All People Sports Association
ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
BAFF	Buendnis Aktiver Fussballfans
BIFA	Blades Independent Fans Association
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNP	British National Party
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CALM	Campaign Against Living Miserably
CARD	Campaign Against Racial Discrimination
CARE	Charlton Athletic Race Equality
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ECB	England and Wales Cricket Board
FA	Football Association
FAR	Foxes Against Racism
FARE	Football Against Racism in Europe
FFEVTS	Footballers' Further Education and Vocational Training Society
FITC	Football In The Community
FSA	Football Supporters' Association
FURD	Football Unites Racism Divides
GLC	Greater London Council
ICC	International Cricket Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFG	Indian Footballers in Germany
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
INUSA	Independent Newcastle United Supporters' Association
ISA	Independent Supporters' Association

KFF	Khalsa Football Federation
LAFa	Leeds Anti-Fascist Action
LASI	Leicester Asian Sports Initiative
LFUARF	Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism
LKROF	Let's Kick Racism Out of Football
LTUC	Leeds Trade Union Council
MBPA	Metropolitan Black Police Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People
NF	National Front
NFIU	National Football Intelligence Unit
NHS	National Health Service
NUAR	Newcastle United Against Racism
NUM	National Union of Miners
OAN	Orient Against the Nazis
PFA	Professional Footballers' Association
RAFFI	Respect All Fans Football Initiative
RAR	Rock Against Racism
SAN	Spurs Against the Nazis
SCARF	Supporters Campaign Against Racism and Fascism
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SPACE	Sports Participation and Cultural Equality
SRTRC	Show Racism the Red Card
SWP	Socialist Workers' Party
TGWU	Trade and General Workers' Union
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)
WDL	White Defence League
YARE	Youth Against Racism in Europe

Chapter 1

Both white and Indian but Geordie through and through: An introduction to football, anti-racism and young, male, British Asian identities

Introduction

On Saturday 5th April 2003, a teenage¹ professional footballer scored four goals for Watford in a Nationwide Division One match against Burnley – a remarkable achievement with far-reaching social significance. This is because the player in question, Michael Chopra, is a rare commodity in English professional football: his mother, Sharon, is white and his father, Minty, is Indian. He is thus one of a select band of players with some degree of South Asian heritage to have played English professional football. In this regard, he is part of a breakthrough – albeit a very small one – that British Asians² are currently making into the professional game. During the 2003-04 season, five British Asians were in the first-team squads of professional clubs. In addition to Chopra (who returned to his Premier League club, Newcastle United, shortly afterwards, having been loaned³ to Watford to gain first-team experience⁴), there was Adnan Ahmed (Huddersfield Town), Zesh Rehman (Fulham but loaned to Brighton and Hove Albion), Harpal Singh (Leeds United but loaned to Bury) and another Anglo-Asian, Anwar Uddin (Bristol Rovers but loaned to Hereford United in the Nationwide Conference).

However, Michael Chopra and his British Asian professional contemporaries also reflect a more general, yet little-recognised, trend – a rapid growth in the number of British Asians playing football at *amateur* level. Playing football has become an extremely popular pastime among young, British Asian men and the players progressing to the professional game represent a tiny proportion of the large overall population of British Asian footballers. In spite of this state of affairs, there is a lack of popular awareness about British Asian football culture and those players that reach professional level are an anachorism to many people: they are making names for themselves in a sport that is widely believed to be generally unpopular in British Asian communities. They are thus seen as exceptions to the general rule of non-participation and lack of ability in football among the British Asian population as a whole.

The reality, however, is that Ahmed, Chopra, Rehman, Singh and Uddin are representative of wider contemporary developments in the identity politics of young, British Asian footballers playing at all levels of the game. Taking Chopra as an example, as a youngster he was as likely to be watching his beloved Newcastle United at St. James' Park, accompanied by his Indian father, as attending the local Hindu temple. He has also openly expressed his affiliation to the England national team and he has represented the under-21 side since 2002. Chopra is clearly proud of, and comfortable with, his dual ethnicity, and he refuses to prioritise either his "Indianness" or the white components of his heritage. In fact, the Newcastle-born player has often remarked that it is his local "Geordie" background that is the most significant aspect of his identity. In this regard, he has publicly stated that he does not want to be seen purely as a role model for British Asian communities – for this would involve a denial of another side of his heritage – and that he will not allow himself to be used by individuals and agencies who are pursuing this agenda. Furthermore, he has attitudes, preferences, aspirations and lifestyle choices linked, in particular, to the commercialisation of youth culture – to sport, fashion, music and other leisure pursuits – which he shares with white and British Asian youths alike. In other words, his identity is multiple and complex, resulting in the construction of a specifically *British Asian* male identity, rather than an insular "Asian" or "British" one.

For many other British Asian young men, as well as for Chopra and his fellow professionals, the culture of football provides an important context for the construction of specifically *British Asian* identities. Similar multiple identifications as articulated by Chopra can also be found among young, working-class, British Asian *amateur* footballers. Importantly, this applies not simply to those of dual ethnicity but also to those with two British Asian parents. In other words, the complexities of Chopra's specific sense of British "Asianness" are common among young, British Asian men throughout inner-city Britain from, for example, Glodwick (Oldham), Highfields (Leicester), Manningham (Bradford), Southall and Tower Hamlets (west and east London, respectively). Furthermore, many among this

current generation of young British Asian men are challenging traditional “Asian” social structures and dominant ideas with regard to the family, religious practices, financial prudence, clothing and fashion, sporting and leisure activities, and career aspirations. As a consequence their identities are constantly ‘in process’ (Hall 1990) and the product of numerous different, and often conflicting, influences.

The poverty of knowledge about the involvement of young, British Asian males in English football, the discrepancies between amateur and professional levels of participation, and the specific relationship between British “Asianness” and the culture of football outlined above provide a backdrop to the rationale for this research project, as described below.

Research rationale

This thesis investigates why, in spite of their passion for the game and significant involvement at *amateur* level, British Asians are under-represented as *professional* footballers proportionally to their numbers in the overall population. It is both an account of how young, male, British Asian footballers interpret and explain their under-representation in the professional game, and a critical analysis of the strategies and policies employed by the anti-racist football movement – i.e. the national and regional organisations, club-based initiatives and governing bodies that state the aim of attempting to eradicate racism from English football – to overcome this phenomenon. The central problematic is that the initiatives undertaken by anti-racist football organisations are often in direct conflict with the attitudes and aspirations of young, male, British Asian footballers themselves.

The importance of providing British Asians footballers with a forum to talk about their under-representation as professional players means that this thesis is characterised by a notably different orientation from other research in this area. Firstly, it is based on ethnographic fieldwork with large numbers of professional and amateur British Asian footballers, professional football coaches and members of anti-racist football organisations. British Asians have traditionally been marginalised

from consultation and decision-making processes in this area but this thesis places their “voices” at the centre of the inquiry. The oral testimonies of British Asian players provide rich, original material covering a wide range of important, contentious and sensitive issues. In-depth interviews with British Asian participants enabled a wide variety of topics to be covered, from their attitudes and aspirations as footballers to their opinions on anti-racist football organisations and contemporary social and political phenomena. This is reflected throughout the thesis and oral testimonies are continually woven into the analysis. Secondly, this thesis demonstrates the intricacies and complexities of studying ‘race’ and ethnicity during the early twenty-first century. It challenges some of the academic orthodoxies in the field of ethnic and racial studies and seeks to reconstruct a number of contemporary sociological and anthropological theories of young, male British Asian identities. It argues that there is a need for new conceptualisations of “Asianness”, particularly in relation to issues of youth and sport. Thirdly, it provides a *critical* analysis of the schemes, initiatives and organisations that are working towards increasing the representation of British Asian footballers. It seeks to overcome the taboo that exists about questioning the work of anti-racist organisations and addresses a range of issues that other analyses have failed to address. It is through these means that this thesis contributes to an understanding of the under-representation of British Asians in professional football; young, male, British Asian identities; and the anti-racist football movement.

Overview of the thesis

Each chapter of this thesis could represent a relatively self-contained analysis on a specific area of sociological inquiry but they should be seen as inherently complementary parts of a whole. The chapters have been arranged deliberately to enable the reader to grasp the main issues and problems experienced by young, male British Asian footballers before analysing the responses made by members of the anti-racist football movement. The material is organised so as to facilitate an understanding of the complexities of the issues under discussion.

Chapter Two provides an unreservedly personal and reflective overview of the three-year research “journey” undertaken between 2000 and 2003. It provides a detailed retrospective account of all the components that comprise the research process, i.e. the background research, fieldwork and writing of the thesis. The chapter describes the reasons why the under-representation of British Asians in professional football was chosen as the area of inquiry for this doctoral thesis and why the particular focus on the anti-racist football movement was selected. It details why ethnographic methodologies were utilised in this research, with regard to both the fieldwork (interviews and participant observation) and the ethos behind the thesis (the use of oral testimonies). A comprehensive description of the research sample is provided, including the reasons why participants and clubs were selected and how they were contacted. The crucial issues of gaining and maintaining access within this ethnography are then highlighted, with particular regard to the implications of ethnic differences in researcher-participant relations. The remainder of the chapter provides a practical examination of how the data was actually generated, through interviews, participant observation and document analysis.

Chapter Three examines popular representations of British Asians as the non-sporting ‘Other’ and “common sense” explanations of their under-representation as professional footballers. Two contrasting branches of explanation are analysed; those that focus on social structures (i.e. ideologies of physicality, religion and diet) and those that cite the role of British Asians as determining agents (i.e. consciously deprioritising careers in professional sport). In analysing the processes of under-representation, this chapter utilises a socio-historical approach. In the first instance, the hegemonic images of British Asian physicality and masculinity that exist within professional football are traced back to the era of British rule in India. Current challenges to these stereotypes are discussed with reference to both the special case of Sikhs and the involvement of young British Asians in incidents of urban unrest during the summer of 2001. The ubiquity of stereotypes regarding the inhibiting influences of South Asian cuisine and religions within professional football are also discussed. The second half of the chapter examines popular claims that British

Asians prioritise educational and economic achievement ahead of sport and, by examining issues of generation and parental attitudes, suggests that this is not necessarily the case. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the social significance of football for young British Asian men and the role it plays in the construction of specifically *British* Asian identities.

The focus of Chapter Four is on the complex interplay of ‘race’ and nation in contemporary British society, and the implications that such notions have for the involvement of British Asians in professional football. Firstly, the evolution of the phenomenon of ‘cultural racism’ is outlined. The following section places this in context by providing a socio-historical analysis of relations between whites and British Asians in post-industrial northern towns, such as Oldham, and highlights how a “siege mentality” amongst some white communities has contributed to increasing ethnic segregation in many social spheres. The chapter examines how this situation has led to the construction of increasingly ethnically exclusive definitions of England and “Englishness”. These developments are then examined in the context of professional football. It is argued that, in direct contrast to the situation in cricket, for instance, many British Asian footballers and supporters strongly affiliate with the England national team. The remainder of the chapter examines the direct influence of ‘race’ and racism in the recruitment of British Asians as professional footballers. It highlights the belief of many British Asian players that, contrary to the sentiments proposed by the anti-racist football movement and sections of the media, racism at professional clubs is not the main inhibiting factor in their careers. It is suggested that racism is more pernicious in *amateur* football and that this may be of greater significance in restricting the recruitment of British Asians as professional players.

Chapter Five examines the extent to which those British Asians that have been involved in professional football have sought – and, at times, managed – to become “one of the lads”. Using the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu – namely the concepts of ‘cultural capital’, ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ – this chapter uncovers three significant trends regarding the identities and lifestyles of these players. Firstly, the

majority of British Asians who have played for professional clubs have been Anglo-Asians, i.e. they have had one white parent. Secondly, in direct contrast to wider shifts in the identity politics of young British Asian men, many British Asian footballers consciously deprioritise their ethnic identities and seek to adhere to the dominant habituses of their white and African-Caribbean team-mates. Thirdly, many British Asian players believe that those players who have experienced Anglicised processes of socialisation will possess more of the specific cultural capital needed to make the professional grade. The final part of the chapter demonstrates the ambiguous status of dual ethnicity players, within British Asian communities, the anti-racist football movement and the media. Some players believe that Anglo-Asian players are not sufficiently “Asian” to be representative of British Asians in general. Conversely, the anti-racist football movement and the media attempt to impose identities on these players and propose that they should affiliate predominantly with their South Asian heritages.

The socio-political foundations and development of the anti-racist football movement are discussed in Chapter Six. The analysis examines both *how* and *why* anti-racism has become the most salient anti-discrimination discourse in English football and, in particular, why British Asians constitute a substantial focus for contemporary anti-racist initiatives and schemes. Primarily, the chapter traces the ideological shifts that have occurred in English football in the fifteen years since the Hillsborough stadium disaster. This involves an analysis of the processes of sanitisation and bourgeoisification that have inexorably transformed the demographic profile of football supporters and, consequently, meant that football has become a permissible medium for the articulation of anti-racism. Associated developments, such as the construction of football as an educational tool and a medium for facilitating the social inclusion of various minority groups, particularly British Asians, are also examined. The chapter then examines the financial support that the anti-racist football movement has received from commercial companies, many of whom are attracted by both the kudos that can be derived from associations with football and anti-racism, and the economic benefits of aligning themselves with

certain minority ethnic groups. The final section further demonstrates the entrenched nature of anti-racism in English football by contrasting it with the lack of anti-homophobia initiatives, the situation in other English sports and the status of anti-racism in European football.

Chapter Seven seeks to contextualise the central issues of the previous chapter and traces the wider ideological shifts in the politics of anti-racism during the last twenty-five years. This involves examining the development of anti-racism from the period when the notion of ‘political blackness’ – which was constructed to facilitate solidarity between all non-white groups – was the hegemonic concept in ‘race’ relations thinking to the return to an emphasis on ethnic diversity. It is demonstrated that an anti-racism based solely around colour discrimination can alienate British Asians and be insensitive to the complexity of their identities. The chapter examines how these issues and transformations have influenced the anti-racist football movement and been encompassed within their policies and strategies. The analysis then moves to the contrasting social statuses of different British Asian groups. This involves an examination of both the rise of Islamophobia in Britain and the divergent levels of socio-economic achievement/disadvantage amongst British Asian communities. The implications of these phenomena are then analysed in the context of football, i.e. the inclusion of Islamophobic sentiments in terrace discourses and the apparent belief among members of anti-racist football organisations that British Asians *en bloc* constitute a racialised ‘underclass’ that is excluded from football fandom because of economic constraints. Finally, the chapter examines communal tensions between South Asians – both in the subcontinent and in Britain – and outlines the repercussions that these might have for the participation of British Asians in football and for the anti-racist football movement.

The analyses of the anti-racist football movement and the wider politics of anti-racism converge in Chapter Eight, which further demonstrates the complex and contradictory nature of the politics of anti-racism in English football. This chapter is an empirical, in-depth critique of the contemporary policies and activities

undertaken by anti-racist football organisations with regard to increasing the participation of British Asians in professional football. Derived predominantly from the arguments raised by British Asian players themselves, this chapter examines the most prominent issues facing British Asian footballers and the problems that they perceive to exist within the anti-racist football movement. It is argued that, in many instances, anti-racist football organisations are out of touch with the identities, lifestyles, attitudes and desires of young British Asian footballers and are subsequently failing to assist in overcoming their under-representation at professional level. It is demonstrated that, in some instances, *young* British Asian footballers are not being consulted by these organisations, and that many strategies and policies actually alienate, or even offend, them. Either way, it is clear that young British Asians are often marginalised in decision-making processes regarding their involvement in the professional game. In this regard, the following areas are examined: the manner in which anti-racist football organisations and club-based schemes attempt to engage in “community consultation”; the significance of ethnicity in coach-player relations; the implications of collaboration with the police in anti-racist projects; the use of matches between British clubs and teams from the Indian subcontinent as anti-racist events; the position of professional footballers as social and moral role models, and the problems that develop when they are involved in racist incidents; and the effects of media publicity on young British Asian professional players.

Chapter Nine brings the thesis to a conclusion and draws together the trends, issues, problems and arguments identified and articulated throughout the thesis. It calls for new frameworks that no longer essentialise and dichotomise “South Asian” and “British” cultures but that, instead, appreciate how these elements are actively fused to create specifically *British* twenty-first century Asian identities and lifestyles. The discussion considers in further detail the significance of football as an arena in which these processes take place. The chapter also acknowledges the valuable contribution made to this research by British Asian footballers themselves. It reflects on the passion and commitment that participants invested in the project

and the quality of information that they provided. It discusses how they intelligently contextualised their own feelings and experiences of “Asianness” within the “bigger picture” and linked the under-representation of British Asians in professional football to a variety of wider social phenomena. The chapter concludes with the implications that this research will hopefully have for British Asian footballers and the anti-racist football movement.

Football is arguably the most researched and written about sport in Britain, yet British Asian players have systematically been excluded from contributing to analyses of the game. This thesis seeks to overcome this phenomenon and, in this regard, it provides a sensitive contribution to the fields of ethnic and racial studies, football and young people. The research is also timely, as it has been undertaken during a period in which the citizenship and identities of British Asians – especially Muslims – have been the subject of intense political and public debate. The analysis is thus of considerable relevance in seeking to understand contemporary articulations of “Asianness” by young, British Asian men.

Notes

- ¹ Chopra was aged nineteen at the time.
- ² The term 'British Asian' is used throughout this thesis to refer to those British citizens that trace their ancestry back to the Indian subcontinent, i.e. Bangladesh, India or Pakistan.
- ³ Loaning young and/or inexperienced players to lower division clubs is a traditional practice within football. It enables players who are not ready to play in the first-team of their registered clubs to gain vital experience and match practice in a less high-pressure setting.
- ⁴ In February 2004, Chopra was loaned to Nottingham Forest in the First Division.

Chapter 2

Tales of the Unexpected: Personal reflections on the research process

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a retrospective account of the research process, emphasising my own *personal* interpretations of, and reflections on, the three-year period that comprised the background research, fieldwork and writing of this thesis. Debates regarding the appropriateness of sociologists allowing their feelings and opinions to influence their research have existed for as long as the discipline itself (e.g. Weber 1919, Gouldner 1962, Becker 1967, Elias 1987). It is acknowledged that such a reflective account might thus contravene the traditions of certain sociological schools of thought. As McRobbie points out:

Although few radical (male) sociologists would deny the importance of the personal in precipitating social and political awareness, to admit how their own experience has influenced their choice of subject matter (the politics of selection) seems more or less taboo (cited in Back 1996: 22).

In particular, ethnographers have often provided a less than complete picture regarding the specific research processes they have undertaken in their studies. However, I strongly side with Maykut and Morehouse (1994) who argue that the researcher is as much an actor, or participant, in the research as those being studied and does not operate in an impartial, asocial context. Stanley and Wise develop this position when they argue that:

Because the basis of all research is a relationship, this necessarily involves the presence of the researcher as a *person*. Personhood cannot be left behind, cannot be left out of the research process. And so we insist it must be capitalised upon, it must be made full use of (cited in Roseneil 1993: 181).

Instead of dichotomising the relationship between the researcher and the participant(s), I view them as interdependent parts of a broader process, i.e. the research project. Rather than ignoring or underplaying my role as *person* as well as researcher, I wish to highlight the personal influences that are inextricably related to the research process. My research is clearly, and openly, underpinned by personal, political and ideological positions regarding issues of 'race', anti-racism and British Asians as a social group. It is also a product of the epoch in which it was carried out, a period that witnessed a number of significant occurrences, such as the urban

unrest¹ created by British Asians during the summer of 2001, the atrocities on September 11th 2001, and the global “war against terror” fought by the USA and Britain. These events have influenced both the areas that I have chosen to write about and, most importantly, my personal thoughts and interpretations of the issues under investigation. In this chapter I attempt to avoid creating a great silence in the midst of ethnographic description itself (Pratt cited in Armstrong 1993: 10) by comprehensively detailing the research process as I experienced it.

This thesis can be seen as representing both a summative and a formative stage in my academic and personal lives. On one hand, it is the result of a life-long interest in issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity, and an opportunity to contribute knowledge and experiences to this area of study. On the other, it is hoped that it will act as a starting point for a career encompassing further work in this field, either within academe or another professional capacity. The factors influencing my decision to research and write this thesis, and the implications that I hope it will have, are thus jointly related to my life inside and outside of academe. Despite growing up in Brighton, a predominantly “white” city², as a youngster I always had an interest in issues surrounding minority ethnic groups. These tended to be framed through the medium of music – whether it be perusing the Blues and Soul records in my dad’s collection; listening to the guitar-riffs of Chuck Berry and the sweet vocals of Sam Cooke that iteratively emanated from the living-room stereo; or physically feeling the reverberations from Dub Reggae sound systems when traipsing around North Kensington³ with my mum on visits to the area where she grew up, I was beginning to understand that there was far more “out there” than what I experienced living in the suburbs of this southern outpost.

It was also the case that, by the sometimes illogical processes through which such affiliations develop, I was an ardent supporter of Everton Football Club, located 250 miles away in Liverpool. During the 1980s, the club developed a reputation as a racist institution (see Hill 2001), due to the behaviour of some of its fans, and also, it was alleged, the club’s player recruitment policy⁴. In my early years as a fan,

football simply revolved around the action taking place on the pitch, and I was oblivious to the social issues that impinge upon the sport and now form the focus of my academic research. I was, therefore, horrified when watching an *Inside Story* television documentary in the late 1980s to see Everton “named and shamed” as a racist club⁵. I subsequently made a conscious effort to improve my understanding of racism in sport and, in particular, keenly observed the campaign to eradicate racism from my club⁶.

Studying for a degree in Sport and Recreation Studies familiarised me with the academic literature on ‘race’ and racism in sport. It was at this stage that I developed my specific interest in the under-representation of British Asians in professional football and this subsequently formed the basis of my undergraduate dissertation. Following the completion of my undergraduate studies, I spent a year at the University of Leicester, undertaking a Masters degree. Having become aware (through my undergraduate studies) of the anti-racist work being carried out by Leicester City FC, I approached them to inquire about work experience. For that year, I was kindly invited to become a member of the steering group for the *Foxes Against Racism* initiative. I was able to develop a substantial appreciation of the measures being implemented to eradicate racism in football and, in particular, to facilitate the inclusion of British Asians as professional players, both through this initiative and through other schemes. I gained an insight into the politics and strategies of the anti-racist football movement, and I was soon able to categorise what I believed to “the good, the bad and the ugly”. Having closely followed developments in the anti-racist football movement ever since, it would be fair to say that I have had a number of concerns about certain policies, in terms of the rationales behind them, and the manner in which they have been devised and implemented. When the opportunity to study for a PhD arose, not unexpectedly I chose to further my research into the absence of British Asians in professional football, and to focus on the role of anti-racist football organisations in this phenomenon.

Writing to reach you: oral testimony and overcoming the “silencing” of British Asian footballers

Traditionally, the authoritative voice, i.e. the “knower”, within discourses of ‘race’ and ethnicity has been the white scholar, policy maker or member of an anti-racist organisation (Stanfield 1993). Academic studies of sport have been no exception. This is a situation that has both contributed to, and been influenced by, a failure to appreciate the interests and attitudes of British Asians in research into their under-representation as professional footballers. It seemed obvious to me that any research into the under-representation of British Asians in professional football could not be undertaken with any degree of authenticity without ascertaining the views of British Asian players themselves. However, after speaking to a number of people at British Asian football clubs, it soon became clear that I was probably the first British academic to do this. It was evident that this was the first time that the British Asian players I interviewed had participated in any kind of research, academic or otherwise. Consequently, a key objective of this research has been to rectify the “silencing” of these players.

The identities, attitudes and experiences of British Asian footballers are crucial to the generation of knowledge in this area and so it is vital to position the players as “knowers”. In order to achieve this, the fieldwork for this thesis involved a multi-method ethnography, using predominantly semi-structured interviews and observational techniques. As Bryman argues, ‘The most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its express commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, values...from the perspective of the people who are being studied’ (cited in Prior 1997: 64). I was committed to providing a forum for British Asian footballers to discuss their attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the topic being studied and so it was necessary to utilise a research framework that facilitated this. I also wanted to locate my research within an understanding of contemporary “Asianness” and the manner in which the identities and lifestyles of young, British Asian men are articulated in the early twenty-first century. Therefore, this thesis is characterised by the use of oral testimonies/life stories⁷. According to Corradi, these refer to:

The results of a research approach that consists of collecting an individual's oral account of his or her life or special aspects of it; the narrative is initiated by a specific request from the researcher and the ensuing dialogue is directed by the latter towards his or her field of inquiry (cited in Sparkes and Templin 1992: 119).

Throughout my fieldwork, participants spoke openly to me about specific topics, either within interviews or during casual conversations. Every attempt has been made to ensure that this emphasis on oral evidence is reflected within this thesis, through the inclusion of British Asian players' testimonies – many of which are of substantial length – throughout the text. However, whilst verbatim interview transcripts are used with the objective of representing participants in as accurate a manner as possible, as Clifford (1986: 7) points out, 'Ethnographic truths are...inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete'. By utilising the method of oral testimony, I am 'both the narrator and the author/interpreter' (von der Lippe 2000: 181), and what is written here is unequivocally my *personal* interpretation of the issues, underpinned by my own developing thoughts on 'race', "Asianness", and the politics of identity.

I do not claim to speak *for* the people I have researched. This thesis is merely a forum for their testimonies. I adhere closely to the concerns of Back (1996) and Sharma et al (1996) who are rightly suspicious of those who claim to possess some kind of insider status, particularly those who claim to speak *for* the people they are researching. Nevertheless, Hargreaves (2000: 11) reminds us that 'bell hooks...has insisted that those of us who are privileged have an obligation to support and facilitate those from minority groups...Providing research and knowledge is one way to do this'. On one occasion, a British Asian player gave me some photographs of him playing for the youth team of a professional club. I asked him why he was prepared to part with such special items and his response was, "Because *you* can tell our story, Dan". I hope that this thesis goes some way to achieving his wish.

The research sample

Researchers who fail to fully explicate the processes through which their studies were undertaken usually also fail to identify the characteristics of their participants. For example, Werner and Schoepfle argue that:

The selection of informants for ethnographic fieldwork is often shrouded in mystery. Very few ethnographers list explicitly the number of people they have talked to...Ethnographers are equally reluctant to explain how they selected the people they did talk to (cited in Johnson 1990: 15).

In contrast, this section provides details of the participants in my research and the processes by which they were identified and became involved in the study.

The research for this thesis involved a process of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork between 2000 and 2003, utilising a multi-method approach of interviewing, observation and document analysis. Of these three procedures, interviews formed the main part of the data collection. In total, thirty-one interviews were undertaken, between November 2001 and July 2002. Participants came from four main groups: professional, ex-professional and semi-professional British Asian footballers (eight interviews); amateur British Asian footballers (eight); members of anti-racist football organisations⁸ (nine) and staff from the academies – special development centres designed to coach and train talented players aged between seven and nineteen⁹ – at English professional football clubs (six). The method of sampling used was that of “snowball” or “network” sampling, i.e. initiating primary contacts within the field, and using the knowledge and contacts of these people to develop a further network of potential participants. As Werner and Schoepfle point out:

After choosing anyone who cooperates, the next step is to follow a network. At first, one interviews those people who are easily accessible. Then, ethnographers use the first batch of people to introduce them to a widening circle of friends and relations. The “networking” label derives from the fact that ethnographers utilize the personal networks of their earliest contacts to expand the sample (cited in Johnson 1990: 32).

“Snowballing” was deemed to be the most appropriate method due to the close-knit nature of professional football and its traditional inaccessibility to outsiders, together

with (in the early stages) no personal network of British Asian friends or acquaintances, nor any contacts within British Asian football clubs. My aim was to utilise the existing framework of inter-club relations that exists within both professional and British Asian amateur football as a means of contacting those with knowledge and experience in the field. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 57) point out, ‘It is not our goal to build a random sample, but rather to select persons or settings that we think represent the range of experience on the phenomenon in which we are interested’.

The most significant component in “snowballing” is “finding the snow” and actually facilitating the start of this process. In October 2000, a preliminary letter detailing the proposed research area was sent to Football in the Community (FITC) departments¹⁰ at six professional clubs in the south-east of England (for geographical convenience should follow-up meetings occur) in order to “start the ball rolling”. As the Independent Football Commission (2004: 35) highlights, FITC departments represent the primary source of anti-racist projects at professional clubs. A first contact was made with the head of FITC at one Second Division club. This person was extremely interested in the research and was able to put me in touch with members of staff at his own and one other (Premier League) club. In order to establish further contacts, in May 2001, a letter (postal or e-mail) was sent to all ninety-two English professional football clubs asking two specific questions:

- 1) Do you currently have any British Asian players registered, at any level, at your club?
- 2) Does your club run any specific schemes or initiatives with regard to promoting anti-racism and/or increasing the recruitment of British Asian players?

The objective of these questions was to locate the whereabouts of any British Asian professional players¹¹ and to identify those clubs that operated anti-racist schemes or initiatives, in order to find people who might be interested in participating in the research. The responses to these inquiries provided further contacts with players and academy staff, and also with members of a number of anti-racist football initiatives.

The fieldwork with British Asian amateur players was carried out with players from four British Asian clubs. I managed to obtain contacts at all of these clubs and I felt that exploring all sources of potential information would enable me to identify suitable participants. Quite coincidentally, I was able to achieve some degree of representation with regard to players' ethnic, religious and ancestral regional backgrounds. The first club was predominantly Punjabi Sikh and based in Greater London. The other clubs were predominantly Muslim and based in inner London: one was Pakistani and two were Bangladeshi. My first contact was facilitated by a mature student who was studying for his Masters degree in my university department. A semi-professional player himself, he had recently represented a British Asian amateur team during one of their prestigious summer tournaments¹² and was able to introduce me to a contact at this club. The second club was accessed as a result of a purely coincidental word-of-mouth association. A friend of my brother worked with a member of this club and, having previously mentioned my research to him, he was able to act as a go-between until direct contact was made. The third club was approached directly, by contacting a player who had written an article in a programme for a match that his team had played in. Through meeting members of his club, I was put in touch with the final team.

With the professional, ex-professional and semi-professional British Asian players, my first point of contact was provided by a FITC officer. He put me in touch with a player who had recently left his club and this player was able to provide me with details of a former team-mate. This process was replicated at another club where a member of the coaching staff introduced me to one of his players who then put me in touch with a player at another club. One player was traced through his current employment as a coach at a professional football club, whilst three others were identified by amateur players who knew them personally.

Stepping onto the pitch: initiating and maintaining access to the field

This section concentrates on the specific practical aspects of establishing and maintaining access to the participants in this research, whilst the following section

discusses the significance of ‘race’ and ethnicity in these processes. Although I had an idea of the people that I wished to interview and the teams that I wanted to observe, I still needed to initiate access to the various participants and their social environments. As Ackers (1993: 214) points out:

Access is a central issue in any research exercise; in ethnographic research it is crucial. The negotiation of access often takes a covert form. It is not simply a matter of writing a formal letter to cover a questionnaire or request for a formal interview. In ethnographic research, access is an ongoing process of negotiation: of building and retaining trust and reassuring people of the legitimacy of this form of enquiry.

Gaining access was a complex process. My research involved dealing with a variety of social groups and agencies, with substantially different entry criteria – for example, providing proof of academic registration at professional football clubs and proving myself to be genuine and credible to British Asian footballers.

Facilitating access to the groups involved in this study required seeking the acceptance and trust of a number of relevant “gatekeepers”, i.e. those ‘actors with control over key sources and avenues of opportunity’ (Atkinson cited in Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 34). Shaffir (1998) argues that this process is influenced by two main factors. Firstly, the degree to which the participants are knowledgeable of, and interested in, the aims of the researcher. Secondly, the extent to which the researcher is seen as ‘likeable, friendly, dependable and honest’ (ibid.: 48). Wax suggests that the latter is more important and argues that:

Most sensible people do not believe what a stranger tells them. In the long run, (the investigator’s) hosts will judge and trust him, not because of what he [sic] (initially) says about himself or about his research, but by the style in which he lives and acts, by the way he treats them (cited in ibid.: 60).

Fortunately the nature of my research meant that the majority of participants had a vested interest in its content and outcomes, but I also took extensive measures to ensure that I was seen to be genuine and credible by participants. This could only be achieved by influencing participants’ perceptions of my social identity and the way in which they interpreted my language, demeanour and intentions. As Shaffir (ibid.:

53) points out, ‘The investigator must marshal [sic] an appropriate self presentation along with a convincing account to gain admission to a social circle or set of activities that may be sealed to outsiders’. Furthermore, inclusion is neither permanent nor absolute. It can only be maintained through a continued process of (re)negotiation throughout the research period, and different people within a participant group may not grant inclusion to the same extent (see e.g. Alexander 2000b). There is no single means by which to accomplish this task. To be successful, the researcher needs a *comprehensive* appreciation and understanding of the characteristics of the group(s) he or she is researching.

The researcher is obviously an integral agent in facilitating access to participant groups or settings, yet it is crucial to recognise – and this can be paradoxically reassuring and frustrating – that his or her inclusion within any social group or setting can also be affected by factors outside of his or her control. According to May (1997), this means that decisions regarding the selection of participants are inevitably placed outside the sole control of the researcher. Whilst this is often true, a distinct *advantage* is that a significant degree of variation is created within the research sample. A further benefit is that an insider within the participant group can act as an intermediary and achieve access on behalf of the researcher. I found participant support particularly helpful in gaining access to the environment of professional football – traditionally a “closed shop” to outsiders – and to the specific social sphere of British Asian football, neither of which I had any comprehensive previous experience of. For example, with the Sikh team, my “gatekeeper” – who did not participate in interviews himself – wanted to select the players from his club that I should speak to. He seemed to enjoy the kudos he could gain in the eyes of both his team-mates and myself through his role in assisting a doctoral research project, but he was also clearly keen to make sure that I received the richest information and I think he selected ideal participants for me.

***White Man in Bangla Town*¹³: undertaking research within British Asian communities**

Throughout the construction of my research proposal I became aware of the number of authors who have argued that potential problems in gaining access may be accentuated when they involve a white, middle-class researcher probing the world of (predominantly working-class) minority ethnic groups. For example, Amos et al (1982: 16) argue that much sociological inquiry into areas of ‘race’ and ethnicity is characterised by the inability of sociologists ‘to accept their own irrelevance, in the sense that black people don’t need researchers to interpret their lives for them or to make them more accessible and acceptable to white society’. Similarly, Andersen (1993: 41) argues that, ‘The problems of doing research within minority communities are compounded by the social distance imposed by class relations when interviewers are white and middle-class and those being interviewed are not’. This standpoint is still relevant within both academe and the realms of public policy making¹⁴ (Macey 2002: 20). However, Back (1996: 24) makes the point that, ‘Although it is profoundly true that whites cannot fully comprehend the experiential consequences of racism, we do experience the transmission of racist ideas and formulae’. Perhaps, as Andersen (1993: 43) argues, ‘The question is not whether white scholars should write about or attempt to know the experience of people of color [sic], but whether their interpretation should be taken to be the most authoritative’. Ethnic differences between researchers and their participants are by no means unassailable (see e.g. Hannerz 1969, Stebbins 1998), but it would be naive to assume that issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity are not sometimes problematic (see e.g. Keiser 1970). Throughout my fieldwork I was aware that I was not an organic member of the communities represented by the participant groups.

During previous research on this topic – as an undergraduate in 1998 – my observation of a group of young Bangladeshi footballers (in Sheffield) in a setting spatially designated as “theirs” (a recreation ground) resulted in considerable resentment from some other onlookers. I was labelled a ‘white bastard’ by a handful of youths who were clearly unhappy with my presence in one of their social spaces

and this was only mediated by those with whom a degree of trust had already been established, i.e. the players I was observing. With notebook and camera in hand, I may have been perceived as a journalist or academic eager to exploit their social space – which, arguably, to some degree I was – or perhaps I was simply unaware of the racialised “street politics” of the area in which I was carrying out the research. The summer of 2001, which preceded my period in the field for this project, was dominated by widespread urban unrest involving British Asian and white residents and police officers in towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire. In much of the national media these events were (somewhat incorrectly) interpreted as “race riots”, and a combination of misinformation and hearsay led to allegations that districts with predominantly British Asian populations had become “no-go” areas for white people (see e.g. Vasagar et al 2001). Whilst in hindsight this seems to have been simply a rapidly accentuating moral panic (cf. Young 1971, Cohen 2002), it did play on my mind to a certain degree. Nevertheless, soon after commencing my research it was clear that such “scare stories” were inaccurate, at least in the geographical areas that I was researching¹⁵.

Whilst I do not intend to argue that my personal embodiment of “whiteness”¹⁶ was irrelevant or insignificant in my fieldwork relationships, I feel that issues overtly related to my ethnicity were minimal in the research process. Ethnicity was not the only factor in researcher-participant relations and issues of class, age and gender were also important. I believe that being young and male were the most significant factors in gaining access to certain situations, and the implications of “tagging along” with, and seeking access to, the close friendship and social networks of amateur football teams were, at times, more salient than being a white person researching British Asians. The gulf between a white, middle-class researcher and British Asian, working-class participants can also be reduced through the establishment of common interests and the manner in which the researcher presents him/herself to the participants. For example, Ackers (1993) identifies the linguistic and semantic contradictions facing the researcher in the two spheres in which he/she operates, i.e. literally between ‘being there’ and ‘being here’ (Geertz cited in Hobbs

1993: 51). At an early stage of the research process I became aware that the manner in which I was expected to discuss my thoughts with my supervisors and academic colleagues, and present my work at seminars and conferences, required extremely different social skills from those required when mixing and conversing with working-class, British Asian footballers. Greve describes how, by failing to modify their behaviour in relation to the participants they are studying, some ‘social researchers have been handicapped by their approach, manner, accent, vocabulary and image’ (cited in Ackers 1993: 215). As a result, these researchers have often failed to establish the necessary trust and rapport to gain access to participants. The inherent ironies within these processes of self-management were consciously noted. Experience of working in a university, together with having a number of friends and football club team-mates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, undoubtedly helped me to shift between the two spheres – from “here” to “there” – relatively effortlessly. Some participants – particularly those who had studied at college – were interested in the theories behind my research and in discussing the academic implications but, to ensure perspicuity, in most instances I actively avoided using “sociology speak”. At no stage was my linguistic flexibility taken for granted, however, and I would never claim to have substantial knowledge of the specific vernaculars, semantics, semiotics or social networks of working-class British Asians. Throughout my research, participants would occasionally revert to Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu when conversing with older people, whilst dialogues between participants were sometimes spoken in a dialect that was also part “Cockney” and part Jamaican “patois” (see Back 1996, Baumann 1996). Obviously I seldom understood what they were saying – a stark reminder of my outsider status.

Language or argot is not the only issue to address. It is also crucially important for researchers to present themselves physically to the participants in a way that is acceptable, friendly and sensitive. Winlow (2001: 12) argues that age and physical appearance are significant when undertaking ethnography and I feel that I was well-suited in terms of both criteria to carry out this research. Being in my mid-twenties and not resembling a stereotypical image of a student or an academic was certainly

of considerable benefit. A conscious effort was made to dress in a way that would make me credible in the eyes of the people I was speaking to. When meeting with people from the anti-racist football organisations I adopted a smart, formal approach to demonstrate how importantly I perceived the meeting to be and also that I “meant business”. With the players, however, I tended to dress in sportswear or types of clothing common to both young British Asian and white men alike. This was by no means a deliberate attempt to imitate or parody these people; rather it was a case of managing my appearance to meet the needs of the situation and avoid “sticking out” as a symbol of academe/the establishment/the middle-classes. As the aim of my research is to represent the views of British Asian footballers, it was these players that I felt I needed to establish the most credibility with. I used a number of methods to achieve this, such as sharing my experiences as an amateur footballer, demonstrating my familiarity with the area of inner London in which many of the players lived, and discussing general issues such as talent identification, coaching, and racism in football. Ironically, I also knew more about the overall involvement of British Asians in professional football than most of the participants. This established my credibility as someone with knowledge in the field and provided the participants with information that they could pass on to others. As Armstrong (1993: 18) points out:

It is, perhaps, “not done” in academia to say so, but when researching with groups of people, the primary aim is to be both known and popular. When these two elements are combined, people talk to you. The researcher need not as a consequence “go native” or achieve “*over-rapport*”.

Certainly by creating informal dialogues on subjects of common interest I was able to reduce the risk of trying too hard to impress and, by so doing, damaging my credibility. Fetterman (1989: 56) points out that ‘acting like an adolescent does not win the confidence of adolescents, it only makes them suspicious’ and so I was conscious throughout of the danger of descending into an “Ali G”-style¹⁷ character or a middle-class white man claiming to be “down with the Asians”.

I did not experience any overt refusal of access – most people were extremely welcoming – yet it was evident during my visits to British Asian clubs that whilst many players wanted to engage in dialogue, others preferred purely a greeting or acknowledgement. To some people I was “Dan, doing his PhD on British Asian footballers” and, to others, simply “the bloke doing the research”. I am sure that some people had no idea why I was there and must have wondered why a solitary white man was watching an amateur football match being played and watched otherwise exclusively by British Asians. This is an inevitable consequence of doing ethnographic fieldwork, however, and it is impossible to inform everyone present about one’s identity and reason for being there. In many ways my presence often paralleled the scene recorded by Duneier (1992) in his ethnography of a Chicago restaurant, patronised predominantly by working-class African-Americans. The black men who frequented the restaurant would occasionally discuss why they thought Bart, an elderly middle-class white man, was a regular attendee in such an environment. Slim, the figurehead of this group, would counter that, ‘He don’t bother nobody’ (ibid.: 7), and despite an absence of overt affection or integration between Bart and the other men, they developed a mutual respect for each other’s lives. In my research, whilst some participants were keener to participate than others, I would like to think that a mutual respect existed between myself and all the players that I met, and that *I* “didn’t bother nobody”.

Talking a good game: generating data from semi-structured interviews

The type of interview utilised within my fieldwork was semi-structured. This was due to both epistemological and practical concerns, and in particular, my adherence to the use of oral testimonies. None of the interview schedules were identical – they varied depending on the background and position of the participant – but, as a general approach, I asked certain set questions in order to generate fairly formalised contextual information. However, the most important aspects of the interview were the open-ended questions that followed, enabling me to investigate the experiences and attitudes of particular participants, together with the manner in which they construct, interpret and represent realities. Participants were able to speak at length

on specific issues, providing me with comprehensive oral testimonies and thus allowing me to construct a more accurate representation of them and their situations. A second, and directly related, advantage of using semi-structured interviews was their interactive nature. I was able to be more responsive and flexible, and so I could both clarify and elaborate on specific points during the interview. Any misunderstandings could be elucidated whilst particular responses were focused upon, allowing supplementary inquiries. The semi-structured interview is thus 'malleable enough to follow emergent leads and standardised enough to register strong patterns' (Oliker cited in Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1996: 234), whilst permitting the interviewer 'more latitude to *probe* beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee' (May 1997: 111).

The interviews were undertaken in a wide variety of locations. Where possible I gave the participant the opportunity to choose the setting for the interview. The interviews with the staff of the football academies were generally undertaken at their clubs' stadiums or training grounds, although one was carried out at a private health club where the coach brought youth team players for specific gym-based fitness work. The locations for the interviews with professional, ex-professional and semi-professional British Asian players were less standardised and included club stadiums or training grounds, players' homes, Brunel University, a pub, and a park (after a coaching session that this player was running). The interviews with the amateur players were undertaken in their homes, their workplaces, a restaurant and a pub. The interviews with members of anti-racist football organisations were undertaken at their places of work.

The majority of interviews lasted between one and two hours. The duration depended on the participants involved, in terms of both the period that they permitted me to speak to them and the length of their responses. The interviews with the amateur players tended to be the longest as they were often undertaken outside of their work hours and on a more sociable basis. It was also the case that because of their vested interest in the research, they tended to approach the topic with the most

enthusiasm. The structure of many of the British Asian clubs also meant that many players had off-field roles, for example, as committee members, and so were not only articulate but knowledgeable: they were able to speak about a number of different aspects relating to the topic, from playing to coaching, funding and administration. Interviews with academy staff were sometimes shorter than one hour. I perceive the reasons behind this to be threefold. Firstly, these coaches were based at club training grounds and, due to the nature of their work, were extremely busy, spending most of their time on the training ground coaching young players. Secondly, the impression I gained during this project was that although some attitudes appear to have changed during the four years since I last undertook research with professional football clubs, sociology – unlike perhaps biomechanics or physiology – remains a sub-discipline of Sport Sciences that has little discernible relevance in the eyes of many professional sport practitioners. Thirdly, the academy staff were neither familiar with interview situations nor particularly articulate. Consequently some inquiries – despite my efforts to relax the participants and seek elaboration – received short, pithy responses. In contrast, due to their experience in disseminating publicity and working with the media, members of the anti-racist football organisations were much more confident in interview situations, whilst the vast majority of players were also comfortable in the interview setting. I am drawn, therefore, to conclude similarly to Roseneil (1993: 198) that, ‘Although the interview is an inherently “unnatural” situation, I found that almost all of them proceeded smoothly, much like a long, intense, conversation’.

During each interview it was a personal policy that, having ensured that we had covered all of the areas that *I* wanted to look at, I would encourage participants to discuss issues that *they* perceived to be particularly important. Furthermore, participants often questioned *me* regarding *my* opinions on certain issues related to the study. Whilst in the early stages I was still developing my own thoughts on these matters, as the research progressed I was able to offer more considered insights and suggestions, and so my role occasionally changed to that of ‘consultant/advisor’

(Yow 1994: 120). Again, my experiences concur with those of Roseneil (1993: 198-9) who reports that:

I frequently found myself asked for my opinions and about my experience of particular events or issues; the interviews typically became dialogic. I answered as fully and honestly as I could, and often the divergence or similarity of our opinions and experiences became a topic of discussion in itself.

I was keen not to let my opinions dominate an interview or to unduly influence participants' responses, but opportunities for me to speak had two major advantages. Firstly, I was able to clarify anything that the participant did not understand by providing examples or putting forward my own thoughts on an issue. Secondly, by offering occasional intermissions I was able to provide a break for those participants who appeared nervous or unused to speaking for prolonged periods. The relative informality of these exchanges rendered the dialogue predominantly what Burgess (1984: 102) labels a 'conversation with a purpose'.

In all cases, participants knew that my research was on the under-representation of British Asians in professional football and the wider issue of anti-racism in the game. However, when an interview was arranged over the telephone and I informed the participants of the title of my research, I was often asked what my "angle" was. I had to be relatively covert because in the majority of cases I knew little of the personal backgrounds of the participants and I did not want to put them off by disclosing the nuances of the approach I was adopting. Consequently, I usually waited until meeting a participant before going into further detail. For example, if a British Asian player mentioned that he was displeased with a particular anti-racist football scheme or initiative, I took it that he was probably not directly involved in such work. I could then mention that my study actually involved a *critical analysis* of anti-racism in football. This could also then be used to gain a greater rapport with the participant and I would make it clear that "I think we're coming from the same angle here". As Glesne and Peshkin (1992: 79) state, 'Rapport is tantamount to trust, and trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make'. I do not perceive this to be withholding information or

deceiving the participants, for it is impossible for interviewers to reveal everything about their research to participants (Denzin 1989). Rather, it was a case of customising the interview to suit the participant and decreasing both the likelihood of offending him/her or having information withheld. Aspects of my research were ‘sensitive’ (Lee 1993) as – implicitly if not explicitly – I was actively challenging aspects of the anti-racist football movement. For this reason I kept a lot of my own thoughts regarding the politics of anti-racism in football to myself when interviewing members of the anti-racist organisations. I tended to subtly introduce contentious topics rather than present them blatantly and often situated myself as “devil’s advocate” or as citing the opinion of somebody else. However, Punch identifies the difficulties in studying ‘literate, articulate, self-conscious people with the power, resources and expertise to protect their reputation’ (cited in *ibid.*: 8). Due to the experience of members of anti-racist football organisations in publicity and media work, they were clearly more aware than others of times when I was probing for contentious information and they often endeavoured to direct the interview towards other issues.

In some interviews, I initiated discussion on topics that the participants evidently found uncomfortable or perceived to be outside the boundaries of what they were prepared to discuss. Refusals to provide information tended to fall into two categories. The first of these relates exclusively to the academy staff of the professional clubs and occurred when issues relating to sexuality or homophobia were raised. Although questions were asked in conjunction with discussions about the political relationship between football and social inclusion, and the predominance of discourses of anti-racism (see Chapter Six), my preconceptions regarding sexuality and homophobia being the ultimate taboo subjects within football were confirmed by the uniform responses: “I haven’t really thought about that” or “No comment”, together with visible discomfort on the part of the participant¹⁸. Secondly, due to the current sensitivity regarding issues of ‘race’ and racism in the police force, some members of anti-racist football organisations were reticent to discuss the involvement of, or sponsorship by, the police. Raising

controversial or threatening topics presents a difficult situation not only for the participant but also for the interviewer. The participant is offering his or her time to assist in the research and can request that the interview is terminated if they no longer want to participate. Fortunately this was never the case, but during some interviews I sensed – from both verbal and non-verbal responses – that it was necessary to move quickly to a less contentious area of debate. In retrospect, however, I am glad that I had the confidence to ask controversial questions and “get beneath the skin” of the topics that I was researching. Again, I took heed from Roseneil (1993: 200) who argues that ‘interviews do not always have to work well as social encounters; they don’t have to run smoothly and involve strong “rapport” in order to produce useful data’.

A dictaphone was used to record the data during all the interviews. The tape was switched on for the duration, except for during pleasantries at the start and end of the interview. All participants agreed to the interviews being recorded and I can only recall requests for the tape to be switched off on three occasions: one was when a British Asian semi-professional player was discussing the name of a specific commercial organisation in an uncomplimentary manner; the second was when a member of an anti-racist football organisation was traducing another organisation and labelling its co-ordinator ‘a slimy little toe-rag’; and the third time was when another member of an anti-racist football organisation was discussing the alleged homosexuality of a certain professional footballer.

Keeping an eye on the ball: generating data from observation

Through the use of oral testimonies, my aim was to provide as accurate a picture as possible of the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the British Asian players I was researching. However, data generated from interviews can only provide a partial representation of the lives and perceptions of the participants being studied, and so further ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken using methods of observation. My contention was that the type of data that I could generate through the use of observational techniques would differ from, and thus complement, that

generated through interviewing. Whilst the interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the issues under discussion, during my observations I could watch, listen, enjoy stories, share in the joys and sorrows of a game, and recognise the special exchanges and rituals intrinsic to football. I was, therefore, able to enhance substantially my understanding of the lives and identities of British Asian footballers. Through this combination of methods, I could begin to understand how British Asian footballers actually articulate and construct their identities in the context of the game.

The periods of observation that I undertook can be divided into two categories: those undertaken within the field – which formed the vast majority – and those outside of designated fieldwork hours. The dividing line between the two was at first obvious, yet I have since begun to appreciate that there is no clear demarcation of time within the research process. Observation becomes ostensibly a twenty-four hour activity and significant occurrences can take place at unlikely times and in unanticipated contexts. For example, I overheard the conversation of a group of young British Asian men on a London underground train focusing on Lee Bowyer and how they believed he has alienated the British Asian supporters of clubs he has played for¹⁹ (see Chapter Eight). Other observations were recorded in less-surprising locations, such as football stadia, where I overheard anti-British Asian discourses amongst supporters at professional matches that I was attending for my own pleasure. Most of my observations took place, however, during my visits to watch matches or coaching sessions involving British Asian players. These situations provided me with opportunities not simply to engage in further dialogues but also to closely observe the behaviours of young, British Asian men when playing and watching football. On one hand, I was able to hold informal conversations and discussions with those participants that I was unable to interview, and a number of people were able to offer helpful insights into my research or qualify anything that I did not understand. On the other, my visits allowed me to observe British Asians in as natural and apposite a context as possible for this research, i.e. actually playing

football, and thus I was able to gain first-hand evidence and experience of the specific activities and lifestyles that I was researching.

At one club I was allowed to “access all areas” on matchdays, including the changing rooms and was thus party to the complete matchday experience. This provided me with an opportunity not merely to mix with the players but also to witness the interaction and dialogue between them: their banter and discussions on football and their social lives. I was also able to observe the interface between British Asian players and white or African-Caribbean teams, and the behaviours of referees or visiting supporters in matches involving British Asian teams. I watched matches from the sidelines, which meant that I was positioned close to the action on the pitch and was also able to mingle with coaches, substitutes and supporters. Watching matches was always very informal and, apart from tense periods during a match, the atmosphere was very relaxed. The inevitably more formal ambience that characterises a one-on-one interview was noticeably absent, whilst many players and supporters, despite being aware of my presence as an outsider, were unaware of my role as researcher. For my part, carrying out observation of an activity I would be normally watching on a Saturday afternoon anyway enabled me to relax and become less self-conscious of my role.

My observations allowed me to gain information about issues that participants might not have been conscious of, or had not thought relevant enough to raise within an interview. For example, I became aware of a stringent process of “self-policing” – more than I have witnessed in my own amateur football career – within many teams with regard to indiscipline on the pitch. Older members (either players or spectators) would seek to calm abusive or violent players in order to prevent recriminations from the referee and/or to preserve the reputation of the club. Observing games from the sidelines also meant that I was often party to conversations revolving around topics that would probably be deemed inappropriate or too personal to mention within an interview. For example, on occasions references were made to drinking alcohol, gambling and watching pornographic

movies. Although many of the conversation topics were not directly related to football, they enabled me to gain a greater insight into the social lifestyles of the participants. These non-footballing dialogues enabled me to contextualise football-related data and were of great help to me in theorising early twenty-first century British Asian male identities and the position of football within them.

I was also able to view British Asian football in a wider context and to appreciate its interface with different aspects of identity. For example, during one particular visit to the Sikh team, a celebration was being held at the local *gurdwara* (Sikh temple) to honour the birthday of Guru Nanak, the founding father of Sikhism. This was also the day that the players of the football team affiliated to this *gurdwara* took the trophies that had been won over the last year to the *gurdwara* for presentation during the service. I was invited to take part in this ceremony and despite being extremely nervous about making a religious *faux pas*, I followed the acts undertaken by my hosts. I took off my shoes and adorned one of the headscarves that those not wearing turbans are required to wear and, following the procession of the other team members, I presented a trophy, made the obligatory financial offering, and received a blessing and the *langar*²⁰ from the congregation leader in return. This provided an enriching experience in terms of contextualising my research, particularly by demonstrating how South Asian ethnicities and traditions are fused with twenty-first century British football cultures and lifestyles.

My visits to watch British Asian football teams also increased the likelihood of meeting prominent club members. I was quite fortunate that when attending a match I would often be told that “[x] is here today. He would be really helpful for your research”. These occasions also enhanced my ability to gain and maintain access, thus facilitating my inclusion into the clubs that I was researching. On one specific outing, whilst watching a match involving the Pakistani club in inner London, I found that being able to obtain the scores of Premiership football matches on my mobile phone proved extremely popular with other spectators. It was an excellent “ice breaker” and assisted me in getting to know the members of this club. At other

times I would make myself useful by, for example, helping to put up the goalposts or doing other matchday chores. I even used my car to drive players to matches, to take one player's nephews to football training, and to help take another player's daughter to nursery. Once I was approached by a player who was hoping to take a degree in Sports Sciences. I took the time to talk him through his options and assess what might be the most suitable degree and university for him. All of these occasions were opportunities to show my gratitude to particular participants for their hospitality and time. They were also of great significance in the research process in terms of gaining access to other participants – for example, when making a first contact I was able to inform them that “I know [x]” or “I was given your name by [y]”.

Further observations were carried out during two matches featuring the Indian national team, against Fulham at Craven Cottage in July 2000 and against Brentford at Griffin Park in July 2001. My attendance at these games was predominantly to gauge “mainstream” supporter reactions to, and interpretations of, participation by South Asians in football (see Chapter Three). During the periods before and after each game, I made observations outside the grounds, whilst the matches themselves were watched from the “home” terraces – the Hammersmith and Ealing Road, respectively. As a young, white male I was able to mingle amongst the home supporters with ease yet, in contrast to my visits to watch amateur British Asian teams, I had to be more covert in recording my observations. I did not particularly want people to know that I was recording their dialogues – I neither wanted to reveal myself as a researcher nor to give the impression that I was an undercover police officer – and so significant observations were mentally noted until half-time or the end of the game, when I was able to transfer them immediately to a field notebook without arousing suspicion.

Rhetoric versus reality: analysing the documents of the anti-racist football movement

The period during which I undertook my research was dominated by a number of events and issues related to issues of 'race', for example, the urban unrest of summer 2001, the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, debates about asylum seekers and the citizenship of migrants, and regular incidents of racism on the football terraces, both in Britain and Europe. For the purposes of my research, it was as necessary to be aware of these current affairs as it was to be familiar with contemporary sociological literature. A considerable amount of the background information for this thesis thus comes from various media sources, such as newspapers, television programmes and e-mail bulletins. Furthermore, together with the ethnographic methods already discussed, a substantial process of document analysis was also undertaken. This was carried out exclusively in relation to the anti-racist football organisations and was used both to gain pre-interview information – in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of their work and to be able to ask questions on specific issues, such as rationales, achievements and funding – and to provide a critique of their activities in general. Atkinson and Coffey (1997: 45) point out that:

Many organisations...have ways of representing themselves collectively to themselves and to others. It is, therefore, imperative that our understanding of contemporary society – whether our own near-at-hand, or one to which we are strange and distant – incorporates these processes and products of self-description.

The primary means through which anti-racist football organisations and their members publicise themselves and disseminate their objectives, opinions and achievements is through the production of documents, such as newsletters, reports, flyers and posters, and so an analysis of these documents was essential to my investigation.

Documents are based on a particular reading and representation of events, realities and ideologies. The processes by which they are constructed, and the audiences at which they are targeted, provide us with a great deal of information

about organisations and members. Yin (1984: 80) argues that ‘the usefulness of...documents is not based on their necessary accuracy or lack of bias. In fact, documents must be carefully used and should not be accepted as literal recordings of events that have taken place’. It is important to recognise that the documents produced by anti-racist football organisations are done so in support of specific agendas, for example, to gain exposure or to generate funding. Any examination must, therefore, be undertaken in a critical manner. Engaging in such an analysis provided me with an insight into the political, ideological and financial factors that subtly influence the involvement of members of these organisations. It also enabled me to investigate the extent to which rhetoric matches reality and whether or not the information provided is a true reflection of the motives and achievements of particular organisations²¹. A distinct advantage is that the publicity and information documents of anti-racist football organisations are usually readily available and at little or no cost. The sources of information included the reports, magazines, newsletters, press releases, pamphlets, websites, educational resources and e-mail bulletins of anti-racist football organisations; football fanzines; matchday programmes; and club “equal opportunity” policies.

They think it’s all over...it is now: life beyond the field

The completion of my doctoral thesis represents two achievements: the attainment of the qualification that will hopefully enable me to embark on a career in academe or a related professional field, and the authorship of a document that will hopefully enhance knowledge and understanding of the significance of football in the lifestyles and identities of young, British Asian men. Perhaps, in retrospect, I feel that at the start of my research the former criterion was my main objective, yet at the end, I am equally keen that the latter comes to fruition. In particular, I hope that through writing this thesis I have managed to provide a forum for those players who might otherwise be denied an opportunity to speak about their lives as British Asian footballers. I hope that what I have written is a valid reflection of the attitudes and beliefs of the participants and that I have interpreted and represented their identities and lifestyles in an accurate manner. Denzin (1997: 28n) suggests that a valid

account is one that is ‘plausible, credible, and relevant’ and I would like to think that my thesis meets all these criteria. It has always been my intention that any account I produce should be of benefit to the people whose lives are represented within it and whose participation enabled me to undertake the research. I feel obliged, therefore, to ensure that what I have written does not just gather dust in a library or is viewed only by other middle-class academics. I hope that what I have produced might also have an influence on those anti-racist football campaigns aimed at increasing the inclusion of British Asians in professional football and that the suggestions I have made might lead to the development of more relevant and appropriate policies. In this capacity, what I have written might make uncomfortable reading for some individuals, particularly those involved in the anti-racist football movement who are unaccustomed to such critical analysis. I believe that I have had the courage to discuss contentious topics that others may have shied away from, and that consequently I have been able to address the most pertinent issues facing British Asian players. The inquisitive, critical nature of my research may have annoyed some people – during interviews or through what I have written – but I knew that this would be an inevitable consequence if I wanted to produce a good thesis and a piece of work that, in time, might contribute to a more effective and relevant anti-racist football movement.

Terminology

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, British Asian players were asked to provide a term by which they wished to be referred to throughout this thesis. In the vast majority of cases, participants were not unduly concerned and allowed me to use my own terminology. In most instances, players are thus referred to simply as ‘Asian’, although two older Sikh players suggested that ‘Indian’ was more appropriate for them. Players are referred to as ‘professional’ if, at some stage of their career, they have been registered at a professional club. In the majority of cases they have not (yet) played for the first-team.

Notes

- ¹ The term “riot” is purposely avoided within this thesis when discussing the violent street encounters involving British Asians during the summer of 2001. This is because its ambiguous usage in contemporary popular and media parlance has reduced its explanatory power. As Knopf (1970: 20) states, ‘The continued media use of the term [riot] contributes to an emotionally charged climate in which the public tends to view every event as an “incident”, every incident as a “disturbance” and every disturbance as a “riot”’. Instead, the term “urban unrest” is used throughout this thesis.
- ² The minority ethnic population of Brighton and Hove is gradually increasing – for example, the 1990s saw an influx of Sudanese Asians – although, according to the 2001 Census, the city is still 94% white.
- ³ North Kensington has been the location of one of London’s most significant African-Caribbean communities – in both numerical and cultural terms – since the 1950s (see Phillips and Phillips 1999).
- ⁴ Despite the fact that Liverpool is home to one of Europe’s oldest black communities (Small 1991), by the 1980s, only two African-Caribbean players had played for Everton – Mike Trebilcock and Cliff Marshall, both of whom made a handful of appearances, during the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. Ironically, Trebilcock’s last match for Everton was the 1966 FA Cup Final, in which he scored two goals in Everton’s 3-2 victory over Sheffield Wednesday.
- ⁵ I can clearly remember the disgust I felt standing on the away terraces at Highbury in the early 1990s, watching Everton play Arsenal, on hearing a large number of fellow “supporters” chanting ‘Everton are white, Everton are white, hello, hello’. Whilst racism has certainly decreased amongst Everton supporters – due, in no small part, to the heroic performances of black players, such as Kevin Campbell and Joseph Yobo – it is still sadly audible at some away matches.
- ⁶ In particular, credit must be given to the staff of *When Skies Are Grey* fanzine, who were active in moves to eradicate racism amongst Everton supporters. In particular, appropriating an idea used by players in Italy’s Serie A league, the fanzine produced t-shirts bearing the slogan *No Al Razismo* (No To Racism).
- ⁷ The terms “oral testimony” and “life history” are often used interchangeably, yet the former is deemed more appropriate here. Whilst the participants in this research certainly spoke of historical

matters, e.g. their migrations or their early football careers, the main emphasis was on their thoughts and interpretations of current phenomena. It is felt that the term “oral testimony” is more reflective of this.

- ⁸ One participant came from a general anti-racist organisation not involved with football.
- ⁹ Football academies were introduced in the late 1990s under Football Association (FA) guidelines. By the end of 2002, there were thirty-eight accredited academies in England and Wales.
- ¹⁰ FITC schemes were originally established in 1979 under the auspices of the Footballers’ Further Education and Vocational Training Society (FFEVTS), although it was not until the late 1980s that their role was of major significance. There is little consensus as to the exact role of these schemes (see Watson 2000), yet their broad aim is to improve the participation of disadvantaged minorities, both in activities relating specifically to the club and in general programmes of sport, leisure and recreation. For example, the scheme at Brentford FC aims ‘to return to the population at large irrespective of background, position or ability, the facilities and expertise to provide sports based courses and activities for anyone who wishes to partake’ (Brentford FC 1997: 1).
- ¹¹ Contacting professional clubs directly is the only means of ascertaining if any British Asian players are registered with them. Hann (1999) provided a list of seventeen British Asian players at professional clubs (from under-10 level upward). However, the stringent recruitment procedures of professional football mean that a player might only be registered with an academy for a short period of time before being released and joining another club or returning to a lower level of the game. I am not suggesting that the responses I received were necessarily accurate in all cases. Whilst replies often came from academy staff, sometimes my inquiries were dealt with by secretaries, who were unlikely to possess the specific information I required.
- ¹² The British Asian football tournaments that are held during the summer months are predominantly for British Asian players, but clubs are allowed to field a certain quota of non-Asian players.
- ¹³ The prefix for the title of this section is a pun on the title of the song *White Man in Hammersmith Palais* by The Clash. The song describes the experience of a white man visiting London’s reggae clubs in the late 1970s. Bangla Town is the nickname given to the area surrounding Brick Lane, in Spitalfields, East London. It is the cultural centre of Britain’s Bangladeshi communities.

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- ¹⁴ Macey (2002: 43n), for example, cites a case where the Foreign Office threatened to remove funding for a research project unless a researcher of Bangladeshi origin replaced the proposed white researcher.
- ¹⁵ The fieldwork with British Asians took place in the south of England and not in the northern towns that had witnessed urban unrest.
- ¹⁶ Referring to “whiteness” as a personally-specific characteristic is intended to convey the idea that it is not a homogenous, undifferentiated aspect of social identity. Indeed the identities and cultures that comprise “whiteness” are as complex and multifarious as those that form notions of “Asianness” or “blackness” (see Ware and Back 2002).
- ¹⁷ Ali G is a comedy television character created and played by Sacha Baron-Cohen. The “joke” involves Cohen (himself a white, Jewish, Cambridge University graduate) dressing up in clothing, and behaving and speaking in a manner, stereotypically associated with urban black British youth. Cohen’s failure to elucidate the true identity of the character means that no-one is entirely sure of either the ethnicity of Ali G himself or that which he is trying to appropriate – it has been suggested that he is a parody of white people adopting black culture or a British Asian man trying to “act black”.
- ¹⁸ For example, one respondent replied, ‘No comment on that. I wouldn’t know. Homophobia? Pass. I don’t know. I don’t want to comment on that one’ [Interview with Youth Development Officer, Premier League club, 14th November 2001].
- ¹⁹ Lee Bowyer, then of Leeds United, was part of a group of men – including some of his team-mates – that seriously assaulted Sarfraz Najeib, a student from Rotherham, outside the Majestyk night-club in Leeds in January 2000. Unlike his team-mate Jonathan Woodgate, Bowyer was acquitted, yet previous misdemeanours – both on and off the pitch – have meant that he has retained a reputation of being violent and a racist. His signing for West Ham United in January 2003 led to great condemnation by a number of the club’s British Asian supporters (see Chapter Eight).
- ²⁰ The *langar* is the meal served at every *gurdwara* (Sikh temple) to ensure that all people, regardless of caste, eat the same food communally.
- ²¹ This disparity between anti-racist rhetoric and what is actually done to eradicate racism in football was highlighted in November 2003, when the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) announced

that, although the majority of professional clubs publicly claim to be committed to fighting racism, only a handful had responded to its questionnaire on racism in football (Chaudhary 2003a).

Chapter 3

***Did you hear the one about the Asian footballer?* Popular explanations of the under-representation of British Asians in professional football, and the actual significance of football in British Asian communities**

Introduction

I went to [a trial] at [a Premier League] Football Club, you know. I was chatting to a guy across the road who's got friends that work there, that come from [that city]. I asked them for directions to this place. They were laughing at the fact that an Asian lad had trials with [that club]. They found it such an amazing [thought], you know, *how can it be?!...* So you can see how much of a big thing it was, not just for myself, but for people outside.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

It was funny once because we were playing [the] Derby [youth team]. We were warming up. Obviously my mates and the club itself, you know, they all knew about my background and so on. We played Derby and this young lad ran out with a turban on and we were playing against him. And the lads started laughing because it was, you know, their first impression, probably the first time they'd ever seen that...I don't think it was racism, I think it was just the unknown really because they'd not seen that before, you know. And the lad could play. The lad was a good player. But even to myself I'd never seen that before. I don't know where he's playing now or if he still plays, but it was one of them things where, you know, it could have been classed as racism but I knew my friends close enough to know that it wasn't that, it was just probably the unexpected of seeing that on a football field.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional/current semi-professional player, 5th March 2002]

The under-representation of British Asians in professional football is a topic that has generated heated debate from the higher echelons of academe to the public house. In fact, the majority of people who showed an interest in this thesis – friends, family, colleagues and students – were keen to offer their own explanations for the absence of British Asian professional footballers and would often assert their opinions in a confident, self-assured manner. Some individuals were sufficiently convinced of the sociological adequacy of their beliefs to suggest that a three-year ethnographic research project in this area was actually an unnecessary task. For these people, the reason was clear: the under-representation of British Asians in professional football is simply a manifestation of a historically-grounded, diametrically-opposed relationship between British Asian communities and sporting participation.

Whilst western racial ideologies have labelled African-Caribbeans “natural” sports people (Hoberman 1997, Entine 2000), British Asians have been categorised as the (non-) sporting ‘Other’. In “common sense” ideologies, the African-Caribbean body is perceived to be the epitome of athletic prowess and, indeed, genetically predisposed for success (Kane 1971). Conversely, sport is viewed as an arena in which British Asians lack both the competence and desire to participate (Fleming 2001). These perceptions have contributed to and, in turn, been substantiated by, three main phenomena. Firstly, in the 1970s and 1980s, many school teachers adhered to popular stereotypes regarding the different physical and intellectual qualities of African-Caribbean and British Asian pupils. Consequently, the former were channelled towards sporting activities, whilst the latter were encouraged to concentrate on more academic disciplines (Carrington 1983, Carrington and Wood 1983, Hayes and Sugden 1999). Secondly, popular beliefs about the sporting abilities of British Asians and African-Caribbeans have been corroborated by the differential inclusion of these groups at elite level. In professional football, for example, African-Caribbeans – who comprise one per cent of the British population – represent between ten and twenty per cent of players. In contrast, despite the fact that they outnumber African-Caribbeans in the overall population (comprising nearly four per cent)¹, only three British Asians played first-team football during the 2002-03 season. Thirdly, these perceptions are underpinned by a media fetishisation of the sexually powerful, athleticised African-Caribbean male body (Mercer 1994, Hall 1998) and the absence of positive British Asian male sporting imagery.

Due to a widespread belief in the meritocratic nature of British sport, the under-representation of British Asians in professional football is frequently perceived to be a result of a lack of participation at lower levels of the game. As the anecdotes at the beginning of this chapter testify, British Asians have been constructed as the archetypal ‘Other’ (Said 1985) – antithetical to, and incompatible with, the structures of English football². This represents a substantial misconception, as a burgeoning culture of British Asian amateur football has existed since the migrations of the 1950s and 1960s. However, British Asian players and clubs are often

affiliated to associations and leagues that are organised on a predominantly – if not exclusively – British Asian basis. Few people outside this environment are aware of its existence, and so stereotypes about a lack of interest and aptitude in football by British Asians continue to receive widespread verification. These processes of ‘Othering’ are further substantiated by the fact that British Asian football culture receives little serious media attention outside the British Asian press, whilst any mainstream coverage that it does get tends to be irreverent and “humorous” in character, preventing any substantial analysis of involvement in the game itself³. Due to the fact that British Asian football tends to be represented in this manner, the question that is often asked is, “Why do British Asians not play football?”. Instead, the real issue is the massive imbalance between levels of participation by British Asians in amateur and professional football, and so the question that requires investigation is, “Why are British Asians not making the transition into the professional game?”.

Popular “explanations” of the under-representation of British Asians in professional football can be divided into two broad categories: one that might be labelled *structural* and the other that relates more to *agency* (cf. Giddens 1984). The former category includes arguments about inappropriate physicality and the constraining influences of religion and dietary practices. The other explanation cites the role of individuals as deliberating agents and purports that whilst British Asians are *capable* of playing football, they are either uninterested in the game or they prioritise achievement in other areas, such as education or business. Despite the differences between these branches of popular “explanation”, they share an inherent essentialism. Both discourses implicitly refer to *the* British Asian “community” and locate British Asians as a homogenous, monolithic entity that possesses a common “culture”. The factors that influence the participation of one individual are, therefore, seen to be representative of all British Asians.

The aim of this chapter is to examine how representations and explanations of the relationship between British Asians and sporting participation have manifested

themselves within both the popular imagination and the context of professional football. The latter part of the chapter shows that, contrary to stereotypical images of “Asianness”, football plays a significant role in the lifestyles of many young, British Asian men. Rather than revisiting what is becoming increasingly old ground and simply discussing the popularity of the sport, it is argued that, in the early twenty-first century, football is actively incorporated into the construction of distinct *British* Asian identities. In this regard, it is demonstrated that any analysis of the lives of young, British Asian men must be undertaken within a framework that appreciates the sensibilities of locality, generation, class and contemporary social practices.

One or the Other: constructions of ‘Otherness’

It is often assumed that the act of stereotyping a group and defining them as ‘Other’ (Said 1985) is simply a form of categorisation. This represents a misconception of the ideology underpinning this process. To stereotype a group is not simply to render it distinct from the ‘Self’. This process always takes place within a specific context, period or location, and representations of the ‘Other’ cannot be constructed in isolation with no point of reference. For a group to be defined as ‘Other’, perceptions of its characteristics and attributes are not sufficient. It is necessary to be equally certain of those belonging to the ‘Self’, for this is the model that is seen to represent normality and is the position from which degrees of ‘Otherness’ are gauged. Processes of stereotyping and ‘Othering’ are therefore inextricably linked to relations of power and are undertaken not just to demarcate but also to undermine and stigmatise the subject group. As Ross points out, when ethnicity forms the basis of ‘Othering’, it is a case of ‘the dominant looking at the subordinate: how *they* are different from us rather than how *we* are different from them...where whiteness is taken as the profoundly unproblematic norm against which all “others” are measured’ (cited in Pilkington 2003: 183). The stereotype thus acts as a means of control, limiting the freedom and progression of individuals within a given context (Fiske 1993).

West (1999: 261) argues that minority groups tend to suffer from a ‘relative lack of [cultural and political] power to present themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies’. British Asians lack both the specific sporting success and, more generally, the socio-political power required to overcome and contradict these dominant propositions. Their relative powerlessness – and their inability to break into the professional game – means that they have been unable to challenge definitions and manifestations of “tradition” and “normality” at all levels of English football. As Sampson points out, ‘The Other cannot be permitted to have a voice, a position, a being of its own, but must remain mute or speak only in the ways permitted by the dominant discourse’ (cited in Pickering 2001: 76). Hegemonic representations of British Asians as the (non-) sporting ‘Other’ have, accordingly, continued to receive widespread corroboration.

Body language: socio-historical representations and interpretations of South Asian physicality

When East was East: Racial science and the British Raj

Present day stereotypes of the sporting competencies of British Asians are undoubtedly linked to a variety of contemporary phenomena. However, it is possible to trace the antecedents of many of these stereotypes back to the period of the British Raj in India, between the mid-eighteenth century and 1947. This is particularly the case with perceptions of physicality, which are inextricably linked to historically-grounded theories of ‘race’. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, European academic and intellectual circles were dominated by an obsession with the notion of ‘racial science’ (Kohn 1995, Malik 1996, Banton 1998). Various attempts were made to classify, understand and, most importantly, subjugate non-white populations within the British Empire. Whilst there was clear evidence of ‘scientific racism’ in the preceding century, it was from the mid-1800s onwards that the ideology began to harness popular support. For example, in 1903, writer and Oxford alumnus, Cecil Headlam, claimed that any Briton visiting India would soon ‘cease to be surprised at the resemblance of human beings to monkeys, when you see them

altruistically picking at each other's heads, and otherwise behaving like their cousins in the Zoo' (cited in Williams 2001: 18). He added that one also needs to understand that:

You must be very careful how you hit a man in India. Nearly every native suffers from an enlarged spleen, and any blow to the body is likely to prove fatal...It is best to carry a cane and administer rebuke therewith upon the calves or shins, which are tender and not usually mortal (ibid.).

It is no coincidence that the burgeoning interest in racial classification and, in particular, constructions of the Indian⁴ 'Other' took place contemporaneously with the establishment of British colonial rule. On a micro level, British people were brought into direct contact for the very first time with the indigenous Indian population. It is also the case that the processes of modernisation and empire building that were intrinsic to the colonisation of the subcontinent were unequivocally connected to dominant European theories of racial and cultural difference.

Colonialism and, in particular, the establishment of the British Raj in India, allowed the British – who viewed themselves as modern and civilised – the opportunity to contrast themselves with those populations that they perceived to be backward and inferior. As Said (1985: 232) argues:

Race theory, ideas about primitive origins and primitive classifications, modern decadence, the progress of civilization, the destiny of the white (or Aryan) races, the need for colonial territories – all these were elements in the peculiar amalgam of science, politics, and culture whose drift, almost without exception, was always to raise Europe or a European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind.

The dominant ideology underpinning these processes was the notion of 'Orientalism'. Through its construction of the world as a longitudinally-divided binary unit, Orientalism 'was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")' (ibid.: 43). The British categorised themselves as a "healthy race", for it was believed that they possessed characteristics such as

bravery, courage, physical strength and vigour, the very attributes necessary for establishing and maintaining a global empire. Conversely, the Indian ‘race’ was seen to be bereft of such qualities. The British were, therefore, able to contend that this disparity measured the extent to which their level of civilisation was a consequence of their superior technology, sophistication, and rational thought and behaviour (Pickering 2001). The colonisers used these differences to justify both their position in the racial hierarchy and the need to subject indigenous peoples to a civilising western influence (Dimeo 2001b). In fact, the civilising of other ‘races’ was not simply seen as necessary; it was believed to be a religious *obligation* of the colonising powers.

Central to this civilising mission was the “moralisation” and Christian religious indoctrination of the Indian colonial subject. These processes attributed great importance to the “games ethic” and the role of sport and physical education (Mangan 2001), and thus beliefs about physicality and representations of the body operated as primary agents in colonial constructions of the Indian ‘Other’. This was especially the case with football. For example, a 1909 issue of *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* reported that:

Association football as a regimental game in the native Army of India is in its infancy, and is only just beginning to find favour. The reason for this is probably that the sepoy [Indian soldier], as a rule, has not the build necessary for a first-class player...The recruit, when he first emerges from the jungle or village, has rather less control over his legs than a newborn camel, but in a surprisingly short time he learns how to kick and run (cited in Vasili 2000: 156).

As Mills and Dimeo (2003: 115) point out, ‘Fitness for football in particular and sport in general were important idioms through which these representations of “different” Indian bodies were constructed’. This is unsurprising for, as Benson argues, ‘The body is...the *medium* through which messages about identity are transmitted’ (cited in Hargreaves 2000: 185). Similarly, Alter (1994: 24) points out that sporting images are not just *allegories* of wider racial ideologies, for the sporting body ‘may be seen, not simply as a signifier of meaning, but as a subject actor in a larger drama of culture and power’. It is not coincidental that the attributes

associated with a strong, “manly” population were also those that were perceived to contribute to success on the sports field. Consequently, a mutually reinforcing cycle developed which maintained that the less civilised ‘races’ lacked the characteristics needed to compete in sporting endeavours and that the sporting (non-) performances of Indians were symptomatic of deficiencies in their all-round character (see Armstrong & Bates 2001).

“We shall fight like lions”: the special case of the Sikhs⁵

Whilst the Indian ‘race’ in general was positioned well below Europeans in the racial hierarchy, groups such as Gurkhas and Punjabis were seen to be on a higher level than other Indians. The primary criterion on which this demarcation was based was physicality. Bengali Hindus⁶, for example, were widely constructed as weak and effeminate (Dimeo 2002a). G.W. Steevens, a nineteenth century journalist claimed that:

The Bengali’s leg is either skin and bones; the same size all the way down, with knocking knobs for knees, or else it is very fat and globular, also turning in at the knees, with round thighs like a woman’s. The Bengali’s leg is the leg of a slave (cited in Talbot 2000: 22).

In direct contrast, the Sikhs of the Punjab were lionised due to their perceived qualities as both warriors and loyal British subjects. This was partly due to the influence of predominant eighteenth century beliefs regarding the effects of environmental factors on human genetics. Due to the cold weather and difficult terrain that they endured, the ‘races’ of northern India were believed to be hardier and more courageous than their southern counterparts. Conversely, the sub-tropical heat of southern India meant that the ‘races’ from these states were perceived as weak and indolent (Dimeo 2002a). Perceptions of Punjabi physicality were further substantiated after the near defeat of the British Army in the Anglo-Sikh wars, which led to Sikhs being designated as a “martial race” and awarded a privileged position within the British Army⁷. Sikh soldiers subsequently joined the Allied Forces for the First and Second World Wars, enhancing their image of being physically adept and loyal to the British regime⁸. This was achieved predominantly through their

venerable role in warfare⁹ yet it was also complemented by the fact that their residence in army garrisons enabled them to learn and play football, an activity that was central to colonial constructions of the body (Mills and Dimeo 2003).

The extent to which historical representations of the South Asian body have influenced contemporary sporting imagery is unclear but there is certainly a degree of continuity. Evidence suggests that Sikhs are a special case because they are central to modern manifestations of these historically-based stereotypes. In parallel to their reputation within the Raj, it appears that in contemporary sport, Sikhs differ from other British Asian groups in that they *are* sometimes perceived to possess the requisite physicality for contact sports. For example, England's 2002 Commonwealth Games wrestling squad included two Sikhs, Jatinder Singh¹⁰ and Amerjit Singh Tutt. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the British Asian players that have been involved in professional football have also been Sikhs, e.g. Jaswinder Juttla, Nevin Saroya, Amrit Sidhu, Bobby Singh, Harpal Singh and Shinda Singh. Significantly, several of the Sikh players that were interviewed for this research believe that Sikhs are more likely to become professional footballers than other British Asians. They proposed that their involvement in professional football is a consequence not only of the substantial involvement of Sikhs in amateur football but is also a result of advantageous *genetic* factors¹¹. For example, one (Sikh) 'Indian' amateur player stated that:

The Sikhs, together with the Muslims, are the [physically] dominant Asians really, okay. You'll find that the Sikhs and the Muslims are stronger than, say, the Hindus, you know, physically and more alert. The Hindus, you'll find, would tend to go towards more educational [pursuits]. That way the Sikhs and the Muslims are more sport-orientated. I think to myself hang-on, you've named these [British Asian players] and you're right, you know, amongst them they are mainly Sikhs... *To me that looks as if they are the stronger breed.*

[Interview with, 5th February 2002]

Another player added that:

In terms of the biological thing, there is possibly evidence of, you know, the Singh name is a lion, we are lion-hearted and yes, our physical build is a lot bigger than the Bengalis or the Muslims and so forth.

[Interview with (Sikh) 'Asian' ex-semi-professional player, 19th March 2002]

Whilst one would want to reject bio-genetic, deterministic arguments, theories exist that equate poverty with human morphology. The above player appeared to be alluding to the fact that Bengal is one of the poorest regions in the Indian subcontinent and was perhaps suggesting that this contributed to the tendency for Bengalis to possess comparatively smaller physiques than Punjabis. Two other players spoke of an over-arching Sikh "culture" and argued that this has enabled Sikhs to surmount any impediments they have faced when playing football. For example, one player posited that:

If I have any thoughts on that, it's got to be around saying that there's probably a cultural issue in that Sikhs as a caste [sic] are actually regarded as warriors: fearless, defenders of human rights, justice, equality...They're certainly more prone to be sort of a fearless race in terms of when it comes to competing, physically, in a game, and football is a contact sport. Whereas there is a stereotype that perhaps those of Bengali origin – because of the part of India they come from – tend to be manual labourer-orientated and that perhaps makes them less, you know, willing to take risks and be more obedient.

[Interview with (Sikh) 'Asian' amateur player, 23rd April 2002]

Similar sentiments were proposed by another player who stated that:

I just feel that Sikhs are more accommodating and more receptive to the local community and being, you know, willing to integrate. The Sikh culture is to be able to live and let live and get on with people, and try to integrate. There's no such thing as discrimination in the Sikh religion. Everybody is equal regardless of their beliefs or colour, whereas possibly with other beliefs or backgrounds, they are restricted as to what they can or can't do. Particularly say, as an example, the Muslim people have got certain things they're not allowed to do and that sort of prohibits them from moving into more integrated environments. But with the Sikhs, we are that much more tolerant and we will accept, you know, a certain element of abuse and discrimination because that's our religion. We will accept it and we will try and overcome it peacefully rather than any other way.

[Interview with (Sikh) 'Asian' ex-semi-professional player, 19th March 2002]

There is no evidence that these specific images have directly influenced those involved in recruiting potential professional players in Britain, yet the above discussion highlights how British sport operates as an arena for the articulation of Western racial ideologies. It also demonstrates how particular British Asian groups support the distinctions employed by the British during the Empire and refer to social hierarchies based not only on class and caste but also on issues such as physicality.

Fighting back? Changing representations of British Asian physicality

During the latter decades of the twentieth century, the families of the South Asian men who had settled in Britain in the 1960s came to join them and a cohort of second-generation migrants were born. Subsequently, an increasing number of young British Asians began to enter the British education system and, within the discipline of Physical Education, in particular, inveterate colonial stereotypes started to re-emerge. Physicality was again the central tenet and the following claims were fairly widespread: ‘Asian children have low ball skills, low co-ordination and are weak’; “Asian...children dislike the cold”; “Asians are too frail for contact sports”; “Asian children dislike contact sports but excel in individual skill sports such as badminton”; and “Asian boys generally prefer non-contact games” (cited in Fleming 1995: 38-9). These perceptions were adhered to by both teachers and other pupils (Connolly 1998). In an era in which the assimilation of minority ethnic pupils was the principal pedagogic ideology, although it was acknowledged that British Asians did participate in some sports, they remained the non-football playing ‘Other’.

Stereotypical images of British Asian physicality also gained considerable credence within the sphere of professional sports, such as cricket (Malcolm 1997), rugby league (Long et al 1997) and, especially, football (Bains and Patel 1995). A perceived lack of physicality and masculinity amongst British Asian men began to form the basis of “explanations” for their under-representation in professional football. Branigan (2001), for example, contrasts the position of British Asians with African-Caribbeans and argues that whilst the physical attributes of the latter group

are now viewed as advantageous for participation in professional football, those of British Asians are not. Writing in *The Guardian* newspaper, she argues that:

In popular racist mythology, Arab and Asian men are weak, effeminate, unmanly. If the black “crime” is to be aggressively and uncontrollably male, the eastern equivalent is to be insufficiently so...It is no coincidence that Asians have failed to prosper in football, the sport that now espouses masculinity for British men (ibid.).

Certainly the stereotypical traits associated with the black male body – muscularity, strength, aggression and toughness – are also those that are seen to epitomise the credentials needed for participation in professional football (Carrington 2000)¹². This corresponds with Back et al’s (2001b) ‘structure of antipathy’. This schema contrasts the player attributes that are perceived by “traditional” supporters to be ideal for participation in English professional football with those that are seen to be anathema. The “normative preference” is for players to be ‘unpretentious, practical, tough and masculine’, whilst an aversion is shown to players that are seen to be ‘effeminate, weak, pretentious or fancy’ (ibid.: 131). Whilst this dichotomy ignores the popularity of players that fit into the latter category and is certainly less applicable than it was in the past¹³, a strong emphasis on toughness and masculinity remains in British football. Ironically, for many years African-Caribbean players were believed to lack “bottle”¹⁴, yet the “heart on their sleeve” playing styles of players such as Gary Bennett, Noel Blake, Cyrille Regis and Chris Whyte has meant that this stereotype has gradually been eroded. In contrast, due to their non-involvement in professional football, British Asians have been unable to combat stereotypical images and so they are often still believed to lack the tough, masculine qualities cited above¹⁵. This contention was occasionally advocated during the interviews for this research. For example, the Director of the Youth Academy at a Premier League club stated that:

I do put some substance behind the belief that, physically, certain types of people are more suitable to certain sports than others...I think that Afro-Caribbean players are particularly suited to be footballers. Whether Asians are or not I don’t know, but I’ve yet to see evidence [that they are].

[Interview, 16th January 2002]

However, the opinion that British Asians are less suited for contact sports than African-Caribbeans appears to be becoming increasingly residual, not just amongst British Asians themselves but also amongst the predominantly white members of the professional football community. Elite participation by British Asian men in contact sports – for example, Adnan Ahmed, Michael Chopra, Zesh Rehman, Harpal Singh and Anwar Uddin playing professional football; Ikram Butt¹⁶ playing rugby league for England; Jawaid Khaliq winning the IBO (International Boxing Organisation) world welterweight title; Zaf Shah representing England at Tai Kwon-do; Kuljit Singh Degun winning the British national heavyweight title in full-contact San Shou; and Sikhs wrestling for England in the Commonwealth Games – appears to be reflected in a symbolic redefinition of the sporting abilities of the British Asian population as a whole.

A further challenge to conventional representations of British Asian physicality and masculinity has emanated from the urban unrest by young British Asian men during the summer of 2001. Britain is no stranger to violent rebellions by its minority ethnic populations yet, with the notable exceptions of outbreaks in Southall (in 1979 and 1981)¹⁷ and Manningham, Bradford (in 1995), these have predominantly involved African-Caribbeans. However, the involvement of British Asians in violent incidents during 2001 has led to a reconceptualisation of what it means to be a young, male, British Asian in early twenty-first century Britain. Key elements within this theoretical re-positioning are notions of physicality and masculinity (cf. Alexander 2000a). Since the urban unrest, the young, working-class British Asian male has been seen to undergo a transition from a “soft”/passive to a “hard”/aggressive, street-tough masculinity and, in this respect, has increasingly become a significant minority ethnic “folk devil”¹⁸ (cf. Cohen 2002). It will be interesting to observe the implications of these changing representations. It is possible that British Asians will be seen as fulfilling the ‘normative preferences’ of English football identified by Back et al (2001b) to a greater extent. Conversely, there is the danger that, as the Academy Director of one Premier League club

argued, club scouts might be unwilling to visit areas that witnessed urban unrest, due to feelings of discomfort and physical threat¹⁹.

Food for thought: perceptions of diet and religion as impediments to participation

In recent years there has been a fundamental change in the ideology underpinning popular “explanations” of the under-representation of British Asians in English professional football. In a direct parallel to the wider transition from biological to cultural racisms in late twentieth century western societies (see next chapter), explanations that revolve around perceived cultural, rather than physical, constraints have tended to receive greater credibility. The two main factors that have comprised “cultural” explanations have been diet and religion. In both cases, the British Asian population is located as a singular entity that possesses a homogenous, shared culture. These explanations are also characterised by what Baumann (1996: 1) calls ‘ethnic reductionism’. This approach has characterised many academic studies of British Asian communities and contributes to a situation where:

Whatever any “Asian” informant was reported to have said or done was interpreted with stunning regularity as a consequence of their “Asianness”, their “ethnic identity”, or the “culture” of their “community”. All agency seemed to be absent, and culture an imprisoning cocoon or a determining force (ibid.: 1).

The factors that are perceived to inhibit participation by British Asians in professional football are seen to be specifically a result of their “Asianness”, even though they may be issues that could possibly affect individuals of any ethnic group. For example, if a player states that his parents discouraged him from playing football, this is believed to be exclusively due to the fact that he is a British Asian and other factors that might have influenced this standpoint are not acknowledged. This leads to a reification of British Asian “culture” whereby all attitudes and behaviours are reduced to being purely the product of ethnicity. Consequently, explanations for the under-representation of British Asians in professional football become tautologous: they are under-represented *because they are British Asian*.

The cuisine of the early South Asian migrants was a key source of their ‘Otherness’ in the eyes of the indigenous British population. For a nation that had not long been free from the wartime rationing of staple foods, the introduction of a cuisine consisting of previously unheard of ingredients and emitting a pungent odour was deemed to be extremely un-British. The dietary and nutritional habits of South Asian migrants were believed to correlate directly with the perception of South Asians as being physically underdeveloped. Whilst scientific knowledge has shown that there is some degree of linkage between dietary intake and physical development, there was little evidence to suggest that all British Asians were malnourished. Nevertheless, the perception that the absence of British Asians in professional football was a result of abnormal dietary practices gained considerable support within the industry. For example, in 1995, Sheffield United manager Dave Bassett argued that, ‘The Asian build is not that of a footballer...It may well be that Asian ingredients in food, or their nutrition that they take, [is] not ideal for building up a physical frame’ (cited in Fleming 2001: 114). Similarly, former Luton Town coach Terry Westley claimed that, ‘They do have a problem with their build, which is very slight, and they don’t like the physical element. Their eating habits are also a problem’ (cited in Bains and Patel 1995: 6).

Not only are these arguments underpinned by a clear lack of evidence, but their inadequacy is also demonstrated by the way that terms such as “diet” or “nutrition” are referred to in their singular forms. The implicit perception is that *all* British Asians enjoy only their own common, standardised cuisine, and they are located in hegemonic discourses as ghettoised in hermetically-sealed units that deny them access to “western” commodities. This reification of culture is by no means exclusively the preserve of lay theorists for, as Turner (1993: 415) argues, it is also a ‘chronic anthropological tendency, born as much from the practice of intensive fieldwork as from theory, to focus on cultures as discrete units in isolation’. Ironically, by the end of the twentieth century, “going for a curry” was one of the most dominant British social culinary practices for the under-50s (Basu 2003). In

particular, dishes such as *vindaloo* have come to epitomise the “lager and curry” culture of the white, “new lad” generation²⁰ (Redhead 1997).

Religion is similarly perceived to be a universal constraining factor that inhibits British Asian participation in professional football²¹ and, as is the case with diet, arguments tend to be of an anecdotal nature. For example, a senior official at West Ham United claimed that, ‘You hear about Asians stopping practice to say their prayers’, whilst Clive Baker, former Youth Development Officer at Sheffield Wednesday, argued that, ‘There’s a theory they don’t like open changing rooms, their ethics don’t allow it’ (cited in Bains and Patel 1995: 6). Many of the “explanations” based on religion assume that there is a singular British Asian religion and, in parallel with wider social trends, this is normally constructed from stereotypical ideas of Islam and Muslims. In certain cases, religious practice may influence participation in football or other leisure pursuits but this is related to individuals’ personal religious choice and the degree of secularisation in different families and communities. In Turkey, players often wear swimming trunks in the showers in order to avoid contravening Islamic regulations about bearing the body in public, but this does not restrict their participation in football. In recent years, the Islamic nations of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Turkey have all qualified for the football World Cup, with the latter two progressing to the quarter- and semi-finals respectively in 2002. That religion and, particularly, the act of prayer, are still seen to impede the participation of British Asians in football is significant considering the popularity of, and achievements in, cricket – a game that lasts the best part of a day – in the subcontinent. Many people also perceive Islam to be the preserve of South Asia and the Middle East, and fail to acknowledge that many of the African footballers currently playing in Britain are Muslims. Islam has clearly not restricted the participation of these players. For example, as Arsenal’s Ivory Coast international Kolo Touré states, ‘My religion is just one part of my life...I pray when I can, when I have time. It’s not as if I’m in the dressing room and get down and pray’ (cited in Walker 2003c). However, popular stereotypes persist, fuelled by stories and anecdotes of particular incidents. For example, in 2002, Coventry City

manager Gary McAllister claimed that Youssef Safri (a Moroccan Muslim) did not play in a particular match because, as a result of fasting throughout the period of *Ramadan*²², he was unable to train vigorously (BBC Teletext, 2nd December 2002). Irrespective of the authenticity of this assertion, it provides support for ideas about the negative influence of Islam on sports participation²³, and is seen as representative of all Muslim – and, by implication, British Asian – footballers.

Appropriating the concept from Eisenstein (1984), Raval (1989) and Fleming (1994) argue that representations of British Asians in sport are dictated by a ‘false universalism’. As Fleming (ibid.: 164) argues, this ‘typically occurs when the process of logical induction is applied inappropriately, and on the basis of limited evidence huge generalizations are made’. This is epitomised by the essentialist representations of the inhibiting influences of diet and religion on the participation of British Asians in football. Intrinsic to these stereotypes are reified concepts of “culture” and “community” (see Baumann 1996), which contribute to the construction of British Asians as a homogenous entity, i.e. *the* British Asian community, that shares *a* common culture. These arguments also locate the lives of young British Asians as being inextricably linked to the traditions and the practices of the subcontinent, and fail to acknowledge the influences of British and global cultures on the identities and lifestyles of twenty-first century, young, British Asian men. A further discussion on the construction of British Asian identities is undertaken at the end of the chapter.

Talking about my generation: popular representations of British Asian parental attitudes towards sporting participation

The “explanations” cited so far for British Asian non-participation in football are attributed to the idea that British Asians are *unable* to play, either because they lack the requisite physicality or because of various constraining “cultural” factors. The other branch of “explanation” acknowledges the role of British Asians as agents and proposes that they actively *choose* to avoid involvement in the game. In particular, it is believed that a career in professional sport is anathema to British Asian parents

and that participation in recreational football is deprioritised behind other activities. For example, in their study of British Asian schoolboys in Greater Manchester, McGuire and Collins (1998: 82) conclude that, 'Quite simply, the overriding factor which prevented the boys from pursuing either extra-curricular sport or careers in sport was not racism but parental influence, especially at the secondary age level'. However, although parental influence may be a significant factor in inhibiting the involvement of British Asians in professional football, McGuire and Collins appear to over-emphasise its significance and show little appreciation of the nuances of generational differences.

In the period following the first major migrations from the subcontinent there was some degree of accuracy in the claim that British Asians valued academic pursuits above sporting ones. Irrespective of their previous qualifications, discriminatory employment practices meant that the original migrants were restricted to the lowest-skilled forms of work. Accordingly, it was perceived that through educational and vocational achievement, it could be possible to improve socio-economic status, and a number of Indians and East African Asians proved this to be true. In contrast, a career in professional sport was understandably seen as precarious and short-term. Not only did professional football represent a realm in which British Asians had little realistic chance of obtaining inclusion – African-Caribbeans were still under-represented at this stage – but, in comparison to today, the modest financial rewards the game offered²⁴ did not justify the risk of prioritising sport above education. Furthermore, as Ballard (1994b: 9-10) points out, long-term migration is primarily an '*entrepreneurial* activity' and the South Asian migrants of the 1960s had held a 'middling [social] status' in the subcontinent. It is possible that they eschewed careers in professional football because it was viewed as a working-class activity and, despite their low social status in Britain, they possessed middle-class aspirations²⁵. The following testimonies clearly demonstrate this standpoint:

My parents certainly weren't supportive... Things, when I was growing up, were somewhat different. My parents were very – how shall I say – very cautious about football and very cautious about the community out there, you know. There was a

lot of fear. When I was at school my PE teacher actually suggested that he could put me forward for a trial at Arsenal, just for a training session. When I came home and told my parents about it, it was a no-go area, you know. They kind of referred to so many people who had broken limbs and, you know, had never made anything out of football really. And football wasn't seen to be a profession, it was just a pastime. It was something that you did when you were young, really to keep yourself busy. So support from my parents never really arrived.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 16th March 2002]

To be honest, family-wise, I had very little support. I've got to be really honest. I don't think my parents ever watched me play. I think my mum came to see me play when I was about 36/37, my first cup final and she came to see me play. So they never had an interest.

[Interview with 'Indian' amateur player, 5th February 2002]

These players represent the older age range of the research sample – early thirties and early forties respectively – and their respective parents are first generation migrants. However, when the focus is turned to *second* and *third* generation British Asians, perceptions appear to have changed. Some British Asian amateur players still, somewhat simplistically, claim that a lack of parental support was the primary factor in inhibiting their opportunities to become professional footballers (see e.g. BBC TV 2001c), yet it is also the case that a number of professional players specifically cite the support of their parents as the *main* influence on their careers. For example, Harpal Singh states that, 'I have had the backing of my family, that is the number one reason why I am where I am today [as a professional player]' (cited in Bhatia 2003c). These sentiments were echoed by a number of players in this study who reflected on the encouragement they received from their parents, as follows:

My family [have supported me], definitely, because, like, they made a lot of sacrifices, like getting me boots and all sorts of football stuff. We were a bit short for money but they still stuck by me and got me stuff. So mostly my family supported me.

[Interview with current 'Asian' professional player, 11th February 2002]

I think [my family] have [been supportive], because we weren't really well off or nothing and they bought me the boots and that. My sisters' [needs] were sacrificed. Me and [my brother] used to get boots and shinpads and stuff like that. But now is the time I can, like, pay them back, know what I mean? My dad always said that he wanted us to be footballers. We didn't think we were going to be footballers but [when we were] about fourteen/fifteen he really pushed us. He never really said that "You've *got* to play football". He said "Do what *you* want to do" and it went from there.

[Interview with current 'Asian' professional player, 20th March 2002]

To be perfectly honest the supportive [people] have been my parents. They've certainly encouraged me to do what I felt was right and if football was the thing that I wanted to do then they've been right there supportive of it. I wish other people would actually come in and see that kind of scenario and set-up. They're saying that Asian parents aren't supportive and yet, you know, I wouldn't be where I am without that support.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-semi-professional player, 19th March 2002]

It is also suggested by many of the players who perhaps did not receive support from *their parents* to pursue a career in the game, that they would actively encourage *their sons* to do so. One 'Indian' amateur player stated that:

If somebody says I want to be a professional footballer, my father would have said, "Don't be silly", you know. Whereas if my kid said to me I want to be a professional footballer I'd say, "Yes, have a try". That's the generation gap.

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

Two other British Asian players made similar claims:

Our [generation's] parents wanted us to go and become doctors and engineers and whatsoever. We're talking about third and fourth generation now. Let's look at [my brother's] kids. If they turn around and said, "Look Dad, I want to play football", before they even say "I want to go and play football Dad", he will actually grab a ball and take them out in the garden and start kicking it about. And as soon as he realises that [his son] has got a bit of talent, he's going to do everything possible to make him into a football player.

[Interview with brother of 'Asian' ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

I think you have to see it in terms of the third or fourth generations here. I've got a young lad – he's twelve now – and if anybody tapped him up I'd be pushing him to go, you know, with a balance still to maintain education. But if somebody said to me, "Right, we want him to train for [a professional club], we want him to train for this", I'd encourage that, absolutely, no problem at all.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-semi-professional, 19th March 2002]

These statements suggest that it is more appropriate to view the issue as a case of generational difference rather than parental constraint. It is not disputed that in the past some British Asians have opposed a career in professional football for their sons, but this needs to be placed within the context of a recently migrated population that possessed alternative, more long-term, priorities when settling in this country. In the succeeding years, despite becoming more accustomed to British life, many first-generation migrants maintained this position. By way of explanation, it is useful to refer to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus*, i.e. the system of dispositions, tastes and preferences that underpin particular lifestyles. Prieur (2002) argues that, throughout the period of their new residence, older generations of migrants can often suffer greater degrees of alienation because their habituses are not adapted to the social structures that now surround them. She posits that:

For immigrant parents, the dispositions composing the habitus were acquired in a different social reality, and social change together with their displacement into another society has rendered them obsolete. It is frequently claimed...that those who have emigrated keep more to traditions than those who stayed home, because they have not perceived the changes in their country of origin, or because they need traditions in order to preserve their identity (ibid.: 58).

This supports the contention that negative perceptions of a career in football are generationally rather than ethnically specific. Whilst Baumann's (1996: 154) cautionary note that 'one should be wary...of playing a sociological generation game, as if the forging of an *Asian* post-immigration *culture* were the preserve of youngsters alone' is acknowledged, it is apparent that positive attitudes towards football have developed predominantly within more recent generations of British Asians. Whilst the habituses of first-generation migrants may have undergone little significant modification since their migration, those of second and third generation

British Asians need to be located in relation to their lives as young people in Britain. For these individuals their relations with older generations form only one of a number of factors – such as age, gender, class, youth culture and locality – that contribute to their British Asian identities, and they are increasingly able and willing to emulate the career patterns of their white peers rather than those of their parents and grandparents.

Social soccer: The importance of football within British Asian communities

Young man: “This lot are unbeaten on this tour so far”
Other man: “How many games have they played before this?”
Young man: “None!” [cue laughter amongst all]

This exchange was overheard during the match between Brentford and India at Griffin Park in July 2001. It took place within a group of four respectable looking white men and formed part of various dialogues of “banter” amongst the home supporters, who were generally expressing their amazement that football was actually played in India. In another incident, one man rhetorically asked, “What game is it they play? Kabaddi?²⁶ They’ll be bloody knackered holding their breath for ninety minutes!”. As Lloyd Owusu scored Brentford’s third goal of the match, a solitary – previously silent – supporter exclaimed “Stick to fucking cricket!”. Common to all of these exchanges is the belief that Indians and, by implication British Asians, do not play football and that other sports, such as cricket or kabaddi, are preferred.

The first major study to highlight the fallacy of such beliefs and to recognise the popularity of football within British Asian communities was Bains and Patel’s (1995) seminal *Asians Can’t Play Football* investigation. In particular, it demonstrates that, in relation to their total respective populations, participation²⁷ in football by British Asians (especially Bangladeshis) is at least comparable with participation by whites (ibid.: 7). This is especially significant when one considers that the general sporting participation rate of men from all British Asian backgrounds remains considerably lower than the national average (Sport England

2000: 2). A further example of the popularity of football amongst British Asians is provided by Bains and Johal (1998), who pay specific attention to the large-scale, prestigious British Asian football tournaments that occur during the summer months²⁸. Whilst the most significant developments in British Asian football – in terms of the establishment of leagues and the achievements of particular clubs – have undoubtedly taken place in the relatively recent past, a number of clubs have existed since the migrations of the 1960s, for example, Guru Nanak FC of Gravesend and Coventry Sporting FC (formed in the 1960s), and Paak United FC of Nelson (1970s).

The establishment of football clubs by South Asian migrants was influenced by the specific social conditions they experienced in the post-migration epoch. As it was originally intended that their settlement in Britain would only be temporary, the first South Asian migrants of the 1960s were almost exclusively men. Rather than being undertaken to escape poverty, the act of migration was seen as a means of career advancement. Money earned by the men would be sent home to their families in the subcontinent, not to contribute towards meeting everyday expenses, but for improving houses and buying land or machinery, thus improving their families' standing in the local social hierarchy (Ballard 1994b). The men planned to work until they had earned sufficient income and then return to the subcontinent to reap the benefits of their short, but assiduous, residence in Britain. Consequently, at this stage, it was not envisaged that their wives and families would join them. Playing football together was thus an accessible social activity for these young, "single" men. It was a way of socialising with fellow migrants and participation in a recreational capacity required little economic or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), only rudimentary facilities and, unlike many other dominant "white" leisure practices, such as dances and night-clubs, football was not seen as morally reprehensible.

For large numbers of South Asian migrants, settlement in Britain eventually became permanent for, as Ballard (1994b: 12) points out, 'the longer they stayed, the

more rooted and at ease they felt in their new British environment'. When their families came to join them there was thus already an inchoate British Asian football culture for their sons to participate in. For example, one 'Indian' amateur player stated that:

I came to this country when I was three years old. My father came here first, then me and my mother came here a year after...I went to a local school, just up the road from here and on this road there used to be quite a large population of Asians. I started playing football at about [age] nine, you know, mainly at school...There's a plot of land down the bottom of the road and all our mates would get together and start kicking a ball around, and that used to be, like, the highlight, basically, of our day. We use to call it our mini Wembley. Fifth year is when I started playing for [my British Asian club]. In the last form I'd play football for the school on Saturday morning, then I'd play football for [my British Asian club] in the afternoon, then I'd play football for [my British Asian club] on Sunday, you know. In between there would be training on Tuesdays and Thursdays!

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

Another player added:

My dad came over when he was quite young anyway. He played football back home [in India] and he played football over here as well, so when me and my brother were tiny we used to go and watch him and kick the ball about ourselves...My dad's slightly older now but I mean he was playing until he was forty, forty-two. Nowhere special, just a Saturday team, but he loved it, you know.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional / current semi-pro player, 28th January 2002]

Not only was football established as a popular leisure activity amongst many British Asian men, but the contention here is that football often played a key role in the construction of *British* Asian male identities. For example, the following two interview transcripts point to the belief among some amateur players that football played an integrative role for many British Asian men:

We started the [British Asian] football club in 1965, because we wanted to promote, if you like, ourselves as a culture and also at the same time, we actually wanted to go out into the community and say, "Look, we can be part of you *through football*". And we used to get lumps knocked out of us by the local teams! They'd say "Paki", "wogs" or "go home" or "you couldn't kick a ball straight". But we learned to live through that and what it did was it made us

much, much stronger and now what we've got is a football club of thirty-five years old that actually is respected by the whole community because not only can they play football but they can actually articulate what their views are and they can actually live with the best. And they drink after the game. The [club] players won't be huddling together as ten, twelve Asians in the corner of a bar and drinking. No, they'll be drinking with the team they've just played, who happen to be all white but they're all mates and they'll respect each other for what they bring to the sport.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 23rd April 2002]

I was born in India, and obviously we came over here when I was about seven and it was a new sport to me totally. I'd never seen it in India. So [I became familiar with the game] just through primary school really. It was a good way of being part of the crew as well, you know, being accepted more easily.

[Interview with 'Indian' amateur player, 5th February 2002]

These statements refer to men who started playing football in the 1960s and 1970s, shortly after the first waves of subcontinental migrations. However, it is evident that the game still serves a social function specific to twenty-first century urban, working-class, British Asian lifestyles.

In discussing current lifestyle trends, a number of players referred to an increase in the use of heroin and crack cocaine amongst young British Bangladeshi and Pakistani men (Ahmed 2003a, Fountain et al 2003). According to Kamlesh Patel, Director of the Health and Ethnicity Unit at Lancaster University, this trend is reaching epidemic proportions in many small northern English towns (Harris 2001b). For some young, British Asian men who are trapped in low socio-economic strata, the need to fund their habit has led to involvement in other criminal activities and gang cultures²⁹ (Keith 1995, Alexander 2000b, Glynn 2002, Hussain 2002, Taher 2002a), whilst others have taken advantage of the financial benefits arising from membership of drug-based crime syndicates. It is claimed that British Asian gangs control one fifth of the total amount of heroin currently entering Britain (Singh 2003)³⁰. A number of players spoke of how they believed playing football decreased their likelihood of taking up deviant lifestyles:

One of the things I would say about growing up in an inner city area is that there are temptations to take part in activities that are perhaps deemed inappropriate or anti-social. At the time I was growing up in east London, in Bethnal Green, there were a lot of issues around gangs and, you know, young people getting up to activities that perhaps were illegal and so on. But football, kind of for me, kept me on the right track really. It kind of gave me a focus, kept me healthy and taught me a lot as well about life.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 16th March 2002]

[Football]'s given me a good quality of life both physically and it's been an outlet, you know, to get rid of a lot of the frustrations which, had that not been afforded, could have been channelled into something which, you know, wouldn't have been savoury, so to speak.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-semi-professional player, 19th March 2002]

I think for Asians and specifically Bangladeshi groups – I was born in Bangladesh – I think for the youngsters and for us growing up [football]'s been very, very important because in the area where we've grown up, it's probably been the only leisure time activity that we could participate in. There were probably others but we weren't aware of them or there was no sort of, you know, guidance from other people to go into them...So in terms of that it's been very important but I think now also – and I personally realise that – football has in many ways as well been educational and not just the academic side. I think in terms of life skills and things like that and also keeping your attention away [from deviant activities] so I think it's been very important.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player/member of British Asian football federation, 25th April 2002]

One player, who is also involved in coaching young players, explained how limiting the opportunities for local young people to participate in deviant social activities was the main reason for establishing his coaching programme:

Our primary focus was to develop this area from crime and theft, etc. That was our primary focus when we started about seven/eight years ago. But now, we've developed so much and there's so many parents getting their kids to us, you know, 'phoning us regularly because we're all like voluntary coaches so they're 'phoning us to send their kids down.

[Interview with 'Asian' semi-professional player/coach, 11th May 2002]

Beliefs that participation in sport reduces deviancy are endorsed by the findings of a number of reports by welfare associations and development projects into drug use in British Asian communities in London, Lancashire, Yorkshire and the West Midlands (Bashford et al 2003).

The assertion here is that participation in football is a key activity in the lifestyles and identity construction of many young British Asian men. In demonstrating this, it is useful to refer to Back's (1996) idea of "intermezzo cultures". Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) notion of "cultural rhizomes" – spaces where cultural and political connections are formed through the creation of specialised languages, "slangs", dialects and vernaculars – Back (1996: 226) defines an intermezzo culture as a 'space that links social collectivities, produces cultures of inter-being and mutual identification'. Modernising the arguments of previous subcultural theorists, e.g. Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979) and Jones (1988), Back uses the term primarily to describe the fusion of Punjabi bhangra and Jamaican dancehall music by late twentieth-century British Asian artistes, such as Apache Indian³¹. Football can also operate as an intermezzo culture for young British Asians. Whilst this chapter has shown that in specific instances, participation in the "English" game of football has acted as a means of achieving social integration for British Asians, it is not Back's actual proposition of mutuality that is applicable here. Instead, the contention is that rather than acting as an arena for cultural interactions between whites (or indeed African-Caribbeans) and British Asians, football is a key site for the syncretisation of South Asian ethnicities and British lifestyles. Thus it plays an important role in the creation of new, distinct identities, based on what it means to be young, male and British Asian in the early twenty-first century.

In many ways football operates as a mirror image of the role that bhangra³² music has played for young British Asians. Bennett (2000), for example, highlights how, during the 1980s, the traditional (Punjabi) Indian cultural form of bhangra was adapted to suit the lifestyles of British Asians, in that it was mixed with western instruments such as electric guitars, synthesisers and drum kits to form a British

Asian hybrid known as ‘bhangra beat’³³. In certain instances its development was linked to specific localities, hence the creation of “Southall Beat” and “Northern Rock Bhangra”. More recently, twenty-first century artistes/producers Panjabi Hit Squad, Rishi Rich, Jay Sean and Juggy D have mixed bhangra with hip-hop and R’n’B to reflect the current interests and influences of young British Asians. Conversely, with football, an “English” game has been appropriated and its intrinsic symbolism has been renegotiated to reflect the identities and lifestyles – and the associated issues and problems – of many young British Asian men. In other words, a sport that has been infinitely associated with Britain’s *white*, working-classes also represents a means of affirming their “Britishness” for many young, *British Asian* men. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Nine. The obvious significance of football for large numbers British Asian men means that their under-representation as professional players appears particularly incongruous. The following chapters discuss why the transition of British Asian players to professional level still remains problematic.

Notes

- ¹ According to the 2001 Census, out of a total population of 58,789,194, there are 565,876 African-Caribbeans in Britain. In terms of British Asians, there are 1,053,411 Indians, 747,285 Pakistanis and 283,063 Bangladeshis.
- ² This thesis concentrates on professional *players*, yet processes of ‘Othering’ also exist within supporter groups. Since the 1990s, chants of “You’re just a town full of Pakis” and “I’d rather be a Paki than a Scouse” have been significant “numbers” in the terrace repertoires of certain fan groups. The former chant has been expressed almost exclusively by visiting supporters towards the home fans of clubs based in areas with significant British Asian populations, such as Bradford and Leicester (see e.g. Kick It Out 2000b, Thorpe 2002). Similarly, through the chant of “East London is like Bengal”, some Millwall supporters (from *south* London), have located British Asians within a racialised topography of the city to mockingly question the status of West Ham United supporters (from *east* London) as “true”, i.e. white, Londoners (Back et al 2001b). In both of these examples, the intended recipients at the time the sentiments are expressed (i.e. the duration of a match) are not directly the “Pakis” represented in the songs. Instead, whilst the chants centralise the “Paki” as the despised ‘Other’, the aim is to question the “whiteness” and masculinities of rival supporters (ibid.). This would explain why, for example, in March 2002, a group of Everton supporters were heard to make the seemingly illogical comment of “Your mum’s a Paki” to various white West Ham United supporters (Fieldnotes, Upton Park, 19th March 2002). However, although British Asians are not the intended recipients of the chants within the context of the matchday experience, their significance within the discourse is not reduced. For example, on some occasions – such as Leeds United supporters visiting Leicester City – fans have sung “You’re just a town full of *taxis*”. This alteration enables the perpetrators to escape prosecution yet, by referring to taxi driving, which is a major source of employment for working-class British Asian men, the racist implication of the chant remains clear. The centrality of British Asians in chants aimed exclusively at white audiences is hugely symbolic as it requires both the *singers* and the *recipients* to see British Asians as anathema to “mainstream” professional football culture.
- ³ For example, in the BBC’s profile of London APSA (All People Sports Association), a predominantly British Pakistani amateur club, a large proportion of the programme was spent focusing on the furniture business owned by one of the players (BBC TV 2001c). The *Express* newspaper published a sizeable article noting only the fact that the players in the Sikh Hunter New Boys club in the West Midlands all shared the surname Singh (Stote 2002).

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- ⁴ Pakistan and Bangladesh did not exist as nation-states until 1947 and 1971, respectively.
- ⁵ “We shall fight like lions” was the rallying cry of Southall’s (predominantly Punjabi) British Asian population during their protests against racism in the late 1970s/early 1980s (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism/Southall Rights 1981). As Kathleen Hall (2002: 130) states, ‘through the taking of *amrit* (nectar), Sikhs become Singhs; they are converted from lamb to lion (the literal meaning of “Singh”). They are imbued with the spirit of the Guru and adapt themselves to his living and his form’.
- ⁶ In particular, discourses focused on the *babu*, ‘a term of derision specifically relating to the English-educated Bengali middle-class male who was employed in the service of the empire as an administrative or professional worker’ (Mills and Dimeo 2003: 114-5).
- ⁷ For example, in 1931, General Sir George Fletcher MacMunn, a colonel commandant in the Royal Artillery, argued that only the *Sikh* grenadier fought with ‘the majesty with which the British soldier fights’ (cited in Hoberman 1997: 112).
- ⁸ Dimeo (2002a) argues that Anglo-Sikh relations were also inadvertently enhanced by the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Whilst the instigators had been Bengalis, Punjabis remained loyal to the British. The Mutiny was a violent Indian nationalist uprising against British rulers in India that emanated from the ‘suspicion of Hindu and Muslim soldiers in the Indian army that their bullets were greased with cow’s fat (unclean to Hindus) and pig’s fat (unclean to Muslims)’ (Said 1993: 177).
- ⁹ Sikhs were over-represented as soldiers for the remainder of British rule in India. During the First World War, out of a total population of twenty million, the Punjab supplied 350,000 soldiers. Bengal, which had a population of forty-five million, provided only 7,000 soldiers (Shaw 2000). In 2000, the Ministry of Defence belatedly paid tribute to the role of Indian soldiers during the two World Wars by organising and hosting the *We Were There* exhibition. In November 2002, Umrao Singh, an eighty-two year-old Sikh – who was awarded the Victoria Cross for “supreme” battlefield gallantry during the Second World War – was one of those chosen to represent the five million colonial servicemen who fought in the British Army at the inauguration of a set of memorial gates in London (Ezard 2002).
- ¹⁰ His father, Harbang Singh Chata, who is originally from the Punjab, came to Britain in 1974 as part of the Indian wrestling team and has lived here ever since (Rowbottom 2002).

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- ¹¹ It is not uncommon for British Sikh football clubs to include some form of martial reference in their name, e.g. Sikh Hunters or Khalsa Warriors.
- ¹² This imagery operates both on and off the field of play, as can be highlighted by the involvement of, and status attributed to, African-Caribbeans in football hooliganism at particular clubs (Francis and Walsh 1997, Armstrong 1998, Back et al 2001a, Cowens 2001).
- ¹³ In the 1960s and 1970s, pretentious, “fancy” players such as Rodney Marsh, George Best, Stan Bowles, Tony Currie, Alan Hudson, Charlie George and Frank Worthington were extremely popular. During the 1980s, similar players, such as Glenn Hoddle, became terrace favourites. In the late twentieth century, a number of “flashy”, extrovert, foreign players were signed by British clubs and many attained iconic status amongst their clubs’ supporters, for example, Eric Cantona, Juninho and Gianfranco Zola.
- ¹⁴ It was often argued that African-Caribbean players disliked playing in the (cold) British climate, lacked determination, had attitude problems and were lazy. This belief was symbolised by the comments of then Crystal Palace chairman Ron Noades during an interview for *Great Britain United*, a television documentary about African-Caribbean footballers, broadcast in 1991. He stated that ‘the problem with black players is they’ve great pace, great athletes, love to play with the ball in front of them...when it’s behind them it’s – chaos. I don’t think too many of them can read the game. When you’re getting into the midwinter you need a few of the hard white men to carry the athletic black players through’ (cited in Back et al 2001b: 175).
- ¹⁵ It is crucial to recognise that beliefs regarding the physical abilities of different ethnic groups, and particularly their ability to play professional football, are not confined to Britain. In fact, India provides a prime example of a nation in which desired footballing traits are strongly correlated with ethnicity and nation. For example, Kapadia and Kundu (2001) highlight the success of the Nigerian striker Chima Okorie in Indian football during the 1980s and 1990s. The authors describe how much of Okorie’s impact was related to his muscular style of play. This led to a trend amongst many Indian clubs to identify big, strong, foreign strikers based at Indian universities and tempt them away from their studies by offering attractive contracts.
- ¹⁶ Ikram Butt – a former player for Featherstone, London Broncos, Huddersfield and England, and now rugby league development officer for Bradford council – is the creator of the pioneering Bradford-based rugby league team, the South Asian Bulls. In September 2003, four of the club’s players travelled to India to participate in the All-India Games rugby union event.

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- ¹⁷ See Campaign Against Racism and Fascism/Southall Rights (1981).
- ¹⁸ In the 1970s and 1980s, the most significant minority ethnic “folk devil” was the “black mugger” (Hall et al 1978, Solomos 1988). In the early-twenty-first century, prominent British minority ethnic “folk devils” are African-Caribbean men who use firearms to control territory and drug markets, and young, male, working-class British Asian “rioters” and gang members.
- ¹⁹ It is also possible that professional clubs no longer perceive the inner cities as likely sources for recruiting professional footballers. Traditionally, clubs often recruited players from areas such as the industrial belt in west central Scotland, South Yorkshire, Liverpool, Newcastle and the east end of London. These locations were seen as hard, working-class locales and thus well-equipped for producing footballers. By the 1980s, the introduction of African-Caribbean players meant that the central districts of Birmingham, London and Manchester were added to the list of footballing hotbeds. Since then there has been an increase in players coming from more provincial towns, whilst those coming from large metropolitan areas tend to reside in the suburbs. This is not a reflection on the levels of talent in these respective locations. Rather, it more likely to be a result of class differences. In contrast to the past, young players now need their parents to provide them with the latest equipment and provide transport to numerous training sessions and matches. It could be argued that inner-city, working-class populations are less likely to be in positions to provide this assistance.
- ²⁰ A vindaloo is a very hot curry. The dictum “we all love vindaloo” was the rallying cry of the song recorded by the group Fat Les in support of England’s participation in the 1998 World Cup finals.
- ²¹ The influence of religion in sports participation by British Asians has been touched upon in studies within the disciplines of physical education and the sociology of sport and leisure (e.g. Kew 1979, Carrington et al 1987, Carroll and Hollinshead 1993). A number of accounts have focused explicitly on Islam (e.g. Ibrahim 1982, Benn 1996, De Knop et al 1996). However, the findings have tended to be rather inconclusive and, particularly with regard to the former studies, are clouded by the Eurocentric approach of the researchers (Siraj-Blatchford 1993: 81).
- ²² The ninth month of the Muslim year (lasting thirty days), during which individuals must fast – consuming neither food nor water – between sunrise and sunset.
- ²³ In November 2003, Manchester City’s Christian Negouai, a black Frenchman, was forced to break his Ramadan fasting in order to provide a urine sample for a drug test. Having been fined £2,000 for missing a test during the previous campaign, Negouai was selected again to provide a sample

during the 2003-04 season. Failure to comply could have resulted in a ban of up to two years, as demonstrated by the eight-month suspension meted out to Manchester United's England international Rio Ferdinand in December 2003 for failing to attend a similar drugs test. Consequently, due to his dehydration from a training session, in order to provide a urine sample, Negouai had no option but to drink water and break his fast, causing great distress to the player. According to Manchester City, the officials from UK Sport, the agency responsible for drug testing, would not accept the player's religious obligations as a reason not to provide a sample. This allegation is denied by UK Sport (Taylor and Mackay 2003).

²⁴ The maximum wage for professional footballers was only abolished in 1961.

²⁵ For example, a letter from a British Indian reader to the *Guardian* newspaper regarding an article on British Asian footballers argued that 'Asians are intimidated by football but also see it as a proletarian sport and Asians (particularly Indians) don't see themselves as proles' (*Guardian* 2001a)

²⁶ In the South Asian sport of kabaddi, players from each of the two competing teams take turns to make a "raid" on the opposition's territory and return to their side of the court without being "captured". The time each "raider" is permitted to make a "raid" is limited by the length of time they are able to hold their breath. The "raider" demonstrates this to the umpire by continuously chanting "kabaddi" (see Alter 2000).

²⁷ Unfortunately, it is unclear what "participation" refers to in this instance. Taking into account the role of football in British Asian communities, it is likely that it includes not only organised matches, but also informal "kickarounds" in the park or street.

²⁸ These tournaments have been held annually since 1965, in Leamington Spa, Gravesend, Derby, Slough, Barking, Coventry, Reading, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Bradford and Birmingham. They were originally named after Shaheed Uddam Singh, a Punjabi Sikh martyr who survived the infamous Amritsar massacre of 1919, in which 350 unarmed civilians were killed by British troops under the control of General Sir Michael O'Dwyer. Having altered his name to Ram Mohammed Singh Azaad (in order to reflect the joint Hindu, Muslim and Sikh aim of freedom), Uddam Singh assassinated O'Dwyer in 1940.

²⁹ At the end of the twentieth century, nearly a quarter of British prisoners categorised as 'Asian' were serving sentences for drug offences (Home Office 2000: 45).

³⁰ In May 2003, British Asian brothers Sukhdev and Rajinder Bassi were sentenced to a total of twenty years in prison for their role in supplying illegal drugs in west London. The Bassis were leaders of the Fiat Bravo Boys (named after the inconspicuous mode of transport they used), a gang that used guns, bombs and kidnap campaigns in order to control the supply of heroin in the area. It is believed that they introduced 17 kilograms of heroin into Southall, worth £1.7 million (*Eastern Eye* 2003b). In September of that year, Tony Singh Hare, the leader of a Leicester-based British Asian drugs syndicate was jailed for a total of fifty-three years. Fellow members Amerjit Singh Johal, Jaswinder Singh Nain, Gurbashan Singh Gill and Sukhjevean Singh Rai were sentenced to prison terms of nineteen, nine, seven and four-and-a-half years, respectively (Virdi 2003).

³¹ Apache Indian (aka Steve Kapur) is a Birmingham-born British Asian musical artiste who fuses reggae and bhangra styles in his music. As Back (1996: 227) poignantly highlights, Apache Indian's music is the product of both global and local influences, and combines 'ragga *plus* bhangra *plus* England *plus* Indian *plus* Kingston *plus* Birmingham'. In the 1990s his music was popular with fans of both reggae and bhangra, leading to the media coining the phrase *bhangramuffin*, with reference to reggae's raggamuffin style. In 1991, he won the Best Newcomer Award at the British Reggae Industry Awards, cementing his authenticity amongst African-Caribbeans as well as British Asians (see Back 1996, Shukla 2003).

³² Bhangra is a form of Punjabi folk music based around the traditional *dholak* and *dholki* drums (see Bannerji and Baumann 1990, Bennett 2000).

³³ Prominent bands in this development were Alaap, Pardesi and Sahotas.

Chapter 4

Playing out of position? 'Race', nation, diaspora and the recruitment of British Asians as professional footballers

Introduction

During the summer of 2001, a number of towns and cities in northern Britain witnessed a spate of what were sensationally described as “race riots”, as young British Asian men engaged in violent street confrontations with Far Right groups, other white citizens and the police. Shortly after these events, the British government was actively involved in the global “war against terror” – a response to the terrorist attacks on the United States of America on September 11th 2001. These atrocities were reportedly carried out by pan-global Islamic extremist groups but, in the aftermath, many British Asians (of *all* religious denominations) experienced a backlash – some of which was violent – against them. A direct consequence of these episodes is that the citizenship and identities of British Asians, especially Muslims, have become subject to political and public debate.

Carrington and McDonald (2001a: 2) suggest that, ‘Sport is a particularly useful sociological site for examining the changing context and content of contemporary British racisms, as it articulates the complex interplay of “race”, nation, culture and identity in very public and direct ways’. The aim of this chapter is to highlight how these variables have been transformed in recent years and to identify how they have affected relations – both general and sporting – between whites and British Asians. This involves an analysis of the concept of ‘cultural racism’¹ (Fanon 1967). Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how cultural racism influences the development of a “siege mentality” amongst some white populations whereby British Asian (particularly Muslim) communities were, and are, perceived as representing a threat to an imagined white, British way of life and national identity. This is illustrated by an examination of the socio-historical relationship between whites and British Asians in post-industrial northern towns, such as Oldham, and the current growing socio-geographical divisions between these communities. As Anthias and Lloyd (2002: 8) argue:

In order to understand and fight racism (as opposed to sorting out empirically who are its targets at any particular point of time), it is important to focus on processes, structures and outcomes, through looking both at changing

configurations of ideas about fear, threat, otherness, undesirability, *and* at how groups who are targeted may be responding to these challenges.

A discussion is undertaken regarding how this polarisation has led to increasingly exclusive (re)definitions of “Englishness” and support for Far Right political parties. Notions of English national identity are then examined in relation to the sporting interests and affiliations of British Asians. The final section assesses the extent to which issues of ‘race’ and racism are perceived to affect the recruitment of British Asians as professional footballers. Fundamentally, it is shown that whilst certain aspects of professional football continue to act as an arena for the articulation of anti-Asian racism, the perceptions of British Asian players regarding racism in recruitment practices, together with their national affiliations and allegiances, appear to contradict general social trends. These players are literally “playing out of position”.

Under siege: the development of cultural racism in late twentieth-century Britain

From the era of colonial rule in India to the period succeeding their mass migration to Britain, South Asians have been regarded as the ‘Other’ within western racial discourses (Said 1985). One can identify a number of continuities and similarities with regard to notions of ‘race’ and attitudes towards people of South Asian descent between the empire period and the contemporary context, but these ideologies and discourses have also undergone significant development and modification. Undoubtedly the main contributing factor to this transition has been the settlement in Britain of large numbers of South Asian people. In the first half of the twentieth century, South Asians – or Indians as they were, officially, until the bifurcation of the subcontinent into Indian and Pakistan in 1947 – were perceived within the British imagination as an exotic people, living in an inconceivably distant continent. With the exception of those Britons who had been employed in the subcontinent or served alongside Indian servicemen in the armed forces, the only experience the British populace had of Indian people was from television news footage, newspapers

or educational textbooks. Consequently, they had no first-hand knowledge to verify or disprove preconceptions.

A decade after the cessation of global hostilities in 1945, a rapid and sizeable migration of South Asians to Britain began to take place. This was influenced by both “pull” and “push” factors, i.e. a demand for labour within Britain’s manual industries and public services, combined with a striving amongst aspiring migrants to improve their standard of living. The majority of Britain’s metropolitan areas experienced major demographic changes and many residents of previously “white”, working-class districts soon found themselves living alongside South Asian neighbours and working with South Asian colleagues (see e.g. Channel Four TV 2002 on Gravesend). These processes of migration inevitably had considerable implications for ideas of ‘race’ and nationhood. Balibar (1991b: 43) has theorised the influx of migrants from former colonial territories, such as the Indian subcontinent, as an ‘interiorization of the exterior’, which provided the background for the (re)construction and (re)contestation of notions of ‘race’ and nation. According to Balibar, what was, in essence, taking place was a progression from the *external* racism that characterised perceptions of Indians during the colonial era to a notion of *internal* racism which, in contrast, involved prejudice against a recently constituted minority (South Asians) within one’s own (British) national collectivity. This change was fundamental in providing the antecedents for the emergence of the notion of ‘cultural racism’ (Fanon 1967) in western societies.

As the term suggests, the underlying basis of this form of racism is the significance of “culture”. Thus it has been argued that it is, in essence, a ‘racism without races’ (Balibar 1991a: 21)². In contrast to the historically more prevalent biological variant³, cultural racism does not revolve explicitly around a phenotypical hierarchy of ‘race’ or notions of racial superiority and inferiority. Instead, the key tenet is the concept of cultural difference and the degree to which specific minority (ethnic) groups are inclined to conform to and adopt the norms and values of “traditional” domestic life. This ideology stresses that not only is there an inherent

incompatibility between different cultures, but also that their mixing or coexistence within the confines of a single nation state will inevitably lead to (potentially violent) social conflict. It is alleged that those minorities that do not share the dominant values of British society represent a threat to its cohesion and, therefore, its social stability. Whilst, in theory, this belief applies to all minority ethnic groups, African-Caribbeans are generally perceived to be less culturally different and, subsequently, less problematic than South Asians (see below). During the early phases of migration, South Asians were seen to be introducing irreversible changes to the social composition of Britain. In particular, the main threats were believed to be that they provided competition for jobs and housing, they had excessively large families and that adult men harassed white women (Pearson 1976). It was also perceived that their different religious and social practices, together with a lack of identification with certain elements of the host culture, were not conducive to a modern, western, Christian nation.

An increasingly significant component of cultural racism within Britain is the existence of a “siege mentality”, i.e. a belief amongst certain (predominantly working-class) white populations that their community or way of life is under threat. This represents a specific manifestation of a general fear of crime whereby certain groups are continuously living in a mythical state of siege (Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hough 1995). In the post-war era, social and economic changes in Britain led to the rise of new technologies and forms of employment, such as light engineering, and entrepreneurial activities. Some sections of the white working-classes adapted to the decline of inner-city industries and engaged in a process of “white flight” to the suburbs. Those that remained in the inner-cities witnessed the break-up of their neighbourhoods and a decline in working-class cohesion and solidarity. In order to try and ignore the reality that “things ain’t what they used to be”, certain groups, such as skinheads – through their dress, argot and violent behaviour⁴, e.g. “Paki-bashing” and football hooliganism – attempted to “magically” recreate and celebrate their traditional white, working-class communities and identities⁵ (Cohen 1972, Clarke 1976, Hebdige 1981).

However, this “illusion” failed to conceal the social, economic and demographic changes that were actually taking place in white, working-class neighbourhoods and so an underlying “siege mentality” prevailed. This was further accentuated by the increasing presence of minority ethnic groups. Their contribution to a “siege mentality” can be traced back to the end of the Empire in the middle of the twentieth century, when the independence of many British colonies meant that Britain was perceived to be losing its position as a global power. This mindset continued during the following decades as right-wing politicians accentuated public fears over the large number of migrants arriving in Britain from the New Commonwealth. For example, in 1968, with reference to the influx of refugees from East Africa, Enoch Powell, Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West made the (now infamous) apocalyptic prophecy that, ‘As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood’ (cited in Bloom 2003: 384). Similarly, in 1978 – the year before she became Prime Minister – Margaret Thatcher stated that, because of insufficient immigration controls, Britain was being “swamped” by an alien culture. These ideas re-emerged within the public arena during the 1980s as part of the political discourses of the New Right⁶. Manifestations of a “siege mentality” were influenced during this period by armed conflicts in the Falklands/Malvinas Isles (1981-82) and, post-1990, in the Persian Gulf, both of which were interpreted as discernible external threats to the nation. Perceived threats to “Englishness” and “Britishness” take place, therefore, not only on a national level but also within the wider global context. As Solomos and Back (1996: 18) point out, the focus of cultural racism is on ‘the defence of the mythic “British/English way of life” in the face of attack from enemies *outside* (“Argies”, “Frogs”, “Krauts”, “Iraqis”) and *within* (“black communities”, “Muslim fundamentalists”)

Trouble at mill: the deterioration of ‘race’ relations in post-industrial northern England

In the contemporary context, evidence of a “siege mentality” can be detected in the former mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, such as Accrington, Blackburn,

Bradford, Burnley, Keighley and Oldham. All of these towns have significant British Asian populations, predominantly Bangladeshi or Pakistani Muslims⁷. In order to appreciate how a “siege mentality” has evolved in these locations, it is necessary to map the recent social history of relations between whites and British Asians. The vast majority of the early South Asian migrants were men and they gained employment in textile factories, often accepting shift patterns and wages that many indigenous workers refused. However, by the 1970s, technological advances in machinery had vastly reduced the amount of labour that was required for the manufacture of textiles. Furthermore, the personnel that were needed could be employed much more cheaply overseas, ironically, for example, in India and Pakistan⁸. The rapid deindustrialisation of the mill towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire meant that by the latter part of the twentieth century, both white and Pakistani/Bangladeshi communities were suffering a common fate – mass unemployment. In contrast to the upward mobility of many Indian and East African Asian⁹ migrants in other areas of the country, many already economically disadvantaged Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were unable to break out of the “cycle of deprivation” in which they found themselves. Whilst the majority of the latter came from relatively poor rural backgrounds, Indians and, particularly, East African Asians tended to be better educated, were more fluent in English and possessed some degree of business acumen (Anwar 1998). In the early years of migration, most South Asians were restricted to working in low waged, manual occupations, but Indians and East African Asians were subsequently more able to convert their qualifications into the necessary social, cultural and economic capital to prosper within British society (Modood 1997c). In contrast, the only realistic employment now available to many Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the mill towns was in service industries. However, discriminatory practices meant that jobs went mainly to whites. Consequently, South Asian migrants were left with two main career choices: working in restaurants/take-aways or mini-cabbing¹⁰. Both occupations were unskilled and represented the two key “post-pub” services always required by local white communities.

Pakistanis and Bangladeshis experienced further problems in the pursuit of housing. After the collapse of the textile industry, white residents that were able to afford mortgages moved out to the suburbs. Those who were less well-off took advantage of racial bias in housing policy and moved to new local authority estates (Kundnani 2001). Many British Asians believed that local authority housing was easier to manage than a mortgage and so they tended to seek existing council accommodation. As their settlement was originally only supposed to be temporary, it was unlikely that building societies would lend money to British Asians, whilst for Muslims a mortgage was impossible because under *Sharia* (Islamic law) the payment or receipt of interest is forbidden. A fear of racial harassment meant that British Asians originally opted for “safety in numbers” and lived in close proximity to each other within distinct British Asian districts. Any subsequent attempts to overcome this segregation were inhibited by racial discrimination in the allocation of housing (Karn 1997). For example, in the early 1990s it was found that Oldham council and some estate agents were promoting segregationist housing policies by steering whites and British Asians into different areas, with the latter being allocated accommodation in the more deprived areas. Those British Asians that remained on what were predominantly “white” estates suffered racism and so relocated into areas dominated by their own communities, accentuating geographical segregation (Oldham Independent Review 2001). This segregation in housing has had severe implications for both educational choice/opportunity¹¹ and employment and so, in many of these towns, social contact between whites and British Asians remains minimal¹².

In many northern towns, patterns of racialised geographical segregation have both contributed to, and been influenced by, cultures of suspicion, fear, ignorance, misunderstanding and mistrust (cf. Burnley Task Force 2001, Oldham Independent Review 2001, Ouseley 2001). Perceptions of a British Asian threat amongst many white working-class communities in these towns are influenced by a range of national and local factors. Firstly, there is an increase in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations in many of these locations¹³, mainly due to a high birth rate

but also because of relatives and spouses migrating from the subcontinent (Berthoud and Beishon 1997, Pilkington 2003). Consequently, these groups constitute a far more numerically visible presence than was formerly the case. Secondly, it is increasingly evident that many second and third generation British Asians are unprepared to withstand the levels of racism meted out to previous generations and will respond with violence if necessary. Many young, male British Asians are also displaying previously inconceivable levels of physicality and machismo, as demonstrated by the urban unrest in Bradford, Burnley, Leeds and Oldham during of the spring and summer of 2001. Thirdly, taking Oldham as an example, in the early summer of 2001, rumours circulated that British Asian areas were receiving greater regeneration grants than white areas, that certain British Asian districts had become “no-go” areas, that British Asians were unwilling to mix with other ethnic groups, and that assaults on whites by British Asians were the most common type of racist attack (Vasagar et al 2001).

These rumours have since been proved to be fictitious. In recent years, the Fitton Hill and Hathershaw districts of Oldham (both predominantly white areas) have received far greater regeneration grants than the British Asian areas of Glodwick and Westwood¹⁴ (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism 2001). A research project, entitled *Asian Mobility in Leeds and Bradford*, has disproved the contention that British Asians actively engender self-segregation¹⁵ (Kundnani 2002b), whilst a report published by the Greater Manchester Police in October 2002 revealed that the claim that white people in Oldham were the main victims of ‘race’ crime was a fallacy (Guru-Murthy 2002). Notwithstanding this, such rumours still contribute to a sense of paranoia amongst many white communities. The presence of large numbers of British Asians in adjacent neighbourhoods is irrationally interpreted and people feel that they are becoming a minority within their own towns and, by implication, their country. Cohen (1996: 71) argues that the outcome of this scenario is a racialisation of space, which:

involves the colour-coding of particular residential areas, housing estates, or public amenities as “white” or “black” in a way which often homogenizes

ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and turns relative population densities into absolute markers of racial division. This process is usually articulated through images of confrontation – “front lines”, “no-go areas”, and the like – which serve to orchestrate moral panics about “invasion” and “blacks taking over”.

In such cases, white, working-class ‘defended communities’ (Jeffers et al 1996: 120) are unable logically to account for the feelings of dislocation that they are experiencing. Popular racial discourses become even more pervasive, contributing to increased localised tensions between whites and British Asians and demarcations of space and territoriality along ethnic lines (Webster 1996, Watt and Stenson 1998). Rumours, hearsay and misconceptions abound, and the escalation of “moral panics” (cf. Young 1971, Cohen 2002) means that the inaccurate content within these reports becomes indecipherable from actual fact. Conflicts between white and British Asian communities have thus further contributed to the articulation of a “siege mentality” amongst many white working-class populations. As Alibhai-Brown (2001b) poignantly suggests, ‘They hate it that their Bronte-land has become a balti land, even though most of them have never watched a television version of *Jane Eyre* and could not survive a week without a curry’.

The effects of this situation are succinctly summarised by the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism¹⁶ (2001: 5) which states that:

When you add the (false) perception that Asians are creating no-go areas to the (false) perception that they are also getting preferential treatment in council grants, what develops is a sense of victimhood among a white working class that has been all but abandoned by the Labour Party, its historic defender¹⁷.

This mind-set has led to an increase in support from sections of the white working-classes for the British National Party (BNP)¹⁸ who, under the mantra *Rights For Whites*, are perceived by some as defenders of English national identity. The BNP have achieved significant voting figures in a number of constituencies and by September 2003 the party had seventeen elected councillors¹⁹. The BNP’s ability to take advantage of paranoid communities can be highlighted by the election of the party’s Robin Evans as a councillor in Blackburn-with-Darwen in November 2002. Labour leader for Blackburn, Bill Taylor, attributed Evans’ victory to the fact that

the BNP had distributed a fictitious leaflet which claimed that, as a tribute to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the council was planning to create a replica of the giant swords that span a road in central Baghdad (Choudhari 2002). Articulations of a “siege mentality” are not confined to low income, inner-city areas of northern England, however. In May 2003, the BNP won its first victory in the prosperous Home Counties of southern England. Despite the fact that, according to local council figures, there are no such people in the area (Harris 2003), rumours regarding the perceived presence of asylum seekers in Broxbourne – a wealthy “commuter belt” suburb in Hertfordshire – contributed to the BNP’s Ramon Paul Johns winning a seat on the council.

Cultural racism clearly operates around the nexus between notions of ‘race’, culture, nation, nationalism and patriotism, and facilitates redefinitions and constructions of what it means to be English and British (Kundnani 2000, Parekh 2000). Perceptions of continued threats to England/Britain and “Englishness/Britishness” have resulted in attempts to identify a quasi-mythical English history, and invent a homogenous, monocultural, “white” national identity. Westwood (1991), for example, points out that notions of “the nation” are constructed through a consensus surrounding the notion of “the people”. In England this has involved the development of the “Little Englander” mentality which stresses a perceived common ancestry and homogeneity of English culture, and locates outsiders as ‘Others’. Whilst these views are prevalent at all levels of society, they are often proposed – and thus, in the eyes of many people, legitimated – by ostensibly credible individuals, such as politicians or councillors. For example, in 2001, Conservative leader William Hague claimed that the immigration policies implemented by the Labour government would turn Britain into a “foreign land” (Hinsliff 2001). The following year, David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, claimed that some schools were being “swamped” by the children of asylum seekers (Travis 2002b). Speaking after the urban unrest in Oldham during April 2001, BNP activist Michael Treacy – who stood for the Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency in the general election the following month – stated, somewhat apocryphally, that ‘I have no qualms against

Asians or people of any colour. It's a matter of the country *losing its identity and culture*' (cited in Vasagar et al 2001, emphasis added). Similarly, renegade Conservative MP John Townend argued that, 'Our *homogenous Anglo-Saxon society* has been seriously undermined by the massive immigration – particularly Commonwealth immigration – that has taken place since the war' (cited in White 2001, emphasis added).

The significance of cultural racism is that, as Gilroy (1993: 27) argues, 'the emphasis on culture allows nation and race to fuse'. He adds that:

Nationalism and racism become so closely identified that to speak of the nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms. Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the *white* people (ibid.: 28).

Constructions of "the nation" have revolved around a quasi-mythical notion of "Englishness". This is based on ideas of suburban/rural life, free from the problems of inner city (and *ipso facto* minority ethnic) communities, and invokes notions of militarism and empire, pomp and circumstance, ritualism and commemoration. As Hall (1992: 293) suggests:

From England's green and pleasant land, its gentle, rolling countryside, rose-trellised cottages and country house gardens – Shakespeare's "sceptered isle" – to public ceremonials like the Trooping of the Colour and Poppy Day, the discourse of "Englishness" represents what "England" *is*, gives meaning to the identity of "being English" and fixes "England" as a focus of identification in English (and Anglophile) hearts.

In reality, these specific connotations are only invoked by the older generations. Young white people are similarly inclined to define themselves as an English ethnic collective (Anthias and Lloyd 2002), yet their notions of "Englishness" are far more likely to be constructed in relation to style and consumption than to history. For example, images of national sports teams, "Britpop" music, fashion, football violence, *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street*, and lager-induced shenanigans in Mediterranean holiday resorts all invoke notions of "Englishness". Nevertheless, the sense of cultural separation between whites and British Asians is reproduced through

the alienation of minority ethnic groups from these contemporary white, youth-orientated forms of “Englishness”.

Putting the ball in play: ‘race’, national identity and English football²⁰

According to Kellas (1991: 21), ‘the most popular form of nationalist behaviour in many countries is sport, where masses of people become highly emotional in support of their national team’. Hobsbawm (1990: 43) contends that the identity of a nation of millions ‘seems more real as a team of eleven named people’. The nexus between *football* and constructions of national identity is particularly significant (Wagg 1995, Duke and Crolley 1996, Armstrong and Giulianotti 1999). It would, therefore, seem likely that the transformations in popular interpretations of ‘race’ and nationhood identified above would have considerable repercussions in English football. The remainder of this chapter examines the implications of these relations for the involvement of British Asians in the game, particularly with regard to issues of national identity/affiliation and their recruitment as professional players. The objective of the present section is to examine the extent to which British Asians are permitted inclusion in the national footballing collectivity and are able, or choose, to identify with elements of national sporting identities and iconography.

It would be fair to say that elements of English national identity have traditionally been more accommodating to African-Caribbeans than to British Asians, and the former group has been granted greater inclusion in the national collectivity. Certainly African-Caribbeans are generally believed to be culturally more similar to the white “mainstream” population. The language and religions of African-Caribbeans are also, in contrast to British Asians (at least the older generations), generally more similar to those practised by the majority of white people in Britain. Many young, African-Caribbean men also share – or, equally importantly, are *perceived* to share – a similar culture of consumption to numerous young, white men involving music, designer clothing, alcohol and promiscuous sexual intercourse. Furthermore, with regard to youth subcultures, black British and Jamaican (as well as African-American) cultural forms, images, practices and argots have been

extensively appropriated by white, working-class youths (cf. Hebdige 1979, Hewitt 1986, Jones 1988, Back 1994, Back 1996, Nayak 2003). Conversely, although British bands as diverse as the Beatles, Blancmange, Echo and the Bunnymen, Kula Shaker and Traffic have all flirted with Indian instrumentation – and a media-contrived fascination with Indian cultural forms currently resonates amongst sections of Britain’s white, middle-class populations (see Chapter Five) – appropriation of South Asian cultures by white working-class youths has been minimal (see BBC Radio 2003b). As Aki Nawaz, of the Nation Records label and formerly of the band Fun^{da}mental argues, ‘White people have never really wanted to live near us [British Asians]; we haven’t been “cool” in the way Afro-Caribbeans are’ (cited in Ferguson 2001). The correlation between ‘race’ and nation means that associations between “Englishness” and “blackness”²¹ – identities associated with African or African-Caribbean origins – are, therefore, often deemed to be less antithetical or problematic to the white “mainstream” than those that comprise “Asianness”. In football, significant numbers of African-Caribbeans have played for the England national football team. Similarly, black supporters – whilst still under-represented in relation to the overall population – have achieved a greater degree of inclusion, albeit contingent, in English supporter collectivities than British Asians. This is the case with both “mainstream” and hooligan groupings (Back et al 2001a). On the other hand, although British Asian players Zesh Rehman and Michael Chopra (Anglo-Asian) have achieved England honours at youth/under-21 levels in the early part of the twenty-first century, a British Asian has never played for the full England team²².

A number of authors have, however, highlighted how popular manifestations of “Englishness” are often deemed alienating or irrelevant to African-Caribbeans, whether in wider society (e.g. Gilroy 1987, Gilroy 1993, Back 1996) or in the footballing arena (e.g. Carrington 1998, Carrington 1999, Williams 1999). Furthermore, some interesting and seemingly contradictory findings emanated from the weeks preceding the 2002 World Cup football finals in Japan and South Korea. In a poll conducted by the black British newspaper *New Nation* on the subject of

national identity and footballing allegiance, readers were asked the following question: If it came down to a direct choice between England and Nigeria – as it very nearly did due to them playing in the same first round group – who would they prefer to be knocked out of the World Cup? The results showed that sixty-seven per cent of readers favoured an English exit ahead of a Nigerian one. With regard to the team that readers wanted to win the trophy outright, 34% wanted England to be victorious, 33% chose Nigeria and 20% opted for Brazil²³ (Kelso 2002).

One might propose that this indifference towards the England team would be equally, if not more, evident amongst British Asians. Many British Asians are antipathetic towards elements of English culture and nationhood, and consequently their processes of identity construction often remain located outside of this socio-spatial arena. For example, the National Centre for Social Research annual survey of 2000 found that the notion of “Englishness” proves particularly problematic for British Asians. Whilst only seven per cent classified themselves as English (not British), more than a third stated that they were British (not English) (Carvel 2000, see also Carvel 2002). Similarly, according to the Office for National Statistics (2004), whilst only 6% of Bangladeshis see themselves as English, 67% identify as British. The reasons for this identification with “Britishness” rather than “Englishness” are multiple, and different individuals will have different reasons for their respective affiliations. For example, there is evidence that the concepts of “Britishness” and “Englishness” have different connotations in relation to notions of both citizenship and ethnicity. For example, one participant in Eade’s (1994: 389) study of Bangladeshi Muslims in east London argued, ‘[I am] British because I am a British citizen. No matter what the white (sic) say, I am British. Not English, but British’. Another young Bangladeshi proposed that, ‘I don’t know why, I just feel to be British, you don’t actually have to be white. But to be English I always have this feeling you have to be white’ (ibid.). Whilst ideas of “Britishness” possess more pluralistic and less racially-coded associations, “Englishness” remains an increasingly racially exclusive identity.

Widespread beliefs regarding the potential conflict between “Englishness” and British Asian identities were further corroborated by a piece of observational fieldwork undertaken during the summer of 2001. The fieldnote transcript is reproduced here in full:

On 24th July 2001, as part of their summer tour of England, the Indian national football team played Brentford FC at Griffin Park. Before the match (an evening fixture) commenced, a group of approximately eight white, male teenagers were sitting in the Ealing Road end of the main stand. One was sporting a replica England shirt and the youths were openly displaying both St. George and Union flags. These flags were new but of cheap quality and in contrast to the flags normally displayed by supporters at professional matches, which include some form of affiliation such as the club name, nickname, town or region, they had no identifications. It was evident that the youths had bought the flags especially for the occasion, and as a means of celebrating their English/British identities rather than their allegiance to Brentford *per se*. A number of other supporters wore items of England replica team strip or leisurewear such as baseball caps, t-shirts and shorts. One supporter, in particular, sported an ostentatious “Hackett-style” polo shirt – as favoured by many hooligans – with the word “England” embossed in large letters on the front and a George Cross covering the whole of the back, and England shorts. As the team line-ups were announced, the name of each Indian player was greeted with loud booing from the youths mentioned above. After the match, a proportion of the crowd moved towards Brentford railway station. On the corner of Hamilton Road and Windmill Road, the crowd slowed down as it reached the main road. It was evident that a fairly large number of white youths were present, including those identified above. At this point a car of Indian supporters approached the junction and, when it was noticed, loud cries of “3-0” [the match result] and “England, England” went up. The youths surrounded the car, placing their St. George and Union flags over the windows, thus preventing the vehicle from moving. Various comments were made, such as “Don’t let him [the driver] through, he’s Indian!” and “Smash the windows!” The atmosphere was clearly aggressive but the youths soon moved on. At Brentford railway station the youths (numbering approximately thirty males – including a couple who were of dual white and African-Caribbean heritage – and five females) entered the westbound platform. On the eastbound platform (across the tracks) were approximately ten Indian supporters, gathered in twos and threes. The white youths stood in a confrontational stance, displaying their flags and chanting “England, England”. Sporadic abuse was aimed at the Indians, together with deliberately confrontational questions and threatening stares. The white group decided to walk rather than wait for the train and as they made their way up the steps, a number chanted “We’re coming to get you” and shouted “Fucking Pakis”. Two glass beer bottles were thrown by the white youths, which smashed, but missed their intended targets. Their actions were ignored by the Indians,

whilst a small group of Brentford fans in their mid-twenties chastised the group for their actions [Fieldnotes, 24th July 2001].

It would be unsurprising if such displays of “Englishness” further alienated British Asians from the national footballing collectivity and even led to an affiliation with the national teams of the subcontinent, as is the case with international cricket. Whilst hostility within the diaspora is certainly not the only reason underpinning affiliation with teams from an ancestral country, it may be a significant factor for many supporters.

In recent years it has been widely acknowledged that, in international cricket, a substantial number of British Asians support their country of ancestry – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka – particularly when they are playing against England (Werbner 1996a, Werbner 1996b, Crabbe and Wagg 2000, Williams 2000). With apparent disregard for the “requests” made by figures such as Norman Tebbit and Nasser Hussain, who have both spoken out against this phenomenon (see Chapter Five), supporting a South Asian nation remains both a significant source of their non-English identities and a symbolic link to the subcontinent for many British Asians. Cricket fandom enables the celebration of tradition and feelings of continuity with the nation from which they or their forebears migrated. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for them to distance themselves from those elements of “Englishness” with which they feel uncomfortable. As Werbner (1996b: 101) points out, ‘It is in the field of sport, through support of the [Pakistan] national team, that young British Pakistanis express their love of both cricket and the home country, along with their sense of alienation and disaffection from British society’. Similarly, Wazir (2001) proposes that:

These days with increasing numbers of religious leaders, community elders and even family members unable to articulate, or even understand, the contradictions that an East-West upbringing plant in the minds of [young British Asians], a generation of twenty-somethings...has turned back to its oldest and most popular form of cultural heritage: cricket.

However, whilst this appears to be the case with regard to cricket, this research suggests that, with regard to English *football*, certain contradictory trends are evident.

For example, referring to the country that he would wish to represent should the chance materialise, one current 'Asian' professional stated that, 'I was born here, brought up here and lived and raised here so I see myself as British-Asian, yeah. I want to play for England. I'd love to play for England' [Interview, 11th February 2002]. Similarly, Fulham's Zesh Rehman states that, 'My perfect day would be to score a goal for my country in an important game. Would that be England or Pakistan? Huh, England!' (cited in Donovan 2003). Likewise, when asked which country he would want to play for, Harpal Singh of Leeds United replied, 'England – no question' (cited in Bhatia 2003b). These sentiments are supported by other British Asians, as the following quotations illustrate:

I know my son [who is affiliated to a professional academy] certainly says to me at times, "Dad, what am I?". And I say to him, "Obviously by parents you're Indian – because we're both Indian – but by your right of birth, you know, you're English". So he's already said to me, "If I ever play football Dad, can I play for England or India?". And I said "Who do you want to play for?". He said "England", so I thought then, there you are, you know, it's your choice.

[Interview with 'Indian' amateur player, 5th February 2002]

My mum's English and I was brought up in the East End [of London]. I think of myself as English and would be so proud to represent my country. I was asked to captain Bangladesh recently, but I turned it down, because if I played for them, I won't be eligible to play for England.

[Bristol Rovers defender Anwar Uddin²⁴ cited in Hawkey 2002]

Obviously [players] will have sentiments attached to [the subcontinent], etc. but, you know, if you ask a lot of the Asian community, they would like to play for England...A lot of Asian players don't even see themselves as, you know, Indian or Bangladeshi, etc. because they see themselves as *British* Asian individuals.

[Interview with 'Asian' player/member of British Asian sports organisation, 14th
May 2002]

The following two similar statements were made with regard to *supporting*, rather than playing, for England:

I've spoken to a few people I know about this and all of us were actually up for England in this [2002] World Cup. And that's a first because in the past we've not really felt affiliated to England, or whatever. But for some reason we felt more English on this occasion...I think people are realising that they're English or British or British-Asians, or whatever, and want to fit in...I think more and more sort of British-born Asian people are thinking that they are, or looking at themselves as, English and if they were given a choice in playing sport, they'd play for England.

[Interview with 'Asian' football supporter, 27th June 2002]

I think that it is a misconception [that British Asians do not support England] because there's loads of Asians that support England. If you go to local cafes, [British Asians] are England supporters. It's natural because they're living in this country and they're supporting the country, you know. There's nothing wrong with that.

[Interview with 'Asian' semi-professional player, 11th May 2002]

Furthermore, during the fieldwork for this research, the researcher observed a coaching session for young Bengali players in Tower Hamlets, and a couple of youngsters were proudly sporting England replica jerseys (Fieldnotes, 11th May 2002).

It is clear that patterns of national allegiance and support with regard to football and cricket differ considerably amongst British Asians. Affiliation to the England national football team clearly reflects recent transformations in the identity politics of young British Asian footballers, but it is also possible to propose some further explanations for the disparity between the two sports. Firstly, whilst India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and, to a lesser extent, Bangladesh, are world forces in international cricket, they remain comparative minnows in international football. These nations are poorly ranked in international football²⁵ and are thus awarded low prestige in the global football arena. The perception amongst most football players and supporters

that playing international football represents the pinnacle of an individual's career is somewhat anomalous for members of these teams. Over the last couple of years, the India and Pakistan national teams have been convincingly beaten by English *club* sides²⁶ and so for any British Asians playing professionally in England, representing India or Pakistan would involve playing alongside players of a considerably lower ability. Furthermore, until a standardised global football calendar is implemented, English-based players from non-European countries still have to miss substantial sections of their club seasons in order to fulfil their international commitments. Many non-European players are becoming increasingly reluctant to jeopardise their place in their club teams in order to play for their countries, particularly if those nations have little or no chance of qualifying for a major championship.

Secondly, the English tours undertaken in recent years by the India and Pakistan national teams do not appear to have forged any significant sporting links between subcontinental and diasporic South Asians (for an in-depth critique of these tours see Chapter Eight). Whilst the matches played by these national teams in England have certainly attracted some British Asians as spectators, the numbers in attendance have been very low – with the exception of the match at West Bromwich Albion – considering the fact that the majority of games were held at clubs based in areas of high British Asian concentration²⁷. The increasingly distant relationship between Britain and the subcontinent is highlighted by the fact that few young British Asians have any knowledge about, or interest in, football in south Asia. Consequently, although the India and Pakistan football teams generate mild interest and curiosity amongst British Asians, there is very little evidence of fully-fledged support or affiliation. A distinct demarcation between subcontinental and diasporic populations is also evident in terms of player selection for Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (cf. Dimeo 2002b). Whilst nations such as Jamaica and the Republic of Ireland have utilised changes in FIFA regulations which state that a player is eligible to play for a country if one of his grandparents was born there and have subsequently selected English-born players, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have failed to recruit players from their respective diasporas. British Indians Nevin Saroya and Harpal Singh have

trained with the Indian national team during its visits to England, but teams from the subcontinent have not sought to select such players for matches²⁸. In the case of India, this is because, unlike most other nations, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) does not allow non-nationals or dual nationals to represent the country. Furthermore, whilst one of the stated objectives of the Indian tours to Britain was to encourage links between subcontinental and diasporic populations, the organisers, Sapphire Enterprises, refused to let Indian players visit British Asian schools or community football clubs. Instead, a number of high-profile dinners were organised (Dimeo 2002b). According to a member of a British Asian football federation, the politics of the subcontinent need to be taken into account in understanding this phenomenon:

I wouldn't put too much emphasis on representation at national level for any Indian side to be perfectly honest because unfortunately our perception of how one gets selected into a national team over here [in Britain] is not necessarily [based on] the same criteria that would be applied back home. And that worries us as well because we feel – and certainly we felt this last year when the Indian national football team was over and they played a number of exhibition matches with Fulham, West Brom and so forth – that there is very little representation from the UK or anybody outside India representing India at football. But I think a lot of that is down to the way the team is selected and what their policies are for that selection... Obviously we could open a right can of worms if we go down that [political] route but that's precisely what you'll find across the whole of sport in India. I would be very harsh to say that there is corruption in there but, you know, I would be lying if I said it wasn't.

[Interview, 19th March 2002]

As Dimeo (*ibid.*: 87n) suggests, 'It is interesting that the AIFF and the Indian Government have tried to maintain a stricter sense of national identity, as if the question of being Indian is more important than building a successful sports team'. It is possible that the fierce nationalism that dominates contemporary (Hindu) Indian society and the manner in which the nation wishes to portray its global image (Bhatt 2001) have restricted the boundaries of "Indianness" and may well influence the decision to select purely Indian-born players.

Thirdly, the standard of subcontinental teams in, and the global competitive structure of, international cricket mean that India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka all regularly play against – and, with increasing frequency, defeat – England²⁹. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that cricket was a key instrument in the British imperial domination of India – as, indeed, was football (Mangan 2001) – this process has undergone a direct reversal whereby, for the duration of a match or series, former colonial peoples are afforded the opportunity to compete on equal terms with, and even defeat, England. In football, on the other hand, the likelihood of such matches, let alone such a result, taking place is almost non-existent. Consequently the inherent ideological capabilities of sport are accentuated in cricket and the sport continues to operate as an arena where significant political and post-colonial symbolism can be achieved through “beating the masters at their own game”³⁰.

Finally, in contrast to football, international cricket matches enable British Asian supporters to enjoy their sport in a manner that is not only more closely associated with how it is experienced in the subcontinent, but is also often excluded from lower levels of the English game (Carrington and McDonald 2001b; McDonald and Ugra 1998, 1999). In amateur and, to some extent, professional county cricket, British Asians can be alienated by a hegemonic “traditional Englishness” and notions of idyllic ruralism that equate a cricket match with village greens, church spires, polite applause and the quaffing of real ale. Conversely, spectatorship of the international game appears to facilitate greater opportunities for recreating “traditional” South Asian forms of cricket fandom. Although increasingly stringent and restrictive stewarding practices mean that this is becoming less feasible³¹, international Test cricket has allowed British Asians to celebrate the game on their own terms, through the use of chants, flags and musical instruments. Crabbe and Wagg (2000) suggest that the cricket ground is further able to “host” such behaviour as it is not dominated by the working-class (white) masculinity that can dominate English football stadia.

The different attitudes to international football and cricket by British Asians demonstrate the inadequacy of essentialist models of national identity. As Malik (2002: 124) points out:

When television brought us scenes of British-Asians watching the 1996 cricket Test Match between England and India at Lords and simultaneously cheering when news broke that the England football team had just qualified for the Euro '96 semi-finals, it was clear that whilst they may have failed Norman Tebbit's "cricket test", they would have passed a comparative "football test" with flying colours.

This highlights the importance of appreciating the fragmentation of identities and division of loyalties that characterise attitudes, behaviours, choices and affiliations in different social spheres. In a postmodern world it is quite credible that British-Asians, like the rest of the British population, will follow different sides in different sports and for different reasons.

British Asians interviewed for this study expressed an affiliation to England with regard to both playing and supporting. However, it is important to recognise that football identities, like other identities, can be fluid and changeable. For example, the following two participants talked about playing for other countries if they were not selected to play for England:

I'd like to play for England but it would be hard because there's loads of young kids and they're quality players as well. So if I didn't have a chance to play for England I would probably go for, like, India or Pakistan, and that. At the end of the day, it's all like international play, isn't it? I wouldn't mind. My dad wouldn't say nothing, my mum wouldn't say nothing. I've got a cousin in Pakistan and that, and they'd probably say "Yeah, play for Pakistan" and that but my dad would say "Look, play for who you want to play for".

[Interview with 'Asian' professional player, 20th March 2002]

What I would say to anybody is, if you make it as a sportsperson and you don't get selected for England, then always look at the option of playing for the country of your parents' origin or whatever, and if its India or Pakistan, then fine. And if people start knocking it then we'll say hold on a minute. Look at the Republic of Ireland, look at Wales, look at Scotland. They've been doing it since time began

so what's the difference in this. Then you look at the Reggae Boyz, Jamaica 1998. Robbie Earle and them guys. Never in their wildest dreams would they have thought they'd play in a World Cup yet they went back to their roots, played for Jamaica and *voila!* And that, to me, you can look at as an advantage, that you've got a choice of playing for either.

[Interview with co-ordinator of an anti-racist organisation, 27th June 2002]

Nevertheless, for most players, the option of playing for a subcontinental nation would only become an issue if the opportunity to represent England did not exist.

Obstacle race? Racism and the recruitment of British Asian professional footballers³²

In light of the issues raised in this chapter and a notable deterioration in social relations between whites and British Asians in some areas of the country, it is pertinent to assess the implications of 'race' and racism for the recruitment of British Asians as professional footballers. Such an investigation is important because, whilst research has examined how racism affects the lives of British Asians living in the vicinity of professional football clubs (e.g. Back et al 2001b, Holland 1995, Pinto et al 1997), there is little qualitative data regarding the degree to which racism permeates relations between professional clubs and British Asian *players*. This section firstly outlines how issues of 'race' dominate the socio-spatial relationship between professional football clubs and their local British Asian communities, and then specifically how they affect the transition of British Asian players from amateur to professional football.

Following the Second World War, a process of "white-flight" meant that the white, working-class communities that resided in the inner-city areas adjacent to football stadia moved to new suburban estates. In many cases, the districts they vacated became home to recently migrated South Asian populations. Whilst the economically more prosperous Indian and East African Asian communities were eventually able to replicate this suburban migration, the more deprived Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities have remained in inner city areas. Consequently, at a number of clubs, such as Aston Villa, Bradford City, Luton Town, Oldham Athletic

and West Ham United, such ethnicities now constitute the majority population around their respective stadia³³. For many of these residents, home matches represent a fortnightly “invasion” of thousands of predominantly white football fans – from other areas of the town or city, and even beyond – into their territory. The problems that these residents have experienced range from discomfort or fear to harassment and occasionally assault³⁴.

It is difficult to measure the extent to which recent episodes involving British Asians have influenced their inclusion/exclusion within football, yet it is evident that the urban unrest during the summer of 2001 has already had some significant repercussions. For example, the mobilisation of groups of aggressive and militant young British Asian men in some towns – together with a “siege mentality” amongst white communities regarding their presence – has clearly been noted by a number of hooligan “firms”. Young British Bangladeshi and Pakistani men, who often live in the close vicinity of football stadia, now represent a novel source of conflict for hooligan groups. In April 2001, before Oldham Athletic’s match against Stoke City, hooligans from both sides joined together and fought street battles with British Asians in the Westwood district of Oldham. The rallying cries of “We hate Pakis” and “If you all hate Pakis, clap your hands”³⁵ were continued inside the ground itself (Howard 2001, BBC TV 2001b). The following month, members of Oldham Athletic’s hooligan firm, *Fine Young Casuals*, together with members of neo-Nazi groups attacked British Asians in the Glodwick area of the town (Kundnani 2003b), whilst two British Asian youths were attacked by a gang of thirty Middlesbrough fans outside Bradford City’s Valley Parade ground (Wainwright 2001). In June 2001, a group of fifty right-wing extremists, including members of the *Burnley Suicide Squad* hooligan firm were involved in racist attacks on British Asians in the town’s Daneshouse district (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism 2001). Also that month, intelligence from the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* suggested that Aston Villa football hooligans planned to attack Pakistani supporters at the England versus Pakistan one-day cricket international at Edgbaston (Bans 2001). In 2002, police in Preston attributed the escalation of violence between whites and British

Asians to local football supporters (Judd 2002). However, whilst these events undoubtedly contribute to the under-representation of British Asians as *supporters*, their direct effect on the recruitment of British Asian *players* is likely to be less substantial. In examining this latter sphere, analysis needs to be undertaken at a micro level and focus must be placed on the degree to which issues of ‘race’ and racism permeates the personal relations and interactions between managers, coaches and players.

One popular “common sense” explanation is that the under-representation of British Asians in professional football cannot be due to racial prejudice, because other non-white players – black Britons and migrants from Africa, South America and the Far East – have gained inclusion in the professional game. However, purveyors of this argument adhere to a model of ‘race’ relations that is based on a black-white dualism that positions all minority ethnic groups as experiencing common levels of inclusion and exclusion as a result of their “non-whiteness”³⁶. Whilst British Asians and African-Caribbeans do experience some similar issues and problems as a result of being minority ethnic groups in Britain, it is incorrect to suggest that they are granted equal degrees of inclusion/exclusion in all social or subcultural spheres (Gilroy and Lawrence 1988). For example, in his seminal ethnography, Back (1993) employs the concept of ‘neighbourhood nationalism’ to refer to the contrasting levels of inclusion/exclusion achieved by different minority ethnic groups on a south London housing estate. He argues that whilst African-Caribbeans can be granted contingent inclusion within local white youth subcultures, other groups, such as Vietnamese migrants or British Asians – who do not possess the physical attributes and stylistic codes desired by white working-class youth – remain excluded. As Cohen (1988: 83) argues, many white youths ‘experience no sense of contradiction in wearing dreadlocks, smoking ganja and going to reggae concerts, whilst continuing to assert that “Pakis stink”’. Given the differing perceptions that the white “mainstream” holds with regard to African-Caribbean and British Asian youths, in terms of their physicality/masculinity (Mac an Ghail 1994, Frosh et al 2002), subcultural styles (Cohen 1997) and ability/willingness to

assimilate, it should not be surprising that these groups are granted different levels of inclusion in professional football.

In their pioneering study, Bains and Patel (1995) claim that three-quarters of British Asian footballers believe that their under-representation at professional level is a result of racial discrimination by professional clubs (ibid.: 30). Of those players who have actually had trials at professional clubs, one-fifth state that they received racist abuse from coaches (ibid.: 28). In a similar – although smaller-scale – study, McGuire et al (2001: 75) found that nine-tenths of British Asian players believe that the paucity of British Asians in the professional game is due to institutional racism. However, whilst a variety of agencies, particularly the media (e.g. BBC radio 2001), have highlighted accounts of British Asian players that have failed to make the grade at professional level, little in-depth consultation has been undertaken with the select band of British Asians that *have* become, or have come very close to becoming, professional footballers. As a result, there has been insufficient examination of the degree to which these players believe that racism was present during their recruitment, involvement and, in some cases, eventual failure as professionals. Only by investigating the full spectrum of British Asian experiences in professional football can the complexities of the situation be understood.

In the past, a number of personnel at professional clubs have undoubtedly harboured racist beliefs about British Asian players (see Bains and Patel 1995), and some probably still hold these views. However, most professional club coaches and scouts now state that ‘race’ is not a factor in the recruitment of players. For example, the Education, Welfare and Technical Advisor at one Premier League club stated that:

Because we’re an excellence programme, really, and we scout from schools, local Sunday clubs, community programmes, we’re really picking the best boys, you know. Whether that’s an Afro-Caribbean, a white boy, a Chinese boy, an Asian boy, it doesn’t really matter to us, we just want to get the talent into the club.

[Interview, 1st March 2002]

Similarly, two other academy staff argued as follows:

We identify the strongest leagues and go and scout them. And if they happen to be in [an area of high British Asian concentration], if there happens to be Asian teams and schools participating in them, I ain't got a problem. If they've got a player, we'll try and get him.

[Interview with Youth Development Officer at a Premier League club, 14th
November 2001]

I don't know of any club that would not recruit Asians just because they're Asian. I'm sure there may be one or two people in every walk of life, at every club that may not fancy Asian kids for one particular reason or another but we would recruit Asian kids if they were good enough.

[Interview with Director of Youth Academy at a Premier League club, 16th January
2002]

Critics have suggested that such sentiments are merely propositions of “political correctness” and that they are public cover-ups of inherent institutional racism³⁷ in the scouting and recruitment networks of professional clubs (see e.g. BBC Radio 2002a). Conversely, the fact that these arguments are often proposed by those that work outside of the professional game, such as the media and members of anti-racist football organisations, has led to (often unwarranted) counter-suggestions that these agencies have a vested interest in highlighting racism. Such claims are usually forwarded by the political right, based on the disingenuous belief that racism only really exists in the minds of left-wing activists and institutions such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge the broadly philosophical argument that social organisations can become inexorably dependant upon the existence of what they are “against” in order to constitute themselves, e.g. the notion that the police “need” criminals.

Issues relating to ‘race’ evidently contribute to the under-representation of British Asians in English professional football, yet the testimonies of the British Asians in this research appear to contradict dominant beliefs regarding racism in the game. Of notable significance is the fact that many players strongly deny the claim that racist

recruitment procedures inhibit the progression of British Asians to professional level. In particular, those players that have actually been involved with professional clubs do not attribute their eventual failures to issues of 'race' and racism. For example, with reference to his release from his professional club, one 'Asian' ex-professional/current semi-pro player stated that, 'I honestly don't think me being released was down to the colour of my skin; just that the opinions that mattered didn't think I was quite up to it' [Interview, 28th January 2002]. Another player argued that:

I would say that it was purely football. White players get released, you know. Chinese players get released. I never looked at it that I've got an Asian background, that 'race' was anything to do with it...And I still stand by that.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional/semi-pro player, 5th March 2002]

Similar testimonies were provided by two other British Asian players who have experienced the same fate:

I think [that] if it was my race, I don't think I would have been there in the first place. They wouldn't have offered me a YTS [Youth Training Scheme contract] if they thought it was my race. That didn't come into it...I got released and [my British Asian team-mate] got signed on so I wouldn't say it's down to colour because [my British Asian team-mate] got a contract. He was good enough and I wasn't at that time, so I can't really say [it was] because of my colour.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 11th March 2002]

I look at it and I was standing next to [the team manager]. He's a black man. So how can I look at a black man and think he's racist to me. Do you see what I'm saying? And I'm not saying I can look at a white man and, say I'm looking at you, and think you're a racist, I don't think like that. But if ever any time it occurred to me, not one bit did I ever think it was racism. It never crossed my mind.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

These testimonies portray the selection and recruitment procedures in professional football as being "colour-blind". In reality, the accuracy of this depiction is difficult to measure. What, therefore, might be the reasons underpinning

the unequivocal denial of racism by the British Asian players in this research? Firstly, the players simply may not have received racism at their clubs. In some instances, this might be influenced by the fact that those British Asians that have made the professional grade have tended to come from Anglo- or Anglicised backgrounds, and so their “Asianness” is less distinctive than with other potential players. Secondly, as the above testimonies imply, the inclusion of African-Caribbean and, in some cases British Asian, team-mates may be interpreted as evidence that racism does not, or cannot, exist. Thirdly, racism in football often manifests itself in informal, subtle and sometimes unintended forms (Back et al 2001b, King 2004). The existence of racial discrimination in the game is thus not always easy to detect. This is particularly the case with the use of derogatory verbal epithets which, if they do not include overt, crude, universally-acknowledged terms, may not be recognised as racist. Furthermore, certain behaviours and discourses may be regarded by some as part of the “culture” of football and thus not worthy of discussion. As King (2004: 25) points out with regard to African-Caribbean players, ‘Black players may find it difficult to identify racism and to hold white men accountable, when racist “industrial language” is seen as a legitimate form of competition between men and as a normal part of being a professional soccer player’. Finally, those African-Caribbean players that have publicly spoken out about racism have often been accused of being “over-sensitive” or “having a chip on their shoulder”. British Asian players may be trying to distance themselves from such an accusation, a position that may have been accentuated by the ethnicity of the interviewer – a young, white man. There is also evidence that those players who “accept” racism as “part of the game” are seen as “less troublesome” by some managers and coaches, and are more likely to succeed (ibid.). In summary, racism in football is neither universally present nor absent; it operates in complex, covert and frequently ambiguous ways, and fluctuates contextually and temporally.

A further significant, indeed ominous, finding is the belief amongst some players that, due to the prevailing “post-Macpherson” socio-political climate, an allegation of racism can be an easy and credible option for any British Asian player who fails

to make the grade as a professional. Such sentiments were expressed by a number of British Asian players, for example:

To allow people to treat you [fairly], you've got to allow them to treat you as a footballer, yeah. "Okay, you're doing *that* wrong, I want you to do *this*". Now that is not being racist. That is trying to make you a better player. But what we can get is, "He's told me to do that because I'm Asian, he doesn't like me". Now the tables can be turned where they use it when they want to use it. Now I think that's totally out of order. If I'm sat here now and I want you to treat me right, if you tell me to do something regarding football and I don't like it, I've got to understand that you're doing it to benefit me, you're not doing it to be racist, you know. And it might mean the crap job. It might mean marking somebody who's a good player and you've got to stick with him all the game. That's not because I'm Asian, you know.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player/current professional coach, 5th March 2002]

Sometimes they [British Asian players] do, they use that reason [racism]. It can be a really easy option. Especially when its such a delicate subject, they know that they're going to win...It is an easy option to say that but I can't really say that even if I wanted to because [my British Asian team-mate]'s been signed on. I wouldn't want to say that anyway because I knew that if I'm not good enough, I don't want to be there. I don't want to be there just because I'm Asian. I want to be there because I'm good enough to be there.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 11th March 2002]

It's all very easy to jump on the bandwagon and, you know, when certain things don't go your way, you start playing the race card and that's very unfortunate. That's human nature I suppose but that's certainly not what [our British Asian football organisation] would advocate.

[Interview with member of a British Asian football organisation, 19th March 2002]

Ambiguous interpretations of what constitutes racism and disagreements over when it has occurred clearly make recognising and eradicating discrimination in the professional game a difficult, yet crucially important, task.

Many players believe that extending analyses of ‘race’ and racism in football to grassroots amateur level – where overt prejudice is arguably more prevalent (Williams 1994, Long et al 2000) – would help to further establish why British Asians are failing to make it as professionals. One of the main factors inhibiting the progression of British Asian players from amateur to professional level is that, by playing for British Asian clubs in all-Asian leagues, many players are participating in an environment that is unlikely to lead to them being identified and recruited by professional clubs. To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to examine both why all-Asian leagues have been established and the procedures undertaken by professional clubs to recruit players from amateur youth level. The majority of British Asian football clubs tend to be centred around a particular ethnic/ancestral regional group (e.g. Bengali Muslims) or religious institution (e.g. a temple). Similarly, many organisations have a specific British Asian emphasis (e.g. the UK Bangladesh Football Association and the Khalsa Football Federation [KFF]). In light of contemporary political discourses regarding “Asianness”, many people have been quick to endorse the rhetoric of “segregationism” favoured by the ‘Cantle Report’³⁸ to argue that these clubs and organisations are a further example of the separate social spheres inhabited by whites and British Asians. However, this approach fails to comprehend the processes by which these clubs were established. The previous chapter discussed the importance of football for many of the South Asian men who migrated to Britain between the 1950s and 1970s. Shaw (2000) highlights that the settlement of South Asians in Britain consisted of a process of “chain migration” involving specific *biraderi* (kinship networks). Those migrants that were already resident in Britain provided the travel expenses, accommodation and employment contacts for friends and family leaving the subcontinent. In many cases, the geographical roots of a particular local British Asian community can, therefore, be traced to a specific area, e.g. a village or district, of the subcontinent. In this context, it is unsurprising that most British Asian clubs have a distinct ethnic identity and act as key representations of locality and community. Notwithstanding this, the clubs in this research made it clear that membership was not exclusive and that, although most clubs are dominated by a particular ethnic group or religious denomination,

they are pan-Asian institutions. Furthermore, contrary to popular opinion, some whites and African-Caribbeans play for British Asian clubs. One of the clubs in this research had a white goalkeeper whilst another had two African-Caribbean players. Such players tend to be in the minority, however. For example, one 'Asian' amateur player stated that:

We've had non-Asian players play but then they've had the reverse [kind of racism]. They've had prejudice or racist abuse thrown at them for playing *with* Asian players, you know, being Asian-lovers or whatever, you know, quite rude remarks being said to them like "Paki-lovers" and things like that.

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

Some white or African-Caribbean players might be unprepared to endure such pejorative remarks whilst others might feel alienated by the specific ethno-cultural backgrounds of many British Asian clubs.

The pioneering British Asian clubs competed in predominantly "white" amateur leagues, yet their involvement was rarely without problems, with players often receiving verbal and physical racist abuse from opposition players (Bains and Johal 1998). Such occurrences continue to take place, particularly with those British Asian amateur clubs that play in county associations or leagues comprised predominantly of white, semi-rural village teams. The population of minority ethnic groups in rural areas is far less than in urban areas (Rees and Phillips 1996), yet the highest rate of racist attacks in Britain is not in large metropolises but in those rural areas containing small minority ethnic populations (Rayner 2001). In both 1997 and 1998 players from an Essex-based club, Bari FC, were verbally and physically assaulted by opposition teams, resulting in one player being beaten unconscious (Lindsey 1997, Kick It Out 1999), whilst in April 2002, players from a Leicester-based Sikh team, Guru Nanak, were attacked by a mob of skinheads wielding baseball bats and bottles (*Times* 2002). The inimical treatment that many British Asian teams have received has led to the establishment of all-Asian leagues³⁹, which are perceived to act as environments where British Asians can play without fear of abuse or violence.

However, all-Asian leagues represent a significant problem in terms of the progression of British Asian players from amateur to professional football. This is because those players who play in all-Asian leagues are not participating in an environment where they are likely to be spotted by professional clubs. In the majority of cases, club scouts recruit players from a small selection of established amateur leagues and rarely extend their observations outside of these structures. This situation is the result of four main factors. Firstly, some football club scouts are ignorant of the reasons why British Asians often play outside “mainstream” leagues. They adhere to the theory that “the cream rises to the top” and that if a player is good enough, he will be participating in one of the leagues that they scout. Secondly, many small clubs do not have the resources to designate scouts to watch what are ostensibly “specialist” leagues. For example, the Centre of Excellence Director at one Second Division club reported that whilst a neighbouring Premier League club could deploy up to forty youth scouts, his club only possessed four, all of whom were part-time. Thirdly, many coaches and scouts adhere to the belief that any “specialist” league – regardless of the ethnicity of the players who participate in it – is unlikely to be of a sufficient overall standard to make scouting it a worthwhile activity⁴⁰. For example, the Academy Director at one Premier League club stated that:

As far as recruiting from Asian leagues directly, one of the hardest things would be the standard of football and actually being able to say that that football is of a sufficient level to demonstrate that players have sufficient talent to come into the higher level. The trouble is also that if players only play at that level then they are not going to improve from that level and that’s an added issue. That’s, I think, really why we wouldn’t seek to actively scout an Asian youth league, if it started up in [this city].

[Interview, 21st November 2001]

Fourthly, most all-Asian leagues tend to be based predominantly around *adult* football and so the majority of players will be too old to have a realistic chance of making it as a professional (see Chapter Eight).

The implications of playing in all-Asian leagues are widely acknowledged by many British Asian players. The vast majority of participants in this research argued that players who choose to play exclusively with players from their own ethnic background are preventing themselves from competing against the best players and teams. Consequently, all-Asian leagues are believed to be an impediment to the progress of British Asian players into professional football. A number of British Asian players specifically highlighted the need for British Asians to play in mixed-ethnicity leagues, as highlighted in the following quotations:

I enjoyed playing in English [i.e. white] teams because you're playing with the best sides as well. Obviously [*my* British Asian club] play in a normal [mixed] league and would compete against any side and I think then, at least if you're any good, people can see. If you're playing in your own leagues you're limited, aren't you? You're limited to the ability of the players in that league and it's not going to really improve their standard, I wouldn't have thought.

[Interview with 'Indian' amateur player, 5th February 2002]

Why separate Asians and English [i.e. whites]? If you want to better yourself as a footballer you've got to go and play against the best players and with the best players, you know. Whatever your ability level is. Now, if you're a good Sunday league player, why be stuck playing with, you know, an Asian league? You've got to mix and play at the best Sunday level that you can. And that's going to be a mixed level. Whatever race you are. So I think to get the better out of yourself you've got to be playing with better players. If it be that they're black, white, you know, green, it doesn't matter!

[Interview with Asian' ex-professional / current semi-pro player, 5th March 2003]

It is *absolutely* important that we [British Asians] play in mixed leagues. It is a way backwards for us to play in the Asian league. It is a way of us saying indirectly to the white mainstream, "We accept what you say". So what are we going to do? We are going to hide in a corner, we're going to build our own league, we are going to stick to ourselves.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

I think it's really, really important [to play in mixed leagues]. It's one of the disadvantages at the moment, especially for Asians, because they just play

amongst themselves, you know, local teams, Asian teams. But they need to broaden their knowledge, definitely, by playing with whites, blacks, everyone, because if they just think about themselves, then I'm afraid, you know, there's a long way to go still for us to get our mentality right, then to get the experience, especially for the youngsters. They need to broaden their horizons as early as they can and eradicate from their mind this mentality of racism.

[Interview with 'Asian' semi-pro player, 11th May 2002]

Further evidence of the benefits, if not the necessities, of playing in mixed leagues can be obtained from the career biographies of the professional and ex-professional British Asian players interviewed for this research. All of these players had previously played in local "mainstream" amateur leagues that contained players from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Encouragingly, an increasing number of British Asian clubs are also now playing in mixed-ethnicity leagues, and many have been successful in these environments⁴¹. Building on these foundations is necessary to ensure that appropriate structures are in place to enable British Asians to progress from amateur to professional level. However, whilst British Asian players acknowledge the need to play in "mainstream" leagues if they are to have any chance of making it as a professional, for some, this can be an uncomfortable experience. It is also the case that, in many instances, British Asian parents lack the specific cultural capital needed to facilitate their sons' involvement in "mainstream" clubs or leagues. This issue is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Notes

- ¹ It is more accurate to speak of the existence of a growing number of contemporary *racisms* yet, for purposes of consistency, the term will be written in its singular form.
- ² Sivanandan (2001: 2) argues that, to some extent, the notion of cultural racism has been superseded by a *xeno-racism*, which ‘is racism in substance but xeno in form – a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white’. It is based on neither colour nor culture but a fear of the homogenising effects of the European Union and the consequences emanating from the destruction of international barriers, for example, an increase in the numbers of people seeking political asylum.
- ³ Whilst *cultural* racism tends to be more dominant than *biological* racism in early twenty-first century western racial discourses, it would be incorrect to suggest that there is a finite point where the former begins and the latter finishes. Evidence of prejudices relating to culture can be traced back through previous centuries and both forms often operate in symbiosis within the same context. Cultural racism is thus not necessarily the “new” racism many have posited it to be (Barker 1981).
- ⁴ For a fictional, yet extremely accurate, delineation of the lives of skinheads see Allen (1992).
- ⁵ A somewhat anomalous development of the skinhead subculture in the 1960s was the penchant for listening to Jamaican Ska, Reggae and Bluebeat (see Back 2002). This was primarily due to the infectious dance beat of the music (instrumentals or “versions” of vocal tracks were often as popular as the originals). Indeed, a number of Jamaican Reggae artistes and bands actually recorded tracks that paid homage to skinhead culture, for example, *Skinhead Moonstomp*, *Skinhead Girl* and *Skinhead Jamboree* (by the Pyramids, although under the guise of Symarip), *Skinhead Shuffle* (the Mohawks), *Skinhead Train* (Laurel Aitken), *Skinheads Don’t Fear* and *Skinhead Moondust* (Hot Rod Allstars), *Skinhead Revolt* (Joe The Boss) and *Skinhead, A Message To You* (Desmond Riley). Some sound systems, such as the one run by Sir Neville the Enchanter, often played in exclusively white clubs. Whilst relations between black and white youths were initially cordial within the Reggae clubs, this did not last long and these venues often witnessed fighting between the two groups. By the early 1970s, many skinheads lost interest in the music, due to the growth of *Roots* Reggae and its connotations with slavery, black consciousness and Rastafarianism, together with an increasing association between skinheads and Far Right politics (Marshall 1991).

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- ⁶ The New Right was a range of right-wing Thatcherite politicians and groups in the 1980s that included industry-sponsored “think-tanks” and promoted laissez-faire economics, individualism and anti-welfarism (see King 1987).
- ⁷ For comprehensive accounts of Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrations to, and settlements in, Britain see Eade (1989) and Shaw (2000), respectively.
- ⁸ Between 1951 and 1967, the number of people employed in the cotton industry in Britain decreased from 285,750 to 92,540 (Pearson 1976: 58).
- ⁹ Merchants from the Indian state of Gujarat have travelled across the Arabian Sea to trade in eastern Africa for the last two thousand years. In the nineteenth century, many Gujaratis were taken to East Africa as indentured plantation labour, to build railways for the Imperial British East Africa Company. In the early part of the twentieth century, Gujarat was struck by famine (1899-1900), plague (1899-1902, 1916-18) and an influenza epidemic (1918-19) and many Gujaratis subsequently migrated to East Africa. However, policies of Africanisation in many African states in the 1960s/70s meant that the positions of East African Asians became untenable (Dwyer 1994). For example, in Uganda, President Idi Amin expelled nearly thirty thousand Indians in 1972. As many of these refugees were British citizens, Britain took responsibility for them and so many subsequently migrated there, hence their label as ‘twice migrants’ (cf. Bhachu 1985).
- ¹⁰ Whilst taxi driving has become a popular form of employment for British Asian men in these areas, it can be a dangerous activity. Since 1992, four British Asian drivers – Mohammed Sarwar, Tariq Javed, Sarfraz Khan and Israr Hussain – have been murdered in racist attacks whilst working in Manchester, Bury, Rotherham and Oldham, respectively. In June 2001, taxi drivers in Burnley held a ten-day strike to protest against police inaction in the face of racist attacks.
- ¹¹ In 2003, a study by Simon Burgess and Deborah Wilson of the Leverhulme Centre for Market and Public Organisation found severe levels of ethnic segregation between whites and British Asian pupils in schools in Blackburn, Bradford and Oldham. These three local authority areas qualify as ‘ghettos’ according to a technical measure used by academics in the USA to describe the exclusion of African-Americans. In Bradford, for example, although twenty-nine per cent of pupils are British Asian, segregation is so entrenched that, in order to achieve an even representation of groups across the city, more than half of the British Asian pupils would have to be admitted to schools that are currently disproportionately white (Kundnani 2003a).

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- ¹² In some instances, geographical segregation has been perceived by councillors and politicians as a means by which to reduce problems within communities characterised by conflict. For example, in 2001, Oldham council built a fence to separate white and British Asian communities in a street in Glodwick, Oldham (one of the main districts where the urban unrest took place). The following year, AKSA Housing Association made an application to Oldham Council for the fence to be replaced with an eight-foot brick wall. The proposal was accepted by the council, who publicly claimed that it was to prevent local criminals using the area as an escape route (Taher 2002b).
- ¹³ For example, a report by Oldham council in 2001 pronounced that, within a decade, the town's white population will have decreased by 9%, whilst the Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations will have grown by 112% and 88%, respectively (Harris 2001a). Similarly, in Bradford, it is predicted that by 2011 the city's Pakistani population will have increased by 72% since 1996. The white population will have decreased by 6% (Macey 2002: 24).
- ¹⁴ According to the deprivation index used by Oldham Council, 52% of Pakistanis, 61% of Bangladeshis and 7% of whites live in the towns' worst 10% of deprived areas. Nevertheless, in recent years much more money has been spent on regeneration in predominantly "white" districts (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism 2001).
- ¹⁵ In 2004, a poll carried out by Mori for *Prospect* magazine found that 39% of all respondents would rather live in an area purely with people from the same ethnic background. For whites, the figure was 41%, whilst for minority ethnic people it was 26% (Dodd 2004).
- ¹⁶ The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism is run and funded by the Institute of Race Relations.
- ¹⁷ A poll carried out in Burnley in 2004 by Manchester-based company Vision 21 found that working-class voters are becoming increasingly disillusioned with Labour's attempts to regenerate post-industrial towns. The survey warned that this scenario could be exploited by the BNP (Wintour 2004).
- ¹⁸ For a synopsis of recent BNP policies and activities see Renton (2003).
- ¹⁹ The BNP won its first local council by-election victory in September 1993, in Millwall, south-east London. In the 2001 general election, the BNP saved five deposits and won more than a tenth of the vote in three constituencies. In Oldham West and Royton, BNP leader Nick Griffin won 6,552 votes (16% of the total). In Oldham East and Saddleworth the BNP polled 5,091 votes (11%). In one Burnley constituency the party gained 4,151 votes (11%). In January 2003, the BNP won its

first council seat in Yorkshire, in Mixenden on Calderdale (although this was lost to the Liberal Democrats the following October). In May of that year, seven BNP candidates were elected to Burnley council. Other victories have been achieved in Blackburn, Broxbourne, Dudley, Kirklees, Sandwell (two councillors), Stoke-on-Trent, Thurrock and a second seat in Mixenden on Calderdale.

²⁰ Some of the material included in this chapter was presented at *Social Research in a Brave New World: A Postgraduate Conference for Social Scientists* at the University of Nottingham in June 2002 (Burdsey 2002).

²¹ As is the case with “Asianness”, the notion of “blackness” should not be seen as a homogenous form of identity and representation. As Hall (1990: 225) states, ‘in terms of cultural identity neither Blackness nor Britishness is a fixed, stable element and sport and its representations are one site on which the way these elements are articulated is in the process of transformation’. In football, for example, players such as John Barnes, Sol Campbell, Paul Ince and Ian Wright have demonstrated the different interpretations of being a black Briton in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries.

²² In recent years a small number of British Asians have represented England in cricket at various levels (from youth to full international). These include Usman Afzaal, Kabir Ali, Kadeer Ali, Ravinda Bopara, Aftab Habib, Shaftab Khalid, Sajid Mahmood, Monty Panesar, Samit Patel, Bilal Shafayat, Owais Shah, Anurag Singh and Vikram Solanki. Many other sports have also surpassed football in the selection of British Asians at international level, e.g. squash, hockey, wrestling and even those similar in ethos, such as rugby league.

²³ Whilst one would want to refrain from an essentialist interpretation of national identity and affiliation, it might be suggested that whilst African readers chose Nigeria, African-Caribbeans – in the absence of Jamaica (who had qualified in 1998) in this World Cup – chose England or Brazil. Brazil is a popular team for many people, from minority ethnic groups to white, middle-class “new fans”. The poll is, admittedly, of limited reliability as only one hundred people were questioned.

²⁴ Uddin is Anglo-Asian. His father, Shafique, comes from Bangladesh whilst his mother, Pamela, is white and comes from east London.

²⁵ In February 2004, the official FIFA rankings (out of 204) placed India 139th, Bangladesh 151st and Pakistan 168th.

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- ²⁶ In 2000, India lost 2-0 to Fulham and drew 0-0 with West Bromwich Albion. In 2001, they lost 3-0 to Brentford, 2-0 to Walsall, 2-0 to Nottingham Forest and drew 1-1 with Leyton Orient. Also that year, Pakistan lost 3-0 to Bury and 2-0 to Coventry City.
- ²⁷ In 2001, whilst the attendance for the match between West Bromwich Albion and India exceeded 12,000, only 5,000 (predominantly white) people watched the Fulham versus India game. Just 3,000 people watched Bangladesh play India in Leicester, whilst 1,292 fans attended the match between Bury and Pakistan. The following year, India played two matches against Jamaica in England. Only 1,200 people watched the first match at Vicarage Road, Watford whilst only 4,000 spectators attended the second fixture at Wolverhampton Wanderers' Molineux stadium.
- ²⁸ One attempt to increase the links between subcontinental and diasporic Indian footballers was the first Indian International Football Series, held in Germany, in August 2002. The competition involved the Indian under-17 national team, the Indian Tata football academy under-16 side, an England under-17 Indian select side and a Germany under-17 IFG (Indian Footballers in Germany) select side.
- ²⁹ Bangladesh only achieved Test status in the 1990s.
- ³⁰ This is not to suggest that football does not foster modern day antagonisms between former coloniser and colonised nations. For example, nearly forty years after Algeria had gained its independence from France, in October 2001, a match between the two in Paris was abandoned after a pitch invasion and protest by what the media described as 'largely Algerian and black youths' (Duncan 2001, see also Hare 2003).
- ³¹ A major source of contention revolves around pitch invasions. Running onto the pitch at the end of the match to celebrate a victory is particularly popular amongst Pakistani supporters. Spectators are currently fined up to £1,000 if they invade the pitch at cricket grounds in England. In June 2003, despite the threat of a fine, extra stewarding and public announcements made in Urdu, more than one thousand Pakistani supporters invaded the pitch at Old Trafford after their team's victory over England in the NatWest Challenge Trophy. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) claims that present legislation is inadequate and that pitch invasions should be made a criminal offence.
- ³² This thesis concentrates on British Asian *players*, yet it is important to point out that, with the notable exception of Bradbury (2001b), little reference has been paid to the under-representation of British Asians in non-playing professional roles, such as management and the boardroom or

other areas of employment such as administration or the souvenir shop. There is also an absence of British Asians within governing bodies and as officials. The case of Gurnam Singh is symptomatic of this situation. Singh was sacked as a referee by the Football Association and the Football League despite topping the ratings list for the 1994-95 season. In December 2001, the Football League was found guilty of racially discriminating against Singh and preventing him from being promoted to Premier League matches. The Football League was also found guilty of unfair dismissal. In May 2002, Singh finally received a compensation settlement of £74,000, yet the three years that it took for the Football League to deal with the complaint meant that Singh is now too old to officiate in major games.

- ³³ Other clubs, such as Crystal Palace, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City (until they moved to their new stadium in 2003) are based in areas of high African-Caribbean concentration.
- ³⁴ In an investigation into racism in and around Bolton Wanderers' former ground, Burnden Park, Holland (1995) established the following: 35% of minority ethnic citizens stated that they had been harassed in the streets surrounding the ground on matchdays (compared to 13% of white respondents); 64% of minority ethnic citizens stated that they had been harassed inside the ground (9% white); 90% of minority ethnic citizens stated that they remained at home on matchdays (29% white); 73% of white residents felt comfortable on matchdays, whilst 85% of minority ethnic respondents felt 'uncomfortable', 'nervous' or 'fearful'. These patterns of racism and exclusion can also be found at other stadia that are situated in predominantly British Asian areas. For example, in 1995, 36% of Racial Equality Councils received complaints, from predominantly British Asian citizens, regarding racist abuse in the vicinity of football stadia (ibid.).
- ³⁵ In June 2003, the High Court ordered that a man previously acquitted for using the term "Paki" at a football match should be convicted. The case, brought under the Football Offences Act 1991, declared that even without swearing or insults, chants that used the term were racist and illegal. The man had been in a group of nearly one hundred Port Vale supporters who chanted, "You're just a town full of Pakis" to visiting Oldham Athletic fans in October 2002. In August 2003, a man was given the first Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) banning him from using the term "Paki" after he had continuously racially abused staff at Manchester Council during telephone calls regarding a housing application.
- ³⁶ This line of thinking has been used to distance Jonathan Woodgate and Lee Bowyer – the players involved in the assault of Sarfraz Najeib – from allegations that they are racists. For example, on signing Woodgate in January 2003, Newcastle United manager Bobby Robson stated that 'Jonathan is a close friend of Keiron Dyer, Jermaine Jenas and Rio Ferdinand [all players of

mixed African-Caribbean and white parentage], and that speaks for itself. If we had any inkling that he harboured racist thoughts we wouldn't have signed him at this club' (cited in Walker 2003a).

³⁷ The term 'institutional racism' was first used by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) in the context of the Black Power movement in the United States. In contrast to *individual* racism, they argue that *institutional* racism is 'less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of *specific* individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. (It) originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type' (ibid.: 4). At the present time, the most well-known and adhered to definition of institutional racism is that proposed by Lord Macpherson. According to Macpherson (1999: para. 6.34), institutional racism is 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, behaviours which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance and thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'. The 'Macpherson Report' focused on racism in the Metropolitan police force in light of the murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence – by a gang of white youths – in south-east London in 1993, a botched inquiry and a failed prosecution (see Cathcart 1999). For critiques of the report and, in particular, Macpherson's definition and usage of the concept of institutional racism see Bridges (2000), Bourne (2001), Bridges (2001).

³⁸ The 'Cantle Report', chaired by Ted Cantle, was the investigation carried out by the Home Office into the urban unrest of 2001 (Home Office 2001b). At the time, Cantle was an Associate Director of the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) for Local Government.

³⁹ All-Asian leagues also exist in cricket. For example, the Quaid-e-Azam league – meaning father of the nation and named as a tribute to Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan – was founded by Pakistanis living in England in 1981. Most clubs in the league are based in West Yorkshire.

⁴⁰ One possible option whereby professional scouts would be able to observe the best British Asian players would be during the national tournaments that take place over the summer. Whilst some professional clubs have shown an interest in these competitions, their scheduling represents a problem. They take place outside of the conventional English football season (which runs from August to May) during June and July, and most professional scouts and coaches will be taking their holidays at this time.

⁴¹ See e.g. *Asian Times* (2000).

Chapter 5

***One of the lads?* Dual ethnicity and assimilated ethnicities in the careers of British Asian professional footballers**

Introduction

In recent years, the paucity of British Asians in professional football has been given increasing recognition by academics (Bains and Patel 1995, Johal 2001, McGuire et al 2001), anti-racist campaign groups (Kick It Out 1998b, 2000a), governing bodies (Football Association 1999) and other footballing agencies (Independent Football Commission 2004). As a result of the findings of such groups, together with the inability of most people to cite evidence to the contrary, a widespread belief exists that British Asians have *never* played professional football. This means that little attention has been given to the select band of British Asians who have actually played at professional level. The lack of information about these players is of particular concern for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that the majority of agencies involved in trying to facilitate the inclusion of British Asians in professional football – for example, the Football Association (FA), Professional Footballers' Association (PFA)¹ and anti-racist football organisations – are either unaware of their achievements or have refrained from initiating dialogue with them². This failure to engage in consultation with those British Asians that have played professional football – or, equally importantly, have *narrowly* failed to make the grade – undoubtedly represents a missed opportunity in terms of establishing ways in which procedures could be modified to facilitate their greater inclusion. Secondly, it has prevented the unearthing of two significant trends regarding the personal characteristics of those British Asians that have made the grade at professional level, i.e. that they have tended to come from either a dual ethnicity background or that they have experienced an extremely Anglicised process of socialisation.

This chapter takes the under-representation of British Asians as professional footballers and locates it within a wider debate on ethnicity, cultural assimilation and cultural/social capital. The present analysis examines the significance of these phenomena and their influence on the processes of inclusion and exclusion that dictate the involvement of British Asians in English professional football. The objectives of the chapter are fivefold. Firstly, the chapter contextualises the debate by examining the current popular British fascination with South Asian cultural

forms. It is argued that one of the reasons why they are so keenly appropriated is because they have been consciously selected, modified and diluted by a variety of agencies and presented in a manner that is more acceptable to the white British “mainstream”. In a similar vein, it is also highlighted that those British Asians that have made the most impact in “mainstream” British popular culture have tended to be Anglo-Asians, i.e. they have one white parent. Secondly, the chapter summarises the position of Anglo-Asians in contemporary British society and highlights the fact that the majority of British Asians who have played professional football – like those prominent in popular culture more widely – have been of dual ethnicity. Thirdly – in a partially related development – it is demonstrated that those players with two British Asian parents have consciously deprioritised their ethnic identities and attempted to become “one of the lads”, in order to gain acceptance in professional football. Fourthly, the concepts of ‘cultural assimilation’ and ‘Anglicisation’ are introduced, and an examination is provided of the ways in which these processes can provide British Asians with a greater degree of the specific ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1984, 1986) required to become professional footballers. Lastly, the analysis considers the implications of ethnic identities, cultural assimilation and self-identification for British Asian communities, professional football and the anti-racist football movement.

2001: a ‘race’ odyssey

During the summer of 2001 the images, reports and discourses of the British media were frequently dominated by names, faces and phrases previously familiar only to those within British Asian communities. At the time of writing – three years since then – the current state of affairs could be interpreted and summarised in a similar manner. However, whilst in 2001 it was the front pages and editorials of the national press, and the lead stories of television news bulletins, that resonated with British Asian issues, it is now the arts or fashion sections and the glossy colour supplements that soak up the British Asian influence. The former alarmist crime-and-punishment rhetoric and “scare” phrases such as “race riot”, “fundamentalism”, “racial

segregation” and “no-go areas” have been replaced by references to “Bollywood”, “eastern mysticism” and “ethnic chic”.

A mere twelve months after condemning and admonishing Britain’s South Asian (particularly Muslim) populations to a degree previously only witnessed in the wake of the Rushdie Affair³, in 2002 the media began enthusiastically to promote the appropriation of selected South Asian cultural forms and practices. These cultural elements have been eagerly consumed by the white, British “mainstream”. Coinciding with the visit of the Indian cricket team for a Test Series against England, the summer of 2002 saw an unprecedented level of fascination regarding all things “Indian” – actual or perceived – within British popular cultural circles. On the cinema screen aspiring young female (although not, significantly, male) British Asian footballers were encouraged to *Bend It Like Beckham*⁴. As part of its high profile ‘Indian Summer’ season, Channel Four screened a number of Indian cinema classics, together with a series of beginners’ guides and documentaries relating to Bollywood, the Bombay-based centre of the Indian film industry. Furthermore, West End London theatre, traditionally the bastion of the white middle-classes, provided the setting for Shekhar Kapur and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s production of A.R. Rahman’s *Bombay Dreams*⁵. Bollywood had without doubt become a dominant cultural influence: (white) dance music duo Basement Jaxx used Bollywood-style dancers in the video for their single *Romeo*, department store Selfridges and the Victoria and Albert museum both hosted Bollywood exhibitions, and high-street stores Marks and Spencer and Top Shop introduced Bollywood-influenced fashion ranges. Bollywood films were screened at Test cricket grounds and at Regent’s Park in London and Roundhay Park in Leeds, whilst a bhangra band played a prominent part in the musical displays at the opening ceremony for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. More recently, Bollywood-style dancers were used in the video for the official 2003 *Comic Relief* charity record – performed by Gareth Gates and fictional British Asian comedy family, the Kumars⁶ – as well as in television advertisements for Halifax bank and Walker’s Crisps, and promotional material for the BBC. As images of young British Asians clashing with far right extremists and

police officers fade in the memories of many, Alexander (2000b: 230) points out that ‘as a mode of consumption, the “ethnic” has never been so fashionable, nor so profitable’. Similarly, Hutnyk and Sharma (2000: 59) argue that ‘difference – especially ethnic difference – sells in late-consumer capitalism’. In 2001 the notion “British Asian” was anathema. Today, as was the case in the late 1960s – until popular cultural intermediaries shift their focus to another equally ephemeral and superficial source of identification – the notion “British-Asian” is a marketing dream.

Whilst many have lauded the appropriation of elements of South Asian cultures, it is fundamentally important to recognise that these cultural forms are not simply adopted as part of a process of passive transmission and diffusion into British society. The vast majority are purposefully selected, by a variety of agencies – from television companies to “high street” retailers – and consciously modified, diluted and marketed to suit a variety of white British audiences. For example, it is now fairly widely acknowledged that the diners who cram into the nation’s curry and balti restaurants after pub closing time on Friday and Saturday nights are seeking and obtaining a product – often the stereotypical chicken tikka masala⁷ – that, whilst satisfying the tastes and preferences of many white Britons, actually bears little resemblance to traditional South Asian food. Increasing reference has also been made to the burgeoning profile of British Asian musicians with the dawning of the ‘Asian Underground’⁸ scene, yet it remains the case that Indian music and musicians have only approached mainstream success⁹ through either the psychedelia of the Beatles, the indie agit-pop of Asian Dub Foundation, Black Star Liner, Cornershop and Echobelly, or by giving traditional South Asian rhythms hip-hop or dance music “makeovers”, e.g. Panjabi MC¹⁰ and Talvin Singh¹¹. Furthermore, whilst British Asians have made a breakthrough in prime-time television comedy with shows such as *Goodness Gracious Me!* and *The Kumars at No.42*, the former is arguably constructed in the format of traditional “white” comedy shows¹² and the latter tends to involve predominantly white celebrity guests¹³.

The appropriation of South Asian cultures may result in some positive repercussions. However, the manner in which these forms are diluted means that the majority of the examples cited above represent ‘spaces which offer a primarily middle-class constituency a sanitized encounter with an imagined Asian “other”. They allow for white folk to rub shoulders with a carefully constructed exotica and for the perpetuation of a myth of multiculturalism’ (Banerjea 2000: 65). For such “cultural tourists”, attending a *mela*¹⁴ or grooving to the latest commercial *Desi Beats*¹⁵ CD may simply be a fashion trend, yet for others it can be a means of convincing themselves and others of their support for multiculturalism. Indeed, for some people, it may help them reassure themselves over their private criticisms of Muslim “fundamentalists” and arranged marriages. Basically, the appropriation of South Asian cultural forms should be interpreted as representing both a fashion trend and a transient multicultural consciousness, and not extrapolated to signify a distinct improvement in white-British Asian ‘race’ relations. In other words, this development is simply a contemporary manifestation of a desire amongst the white “mainstream” to experience the exotic. It should not be misread as reflecting a substantial improvement in the integration of British Asians within British society.

This point can be further demonstrated by examining the influence and involvement of British Asians in “mainstream” British popular culture. In this regard, it is necessary to look beyond processes of cultural appropriation and dilution, and explore the specific ethnic backgrounds of the individuals involved. If one looks at those British Asians who have been most successful within “mainstream” media, it is evident that many of them possess dual South Asian and white ethnicities, such as the actors Chris Bisson, Raji James and Jimi Mistri¹⁶, novelist Hanif Kureishi and presenter Melanie Sykes. In professional sport, some of the most high profile members of the select band of British Asians to participate at elite level are Anglo-Asians¹⁷, for example, England international cricketers Nasser Hussain and Vikram Solanki, and golfer Sandeep Grewal. It is also the case that the majority of players of South Asian heritage to have played professional football in Britain have been of dual South Asian and white ethnicities. The remainder of this

chapter locates the above discussion in the context of British Asian involvement in professional football. The notion of cultural assimilation is explored later, but first the analysis concentrates on the issue of dual ethnicity.

From the Cothers to Chopra: Anglo-Asians and English professional football

In recent years, academics have paid increasing attention to the heterogeneity of British Asian communities and the manner in which they remain fragmented along the ethnic, religious, linguistic and caste divisions of the subcontinent (e.g. Ballard 1994a). Furthermore, the multi-generational migration to, and settlement in, Britain by South Asians has led to an acknowledgement of the need to consider the existence of post-modern or fragmented identities which no longer situate young British Asians within the old axiom of being “caught between cultures” (e.g. Anwar 1976; Watson 1977, Anwar 1998). Brah (1996: 41-2) highlights that such an idea not only propagates the essentialist notion of distinct, monolithic “British” and “Asian” cultures, but it also fails to allow for the possibility of cultural interaction and hybridisation, and portrays young British Asians as ‘disoriented, confused and atomised individuals’. It has become evident that rather than experiencing these forms of spatial and generational dislocation, there are increasing segments of the British population that are actively creating novel and multiple forms of identity. As Caglar (1997: 170) points out, ‘in refocusing on the social formations and “disjunct” subjectivities of persons with multilocal and translocal attachments, a number of concepts have come to be celebrated: “hybrid”, “creolised”, “hyphenated” and “diasporic” identities are the most prominent among them’¹⁸.

Nevertheless, considerably less attention has been paid to a further distinction in the broad British Asian collectivity: Anglo-Asians¹⁹, i.e. those individuals with both a white and a South Asian parent. Whilst the early twenty-first century is witnessing a growth in the academic study of people of “mixed-race” or “dual heritage” (Ifekwunigwe 1999, Parker and Song 2001, Tizard and Phoenix 2002, Ali 2003), the lack of qualitative research on *Anglo-Asians* represents a considerable lacuna in this field. This is somewhat surprising, taking into account the marked increase in the

number of individuals to whom this categorisation applies (Alibhai-Brown 2001a). It is important to stress, though, that this pattern is not uniform across all ethnic groups. Whilst the number of Indians and East African Asians (predominantly of Indian origin) marrying white partners is relatively significant – 19% of British-born men and 10% of British-born women from these groups marry white partners (Berthoud & Beishon 1997) – this is not the case for Bangladeshis or Pakistanis who, for a variety of reasons, tend to marry within their specific groupings²⁰ (Modood 1997a). Consequently, in terms of the overall population, the majority of Anglo-Asians tend to be of Indian origin. However, in this thesis, individuals are referred to who are of heterogeneous *Anglo-Bangladeshi*, *Anglo-Indian* or *Anglo-Pakistani* ethnicities. Where appropriate, these classifications will be adhered to, yet at other times, although by no means ideal, it is more logical to use the general category of Anglo-Asians. The significance of these Anglicised British Asian identities will now be examined in the context of English professional football.

The first players of South Asian heritage to participate in English professional football were the Anglo-Indian Cother brothers – John ‘Jack’ William and Edwin ‘Eddie’ – who played for Watford in the late nineteenth century. In the 1950s, Anglo-Pakistani Roy Smith represented West Ham United, whilst the succeeding two decades saw perhaps the most significant contribution (in terms of number of appearances) with the Anglo-Indian trio of Brian ‘Bud’ Houghton (Cambridge United, Oxford United and Southend United), Kevin Keelan (Norwich City) and Ricky Heppolette (Preston North End, Leyton Orient, Crystal Palace and Chesterfield), together with Celtic’s Scottish-Indian Paul Wilson (Vasili 2000). Heppolette was born in Bhuswal (near Mumbai) but emigrated to Britain with his parents at the age of three. Bains and Patel (1995: 10) state that ‘the Heppolette household was English speaking and had little in common with most native Indians...although Ricky Heppolette is of Indian origin, throughout his life he has had little to do with Indian culture or religion’. Two of the most promising young contemporary British Asian players, Michael Chopra (Newcastle United) and Anwar

Uddin (Bristol Rovers) both have a white mother, and an Indian and a Bangladeshi father, respectively.

It is highly unlikely that professional football clubs actively pursue a “less Asian the better” policy and there are obvious exceptions where players whose parents are *both* British Asian have come close to making the grade as professionals. During the 1980s, Naseem Bashir (Reading) and Rachid Sarwar (Kilmarnock) made a handful of league appearances, whilst professionals in the early twenty-first century include Adnan Ahmed (Huddersfield Town), Zesh Rehman (Fulham) and Harpal Singh (Leeds United). However, it is evident that those players with two British Asian parents who have reached the higher echelons of English football have tended to come from Anglicised backgrounds. A prime example is Chris Dolby, who made sporadic appearances for Bradford City and Rotherham in the early 1990s. Whilst both of Dolby’s birth parents were South Asian, he was adopted as a baby by white parents and thus his upbringing reflected the culture of his adoptive rather than biological parents. The presence of an albeit minimal number of British Asians in English professional football suggests that, contrary to popular stereotypes, simply being of a South Asian ethnicity – either partially or fully – cannot solely account for an individual’s failure to make the grade at professional level. One needs to unravel a far more complex matrix of factors and processes in order to understand the nexus between British Asians and participation in professional football. When one examines the personal and career biographies of past and current British Asian players, it is clear that the focus of analysis needs to be directed towards the extent to which an individual is able to minimise – consciously or unconsciously – his “difference” and under-emphasise those aspects of his cultural background most antithetical to “mainstream”, i.e. white, professional football.

“New laddism”? Ethnicity and young, male British Asian identities

The aim of this part of the chapter is to ascertain the extent to which the significance of (de)prioritising aspects of one’s ethnic and cultural identities is recognised and adhered to by British Asian players themselves. The objective is to gain an

understanding of how young British Asian footballers comprehend, articulate and experience notions of “Asianness” and to determine the degree to which they are able to become “one of the lads”. The term “lad” is somewhat difficult to define as there is little consensus about the characteristics of “laddishness”, and the concept differs across geographical and temporal contexts. Since the 1960s in Britain, the term has tended to be associated with studies of delinquency and white youth subcultures (Willis 1977). Hence, at various stages, notions of being a “lad” have been related to Mod, skinhead and football “casual”²¹ subcultures. In the early twenty-first century, “lad” is normally used to refer to a young man who indulges in alcohol, football and promiscuous sexual intercourse and, as Redhead (1997: 99) argues, ‘shuns feminism and homosexuality like the plague’. Traditionally, the concepts “British Asian” and “lad” have been viewed as incompatible. However, recent years have witnessed the involvement of significant numbers of young British Asian men in gang warfare and urban unrest (e.g. in the summer of 2001), together with an increasing proclivity for designer label clothing and the consumption of, and dealing in, recreational drugs. This suggests that in some social spheres, young, working-class British Asian men are appropriating the “lad” lifestyles of some of their white contemporaries.

Within professional football, being “one of the lads” refers to the degree to which an individual shares, and is invited to participate in, the dominant cultural ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1978, 1984, 1988) of his team-mates. The most frequently employed definition of habitus is:

A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990: 53).

Fundamentally, habitus refers to the system of dispositions, tastes and preferences that underpin particular lifestyles (Bourdieu 1977). Whilst habituses differ greatly between player cultures at different clubs²², there is likely to be a greater degree of

commonality amongst young players when peer conformity to appearance, clothing, behaviour and leisure activities is arguably greater (Parker 2001). The perceptions and attitudes of a number of former and current British Asian players strongly suggest that they actively sought, or are seeking, to under-emphasise their “Asianness”, and through their demeanour and behaviour, have, to some extent, managed to achieve acceptance as “one of the lads”. For example, the co-ordinator of one British Asian football scheme described the award of a professional contract to a (light-skinned) British Asian player. In particular, he explained how the player’s ethnicity was not recognised by certain individuals within the club and how he was subsequently “passed” as being white:

When I first met [my club’s] youth team director...and we talked about [that British Asian player], he said, “He ain’t fucking Asian is he?!”. I said “The name’s a bit of a clue, isn’t it?” and he said, “Yeah!”...He hadn’t even noticed that [he] was Asian. He’d noticed he was a centre-half and assured me he’d have a career in the game because he’s good enough. And they gave him a contract.

[Interview, 20th February 2002]

Jaswinder Juttla, a former professional player with Glasgow Rangers and Greenock Morton recalls that:

Looking back I am very thankful that no one asked what it was like being an Asian player. That helped me feel as if I was not under the spotlight, and *made me feel very much like one of the lads* (cited in Bains and Johal 1998: 161, emphasis added).

Similarly, Bristol Rovers’ Anwar Uddin states that: ‘I don’t really think of myself as being an Asian footballer. I’m a footballer, *just one of the lads*’ (cited in Herman 2001, emphasis added). These sentiments are echoed by a number of other participants. For example, one ‘Asian’ professional player stated that:

I’m trying to just play my football, not everyone saying, “Oh, you’re Asian, you will be the first Asian player to do this, the first Asian player to do that”. That’d put pressure on me as well. I wouldn’t want that pressure. *I just play like any other white kid out there playing, another white person.*

[Interview, 20th March 2002]

Another player added that, ‘I didn’t say “I’m Asian, I’m different from all the others”. I still saw myself as *a normal YTS player like any of the others*, just trying to become professional football players’ [Interview with ‘Asian’ ex-professional player, 11th March 2002].

In terms of *amateur* football, Back et al (2001b: 141) suggest that it is often difficult for British Asian players to gain inclusion in the off-field, social activities of their white team-mates, as they lack the appropriate ‘cultural passports’ (Bauman 1988) needed to achieve status as “one of the lads” in this sphere. However, it is interesting to note that, during this research, some behaviours were exhibited by British Asian players that are far more congruent with being a “lad” than those observed by Back et al (2001b). For example, participant players in this research project made references to gambling, drinking alcohol and watching pornographic movies, which suggests that the dominant habitus of these young men in a footballing context – playing or post-match socialising – is, in certain ways, similar to that of white, working-class “lads”.

Although, in most instances, skin colour and name prevent a fully covert presence within the sport, British Asian professional footballers have sought almost to disguise situational aspects of their “Asianness”, such as clothing, argot and religious attendance. This is an interesting development when placed in the context of contemporary trends in the identity politics of young British Asians. For example, in recent years a number of empirical studies have highlighted the tendency for second and third generation British Bengalis (Eade 1990, Eade 1994, Gardner and Shukur 1994) and Pakistanis (Scantlebury 1995, Werbner 1996a, Werbner 1996b, Jacobson 1997, Samad 1998, Vertovec 1998, Saaed et al 1999) to promote their Islamic identities. Furthermore, the re-emergence of Hindu nationalism in India (Bhatt 2001) and its global repercussions have led many diasporic Hindus to prioritise their *Hindutva* [“Hinduness”] (Raj 2000). Similarly, in April 2002, members of Britain’s Sikh communities lobbied parliament for a change in their

official status from their current designation as British Indians to one that highlights their distinct Sikh identities.

It is important to emphasise that the interviews undertaken with British Asian footballers only discussed the issue of identity in the context of their footballing careers. It would be difficult to speculate the degree to which they promote their ethnic or cultural identities in other private or public spheres, although the dynamic nature of their construction means that identities are subject to changes in form and priority depending on the individual and the context of the situation. Hall (1992: 277), for example, argues that:

The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.

Thus it appears that, within the context of professional football, British Asians are exercising their ‘ethnic options’ (Song 2003) and exhibiting one of many *situational* identities (Modood 1997a). As one ‘Asian’ ex-professional footballer stated:

I’ve spoken to you before and I said to myself – even now I sit here – and I said if I ever made it into football, if a reporter came to me and said, “What’s it like being the first Asian player?”, I would have really ripped into that person. I would have said, “I don’t know. I know what it’s like it being a *player*. I know what it’s like being like Steve, who’s also made it. I don’t really know. You tell me, what is it like?...I can tell you what its like being an Asian at home but I don’t know what it’s like [to be an Asian footballer] because I see myself as a *footballer*”. That’s the question the media doesn’t ask. It always asks what’s it like being an *Asian*.

[Interview, 20th February 2002]

The trends outlined above are neither restricted to the sport of football nor to British Asians as an ethnic group. One might draw parallels with the careers of a number of African-Caribbeans that have participated in the highest echelons of British sport. Three of the most successful black British sportsmen during the last twenty years have been the heavyweight boxer Frank Bruno, sprinter Linford

Christie and footballer Ian Wright²³. All shared a common tendency to underplay the degree to which their ethnicities – literally their “blackness” – were prominent within the sporting arena, together with an inclination to openly embrace elements of nationalist symbolism, such as the St. George or Union flags, when celebrating sporting victories. They became, instantly, one of “our boys” within the mainstream, “white” popular consciousness and thus tended to gain greater acceptance within white/establishment circles (Mercer 1994). In contrast, another world-class black footballer, John Barnes, consistently failed to achieve comprehensive acceptance amongst supporters of the England national team and was only ever permitted contingent inclusion within the national collectivity. This cannot be attributed purely to his ethnicity. Instead, it is related partly to his middle-class, Jamaican background (his father was a senior army officer) but also to the fact that he was never prepared to under-emphasise his ethnicity nor to openly associate himself with elements of populist English iconography (Barnes 1999, Hill 2001).

“Not just chapatis and stuff”: Anglicisation, dual ethnicity and cultural capital

As well as the degree to which a player under-emphasises his cultural difference, equal importance needs to be given to the extent to which the processes of parenting and socialisation have equipped him with the appropriate cultural capital to play professional football. For Bourdieu (1984), capital is any resource that is effective in a given social arena, in that it enables an individual or group to secure the specific profits arising out of participation in this arena. In the present analysis, cultural capital refers to the degree to which individuals have absorbed the dominant culture of professional football – one based on style, consumption and masculinity – and are thus able to achieve success in this environment. Professional football therefore represents a ‘field’ (Bourdieu 1990, 1993). A field is a structured space of positions that impose specific determinations on those who enter it. It also represents an arena of contestation where individuals and institutions can maintain – or, indeed, challenge – the existing distribution of power and capital. Involvement and attainment in a field are based on a combination of one’s habitus and cultural capital. Those with the most capital can dictate the legitimate means of access to a ‘field’

(Bourdieu 1986). Therefore, to gain inclusion and to succeed in professional football, one has to acquire and abide by the values and regulations, i.e. the dominant habitus, of this field. Whilst the testimonies cited above highlight that some young British Asians evidently possess the appropriate cultural capital to become professional footballers, many others – particularly those players whose upbringings have not been very westernised – have not. The cultural resources that they possess, and the ways that they are socialised in the family, are not easily converted into the capital – either cultural (the specific patterns of consumption and style) or social (i.e. acquaintances and networks) – needed for involvement in professional football.

Traditionally, the scouting procedures by which young players are recruited by professional clubs have revolved around an established network of relations between parents, school teachers, amateur club managers and county selectors, and their inside knowledge of, and contacts within, local professional clubs. Therefore, for those players seeking to enter the professional sphere from amateur youth football, having the appropriate cultural resources and an existing chain of contacts to the professional game is a significant advantage. In many cases, however, these are attributes that British Asians do not currently possess. Over the last decade, the increasing professionalisation of attitudes, practices and techniques regarding not only playing but also coaching, managing and administering the game²⁴ has led to a further channelling of the ways in which a young player can become a professional. The system that the FA initiated to recruit and develop young players was that of the Football Academies²⁵. These are special development centres, designed to coach talented players aged between seven and nineteen. A series of guidelines has been published by the Premier League informing prospective players and their parents how they should approach a club for a trial (FA Premier League 1999). However, this document is by no means widely available. In fact, it is likely that a player's parents will only be able to obtain it when, somewhat ironically, they have already made contact with a specific club. It remains the case, therefore, that few people who are not directly involved in, or have contacts within, football in some capacity

would be aware of the existence of these academies or the process by which one becomes registered. This is particularly the case for British Asians, as their historical and contemporary absence from professional football as players, coaches, managers, administrators and directors²⁶ means that there is no network of family, friends or professional contacts within the game for them to utilise. Professional football revolves around established networks and the fact that British Asians are not represented in the dressing rooms, boardrooms and players' lounges where contacts are made and networking takes place – in other words they do not possess an 'entry ticket' (Back et al 2001b). The necessity of having personal contacts continues through all levels of the sport and is replicated in microcosm through the word-of-mouth culture that dominates the "lad and dad" world of amateur youth football.

For a number of reasons young British Asians are not involved in the specific amateur youth football leagues that are scouted by professional clubs and so their opportunities for recruitment by professional clubs are vastly decreased. Whilst issues of 'race' and racism (see Chapter Four) and age (see Chapter Eight) also influence participation, many British Asians are simply unaware of the processes through which a young player joins an amateur football club. For example, Jas Juttla recalls that, 'Neither my father nor I had any idea of the routine when it came to signing up as a professional' (cited in Bains and Johal 1998: 160). Similarly, two other players argued that:

There's loads of [Asian] kids that can play but they don't know how to get into a team. They need someone to, like, help them get into a Sunday team, go for a trial or whatever. But it's hard because the parents don't really understand that much, so they need someone outside the family giving them help and advice.

[Interview with current 'Asian' professional player, 11th February 2002]

It does depend on how the family is as well, whether they help [the player] as well, because they wouldn't know about it either. No-one's experienced it before. And they can't exactly go and ask their cousins or someone they know because no-one else has done it. They don't know someone who's become a footballer.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 11th March 2002]

Another player compared professional football to other industries:

How are you going to make any contact if you know the contacts are not of your colour? Do you see what I mean, Dan? If you want to go into an Indian industry you don't go to "John", you go to "Sanjay" because he's got all the contacts. He knows who to go to and where to go to because it's his industry, he knows all about it.

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional, 20th February 2002]

In trying to account for the issues that surround the involvement of British Asians in professional football, one might draw certain parallels with rugby league, arguably the closest sport to football in terms of its ethos of traditional working-class masculinity. Despite the majority of its professional clubs being located within the specific confines of Lancashire and Yorkshire – thus including towns and cities housing significant British Asian populations – the sport has also failed to facilitate the inclusion of British Asians, either as players or spectators. Long and Spracklen (1996) suggest that this can be attributed to the fact that whilst white players are often inducted into rugby league through a "traditional" route, such as an introduction by a friend or family member, this route is less accessible to minority ethnic groups. Taking into account the player testimonies cited above, British Asians' access to professional football appears to be inhibited by similar factors.

As long as the structures of professional football remain as they are, a number of British Asian players accordingly hold the opinion that those players who have been socialised into white British as well as South Asian cultures might have a greater chance of gaining access to the professional football environment. It is perceived that a more Anglicised upbringing might equip a player with a greater degree of the specific cultural capital necessary to become involved with a professional club. As one current young 'Asian' professional player recalled:

I had a mixed diet as well and not just Asian food, because that's another stereotype. [People] think that the diet is wrong. It is true to a certain extent but I have a mixed diet because my parents understand that I have to have pasta and potatoes and stuff, not just chapatis and stuff, so I have a mixed diet now.

[Interview, 11th February 2002]

Whilst this player offers a somewhat simplistic interpretation of what constitutes a “western” upbringing, the sentiments behind it are implicit. It is also perceived that *Anglo-Asians*, because one of their parents is white, are better equipped to become professional footballers than other British Asians. One player suggested how this might operate:

The bearing that it could have is possibly that the support has been there for them, you know, from their parents. So, obviously, because their parents are from a mixed marriage, you know, their outlook on life is more westernized than possibly, you know, if their parents were born back in India or whatever.

[Interview with ‘Indian’ amateur player, 5th February 2002]

Interestingly, a further viewpoint suggested that the presence of a white parent could mean that *Anglo-Asians* receive more favourable treatment from professional clubs – albeit often subconsciously – than other British Asians:

I would say the difference is, if you’ve got a lad there who is of mixed-race, if the white side of his parents goes and knocks on that manager’s door, he’ll probably open that door, sit the person down, give them a nice cup of tea and that, because they’ll have that perception that this person knows about football because they’ve been brought up in this country. But if a parent comes which is Asian, you know, they’ll think, “They don’t know anything about football, so we can get away with blagging [lying], you know, we can get away with talking any kind of things because they won’t understand it”. Whereas if you’ve got someone banging the door, [saying] “What’s going on with my son, yeah, my son here, he wants to be a footballer”, all of a sudden they look up and he’s of mixed-race but his white half has come in, his parents, you know what I mean, it’s totally different. I’m not saying they’re racist but it becomes different, you know.

[Interview with ‘Asian’ ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

This player equates being “normal” in professional football with being white. In fact, it could be implied from his testimony that “acting white” can facilitate inclusion into professional football. However, this view represents an over-simplification of the processes involved in becoming a professional footballer and fails to acknowledge the complex pattern of other factors that affect access, e.g. class, schooling and geographical location. It also ignores the influence of black music and

fashion in professional player subcultures. As Back et al (2001b) and Ware and Back (2002) point out, manifestations of “whiteness” operate in far more complex, multifarious, subtle and nuanced ways than this testimony implies.

“You need to get in touch with your brown side”: ethnicity, self-identification and cultural assimilation in professional sport

Many British Asians are keenly following the career trajectories of players such as Michael Chopra and Anwar Uddin. Taking into account the historical absence of British Asians from English professional football, the wider social significance of a minor breakthrough by these players during the early twenty-first century has been widely noted. For this reason, many British Asians openly lend their support to players such as Chopra and Uddin. However, it is also the case that the dual ethnicity of these players (Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Bangladeshi, respectively) proves problematic for some British Asians. A number of participants perceive that the prominence of *Anglo-Asians* within the current cohort of prosperous young British Asian players actually provides an inaccurate representation of the overall inclusion and participation of British Asian players in professional football. It is felt – rightly or wrongly – that the personal and social backgrounds of Anglo-Asians are significantly different from those of other British Asians so they are unrepresentative of the wider British Asian population.

A number of British Asian players believe that the media attention given to Anglo-Asian players and the failure to recognise their dual ethnicity (they are usually perceived in this context solely as “Asian”) actually masks the fact that few players with two British Asian parents are making the grade. Similarly, through the over-zealous publicity surrounding the likes of Michael Chopra and Anwar Uddin (see Chapter Eight), the various governing bodies, agencies and anti-racist football organisations involved in trying to facilitate the inclusion of British Asians in professional football are able to form a smokescreen which masks their lack of real progress. One ‘Asian’ ex-professional player focused specifically on the implications for anti-racist campaign groups:

This whole issue of, you know, ‘Kick Out Racism’, the group, and all that, they shouldn’t use Anwar Uddin, they shouldn’t use Michael Chopra as an example. They’re not the right examples. If you want to use them as young footballers coming up, then use them for that. Do not use them for the Asian thingy because they did not have the same upbringing, right, as an Asian lad who is through-and-through Asian.

[Interview, 20th February 2002]

It is evident that Anglo-Asian players are placed in a particularly difficult and contradictory situation regarding their inclusion in English professional football. On one hand it is acknowledged by many British Asians that Anglo-Asian players, for the reasons discussed above, are in a better position than players with two British Asian parents to make it as professionals. However, it is felt that the exact characteristics that assign Anglo-Asian players to this position actually decrease the degree to which these players can be perceived as “true” or “real”, i.e. authentic, British Asians. To crudely summarise this viewpoint, it is perceived that the factors that make an individual more likely to be a professional footballer also make him “less Asian”. An Anglo-Asian player is not viewed as *Asian enough* to be organically representative of British Asian communities as a whole. As one player stated:

If I’m being honest, if Anwar [Uddin] makes it, you know, I’ll be pretty happy. I’ll be even happier if somebody makes it who says, “Before a game I need to pray”, you know, or, “After a game I need to go and see my relatives who are running a tandoori house”, you know...I don’t want to say these guys aren’t Asian, because they are Asian, but...I would love to see, as I said, somebody who looks Asian, can speak an Asian language, whose parents are Asian, who lives in an Asian community, you know, even after making it.

[Interview with ‘Asian’ amateur player, 16th March 2002]

This quotation highlights the problems associated with the notion of hybridised identities, in that individuals who are categorised as hybrid are often perceived as not being authentic members of the ethnic and cultural groups that are represented in their identities (Ahmed 1997, Anthias 2001, Song 2003).

The identities of British Asian footballers prove problematic not only for British Asians themselves but also for a number of other groups. The final part of this chapter examines the implications of the trends identified above for professional football in general and the wider anti-racist football movement. In order to highlight fully the ways that certain individuals and organisations attempt to dictate or influence the ethnic affiliations of specific minority ethnic sports people, it is helpful first to cite a couple of recent examples – one from the USA (golf) and one from England (cricket). These ideas will then be discussed in the context of the sport that, unlike these examples of predominantly middle-class activities, is synonymous in Britain with the white working-classes – football.

In May 2000 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called for African American athletes to boycott events in South Carolina over the state's refusal to bring about the cessation of flying the Confederate flag over its Capitol building. Whilst a number of sports people supported the action²⁷, golfer Tiger Woods, a self-styled "Cablinasian"²⁸ of multiple ethnicities, refused to do so. He stated that, 'I'm a golfer. That's their deal, not mine' (cited in Donegan 2002: 20). Woods' decision not only surprised the American public but also ostensibly problematised his relationship with his sponsor, the sportswear company Nike, who, in a measure clearly contrary to the personal aspirations and ethnic identifications of the player himself, have openly promoted Woods as a "black" athlete in its advertising campaigns (Cole and Andrews 2001).

Before the 1990 cricket Test Series between England and India, Conservative MP Norman Tebbit made a parliamentary speech in which he was extremely critical of those British Asians that chose not to support England in sporting contests. He argued that, 'If you come to live in a country and take up the passport of that country, and you see your future and your family's future in that country, it seems to me that is your country. You can't just keep harking back' (cited in Werbner 1996b: 104). Just over a decade later, in May 2001, Anglo-Asian England cricket captain Nasser Hussain expressed his disappointment that, at a Test Match between England

and Pakistan, most of the British Asians in the crowd were supporting Pakistan. Hussain stated that, 'It was disappointing to see a sea of green shirts with the names of Pakistani players instead of ours. It reminded me of when we played India at Edgbaston in 1999. It was like an away game because so many people supported their side' (cited in Chaudhary 2001a). He added that, 'I cannot really understand why those born here, or who came here at a very early age like me, cannot support or follow England' (cited Campbell 2001c). His sentiments were widely misinterpreted and he was subsequently criticised for, according to many observers, failing to pay sufficient reference to the South Asian component of his heritage. For example, *The Guardian* journalist Vivek Chaudhary declared that, 'My message to Hussain is this. You need to get in touch with your brown side' (Chaudhary 2001a). Similarly, speaking on a radio panel discussion, Piara Powar, co-ordinator of the anti-racist football organisation Kick It Out stated that:

I think with Nasser Hussain the issue is the way he puts his identity out to the wider world, if you like. He very rarely talks about being of mixed Asian parentage, he very rarely talks about the way he is perceived by the majority of the population, which is as an Asian player. Now, I think if he was stronger in those terms, if he nailed his colours to the mast, so to speak, I think we'd have more people in the Asian community who say, "Yes, he's one of us, we respect him, we want to do what he's done" (cited in BBC Radio 2002b).

The reluctance of some elite minority ethnic sports people to speak out on issues related to 'race' and racism is a particular problem for those involved in anti-racism and the promotion of equality of opportunity within professional sport. In order to meet the various criteria of their own agendas, those agencies involved in highlighting the absence of British Asians in professional football and working towards their inclusion – anti-racist football organisations, such as Kick It Out, and sections of the media – specifically focus on and promote the South Asian component of these players' identities. Consequently, they rely to a great extent on young, prosperous British Asian footballers speaking publicly about their plight and openly emphasising their "Asianness". However, as has been argued above, it is often the case that British Asian professional players choose to under-emphasise their South Asian identities. This failure of certain British Asian players to promote

their ethnicities therefore often presents distinct problems for these organisations. For example, the co-ordinator of one anti-racist football organisation stated that:

My fear about someone like Michael Chopra is that because he's mixed-race and because he will have been in a very closed environment for a long time, he may not even see himself as Asian. That is a problem and that's why you're kind of hoping [the next Asian player] is a Harpal Singh or Amrit Sidhu [both of whom have two British Asian parents] who know where they're coming from.

[Interview, 28th June 2002]

The examples of Tiger Woods, Nasser Hussain and Michael Chopra demonstrate how people of multiple ethnicities are popularly perceived as being disoriented by their dual heritage and unable to engage in coherent self-identification. They also show how a variety of agencies externally impose upon dual ethnicity individuals those identities that they believe to be the most salient and relevant for the specific agendas they are seeking to follow (Ifekwunigwe 1999, Tizard and Phoenix 2002). Problems subsequently arise when individuals refuse to align themselves with the identities created for them by these agencies. This is symptomatic of an essentialist interpretation of both the construction and representation of ethnic identity, and processes of role modelling. Chopra has stated that 'I don't see myself as a role model just for the Asian community because that would mean me thinking of only half of my family' (cited in D. Harrison 2003). Similarly with Hussain, there is no reason why he should be expected to emphasise his South Asian identity any more than he should promote his white identity. In fact, spurious attempts to establish some form of affiliation between Nasser Hussain and British Asian cricket fans could actually be viewed as somewhat patronising in that it assumes that a common South Asian name or heritage is sufficient to initiate a process of mutual identification. Not only does this promulgate the view of a homogenous South Asian diaspora, it also ignores further relevant factors such as class. Hussain was born in Madras, India and is from a middle-class background and so class differences may override South Asian affiliations with other British Asians. However, because professional sports people are constructed as role models, the perception remains

that they have an obligation to speak out and align themselves with various social and political movements or ethnic groups (see Chapter Eight).

The present analysis has highlighted the significance of the concepts of dual ethnicity, Anglicisation, cultural assimilation and cultural capital for the involvement and acceptance of British Asians in an arena dominated by an ethos of monoculturalism and hegemonic “whiteness” (Long and Hylton 2002). Fundamentally, it has examined how British Asian professional footballers consciously manage their identities in order to become “one of the lads”. The issues raised here, together with the discussions undertaken in the previous two chapters, represent a detailed exposition of young, male British Asian lifestyles and identities and the role of football within them. The focus of this thesis now turns to the anti-racist football movement and the degree to which its strategies and policies are congruent, or indeed conflicting, with the identities and lifestyles, aspirations and attitudes of British Asian footballers.

Notes

- ¹ The PFA is the trade union for professional footballers in England and Wales. It was founded as the Association Football Players' Union in Manchester in 1907. It became the PFA in 1958.
- ² Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD) is an exception in that a fundamental part of its work has been the construction of an exhibition that details the historical contribution of predominantly black, but also British Asian, players in British professional football. See Chapter Six for further details.
- ³ After the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in 1988, the author was issued with a *fatwah* (death sentence) by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini. This decree was supported by a significant number of British Muslims (see Chapter Seven).
- ⁴ *Bend It Like Beckham* is a British movie written by Gurinder Chadha (also the film's director), Paul Mayeda Berges and Guljit Bindra. The film revolves around a British Asian girl and her aim, against the wishes of her parents, to play football. In October 2002 it won the Hitchcock L'Argent audience award at the *Festival du Film Britanique* at Dinard, France. Also that year, Parminder Nagra, who plays Jess, the main character in the film, was somewhat bizarrely chosen to be FIFA's Football Personality of the Year.
- ⁵ In March 2004, A.R. Rahman conducted the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra for two successive nights of music from the Indian film industry. Rahman has also been chosen to score the London West End stage version of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which will premiere in 2005.
- ⁶ The song was a cover of Norman Greenbaum's 1970 hit 'Spirit in the Sky'.
- ⁷ In April 2001, Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, made a speech to the Social Market Foundation – a leading political thinktank – stressing the multicultural composition of Britain. He stated that 'the British are not a race, but a gathering of countless different races, the vast majority of which are not indigenous to these islands...Chicken tikka masala is now Britain's true national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences' (cited in Wintour 2001a). Whilst Cook was making a general reference to "mainstream" appropriation of minority ethnic cultures, the dish symbolises the manner in which these cultural forms are consciously diluted and modified to suit the needs and desires of white Britons.

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- ⁸ The term ‘Asian Underground’ (also known as the ‘New Asian Kool’) was coined by the British music press in relation to a collection of late-twentieth century British Asian musicians, such as T.J. Rehmi, Radical Sista, Bally Sagoo, Nitin Sawnhey and Talvin Singh. These artists formed part of a London-oriented club scene, based at venues such as *Anokha* (which means “unique” in Urdu), *Sitarfunk*, *Outcaste* and *Swaraj* (see Banerjea 2000). This musical genre achieved popularity amongst the capital’s young, upwardly-mobile, white club-goers and Hutnyk and Sharma (2000: 59) argue that ‘there is perhaps currently no better illustration of how ethnicity as a marker of (exotic) otherness has entered into the realms of a European popular music culture than the example of the “New Asian Dance Music”’.
- ⁹ Exceptions are Monsoon (aka Sheila Chandra), who reached number 12 in the British music charts in 1982 with the track *Ever So Lonely*, and Bally Sagoo, whose track *Dil Cheez* made the Top 20 in the late 1990s.
- ¹⁰ In 2003, *Mundian To Bach Ke*, a four year-old track by the Birmingham-based artist Panjabi MC reached the Top 10 after it was remixed with a hip-hop beat and samples from 1980s American television show *Knightrider*. A reversal of this process has also occurred with Timbaland sampling a *tumbi* drum to create Missy Elliot’s *Get Ur Freak On* and Dr. Dre sampling the vocals of bhangra superstar Lata Mangeshkar for Truth Hurts’ *Addictive*. Furthermore, many “mainstream” pop artists are now seeking to have their music remixed with a bhangra influence. For example, young British Asian producers Rishi Rich, Juggy D and Jay Sean have worked with Mary J Blige, Craig David, Liberty X, Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, Mis-teeq, Britney Spears and Sugababes, whilst Panjabi Hit Squad have remixed material by Ashanti and Mariah Carey. However, the syncretisation of Indian and western music forms can be traced much further back in history. For example, Ravel’s *Bolero* is written on a scale similar to a classical Indian *raga* melody, whilst Gustav Holst wrote a Hindi chamber opera in 1908 (BBC Radio 2003a).
- ¹¹ Singh fuses electronic dance music with traditional South Asian instruments such as the *tabla* drum. In 1999 he won the Mercury Music Prize – an annual award given to the artiste(s) recording the best album – for his album *Okay*.
- ¹² *Goodness Gracious Me!* is a sketch show that ran between 1998 and 2001. It is estimated that the first series was watched by an audience that was 85% white (Malik 2002: 103). In terms of fully-fledged situation comedies, since *Tandoori Nights* (1985-87), there have been no exclusively British Asian contributions to this genre. In contrast, African-Caribbean sitcoms, such as *No Problem!* (1983-85), *Desmond’s* (1989-94), *Us Girls* (1992), *Porkpie* (1995-96), *In Exile* (1998)

and *The Crouches* (2003) – many of which included culturally-specific references and jokes – have all been screened on “mainstream” terrestrial television (see Malik 2002).

- ¹³ *The Kumars at No.42* (2001-) involves the spoof Kumar family interviewing real-life celebrity guests, the majority of whom are white. Indeed, in 2003, Elaine Sihera, founder of the annual British Diversity Awards and the Windrush Achievement Awards stated that, ‘I am unhappy with the fact that *The Kumars at No.42* only seems to welcome white guests, and never has a single black person on it...I don’t think it is good enough to stand on its own without white celebrities’ (cited in Ahmed 2003b)
- ¹⁴ A *mela* is a British Asian cultural festival. They are predominantly attended by British Asians but they have a strong pan-community emphasis and in recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of white people attending them.
- ¹⁵ *Desi Beats* is the name of the radio show hosted by Panjabi Hit Squad on the BBC 1Xtra radio station. The name *Desi Beats* is often also used to describe the genre of music played by Panjabi Hit Squad and other similar artistes, which is characterised by the fusion of traditional Indian instrumentation with modern, western rhythms and production techniques.
- ¹⁶ Bisson, James and Mistri all starred in the 1990s British movie *East is East*. Set in 1960/70s Salford, the story follows a family headed by a Pakistani father and a white mother, and focuses on the issues faced by the children in coming to terms with their dual ethnicities. Bisson also appeared in the soap opera *Coronation Street*, whilst James and Mistri have starred in *Eastenders*.
- ¹⁷ The relationship between Anglo-Asians and sport in the Indian subcontinent has been discussed by Mills (2001). This chapter, however, seeks to provide the first major analysis of the interface between Anglo-Asians and sport in *Britain*.
- ¹⁸ This chapter focuses on a singular ethno-cultural interface, i.e. between young British Asian and white men. Whilst it is beyond the confines of this chapter to examine the foci of interchange between young, male British Asians and other groups, their existence should be acknowledged. For example, many young, male British Asians have appropriated the clothing and argot of African-Caribbeans and African-Americans, whilst their (particularly Bengalis) relationship with other minority ethnic groups (particularly Somalis) has been articulated through gang violence in London boroughs such as Camden and Tower Hamlets (*Eastern Eye* 2002d, Nettleton and Davenport 2002).

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- ¹⁹ It is necessary to make a clear distinction between the terms “British Asian” and “Anglo-Indian/Asian”. For the purposes of this thesis the former is used to relate to those South Asians whose ethnicities are based in the subcontinent but through birth/residence in Britain are – even if they chose not to promote this aspect of their identities – afforded British *citizenship*. The latter is based on *ethnicity* and refers to an individual of mixed English and South Asian parentage. The problematic nature of the notion of being *Anglo-* as opposed to *British-Asian* is acknowledged (see Chapter Four) yet the term is used as it relates to an Anglicisation of ethnicity rather than nationality.
- ²⁰ In particular, at the current time, British Muslim parents are far more likely to have an influence in choosing partners/spouses for their children than Hindus and Sikhs (Modood 1997a).
- ²¹ Casuals are football hooligans who wore designer label clothing rather than club colours, originally to avoid police detection but subsequently as a fashion statement in itself (Allan 1989, Giulianotti 1993, Giulianotti 1994).
- ²² This might depend on the location of the club and the ages, ethnicities, marital statuses and social backgrounds of the players. Professional football culture is often stereotyped as being dominated by an overt masculinity and revolving around the social arenas of the pub, pool hall or betting shop. However, a cursory review of player autobiographies highlights that some players possess a far more cerebral approach than this image suggests (see e.g. Dunphy 1987, Cantona 1993, Nelson 1995, Nelson 1997).
- ²³ For further discussions on these sportsmen and issues of ‘race’ and nation see Gilroy (1993), Mitchell (2002) and Carrington (2001), respectively.
- ²⁴ The term professionalisation is used here to refer to a number of developments within the game: the manner in which the qualifications needed for football coaching have become increasingly quantified and standardised (for example, all English professional club managers will soon be required to hold the UEFA ‘B’ coaching licence, as is the case in many other European countries); training practices have been subject to a process of “scientificisation” whereby many clubs now employ sports scientists and nutritionists; and most clubs are now run as businesses or limited companies and are thus subject to the same levels of professionalism as other companies.
- ²⁵ By late 2002 thirty-eight academies had accredited status.

²⁶ There are notable exceptions. During the 1980s, the Bhatti brothers were directors at Wolverhampton Wanderers and the Kumar brothers held similar positions at Birmingham City and Cardiff City. In 2003, Raj Bhatia was part of a consortium that attempted to take over Notts County.

²⁷ These included African-American tennis star Serena Williams and players from the New York Knicks basketball team.

²⁸ Woods personally constructed the label “Cablinasian” as an amalgam of the terms Caucasian, black, Indian and Asian. He is one-quarter Thai, one-quarter Chinese, one-quarter white, one-eighth Native American and one-eighth African American.

Chapter 6

The New Visitation: Discourses of 'race' in contemporary English football

Introduction

Since the late-1990s, a number of organisations have attempted to facilitate greater participation by British Asians in professional football. These organisations comprise what is referred to in this thesis as the anti-racist football movement. Whilst their backgrounds, rationales and methods differ to a certain degree – some are run by professional clubs, some grew out of supporter pressure groups and others are independent – these organisations share a number of common aims. These include raising public awareness of the under-representation of British Asians in the professional game, and implementing specific strategies and policies aimed at increasing British Asian involvement at this level. This issue has only begun to receive substantial attention within the last five years and, in the majority of cases, it is neither the primary reason why these organisations were established, nor does it represent their only current focus. However, the under-representation of British Asians in professional football has become one of the most significant issues for the anti-racist football movement and, in recent years, considerable time, money and resources have been designated to ameliorating the problem. This chapter examines the reasons why, and the manner in which, the campaign to increase the participation of British Asians in professional football has evolved.

The establishment of schemes that aim to increase the participation of British Asians in professional football is a consequence of four wider socio-political developments. Firstly, these initiatives represent the culmination of an ideological shift within English professional football over the last fifteen years, whereby not only has anti-racism become the most salient anti-discrimination discourse but also football has become a permissible medium for the wider anti-racist movement. Secondly, these projects are underpinned by widespread support for the use of football as an educational tool and an increasing tendency for the game to be used within political strategies of social cohesion. Thirdly, the focus on British Asians in anti-racist football projects reflects an emphasis on young, British Asian men in contemporary political discourses of social inclusion. Finally, the funding and implementation of these schemes have been made possible by the involvement of

commercial companies. This chapter examines these developments, and their implications for the involvement of British Asians in professional football.

'Race' course: football as an arena for the rhetoric of anti-racism

Organised campaigns to eradicate racism from professional football and to increase equality of opportunity for all ethnic groups are a relatively recent phenomenon, having been established in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In particular, schemes and initiatives based around British Asians represent an even newer development, emerging within the last five years. However, football and its stadia have been used as sites for the articulation of popular and political discourses on 'race' and ethnicity since the game was transformed into its professional, codified form in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Issues surrounding 'race' and racism in English football thus predate not only the involvement of minority ethnic groups as professional players, but also their migrations from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent. During the 1930s, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) viewed the congregations of large numbers of white, working-class men in football grounds as ideal opportunities to recruit new members. Then, in the 1950s, Colin Jordan's White Defence League (WDL) – which aimed to mobilise resistance against migration from the Caribbean and the New Commonwealth – sold its *Black and White News* publication at grounds in London (Garland and Rowe 1996). In 1967, members of these (and similar) organisations¹ united to form the National Front (NF), a political party that campaigned for the repatriation of African-Caribbean and South Asian migrants. The NF perceived that young, working-class, white males would be most sympathetic to their ideology², and throughout the following two decades the party used the environs of the football ground to sell its *Bulldog* newspaper. This publication was infamous for including a "league table" of clubs whose supporters had the most racist reputations. The organisation also took advantage of the number of skinheads – a youth culture that had already developed associations with right-wing politics – present at many clubs, gaining significant support amongst followers of Chelsea, Leeds United, Newcastle United and West Ham United³ (Marshall 1991).

In response to continued racist activity at football grounds, a visible *anti-racism* movement emerged in football during the late-1970s. This development took place contemporaneously with Rock Against Racism (RAR)⁴, an anti-racist movement that utilised the medium of contemporary popular music. RAR received considerable support from a number of major British bands that, although belonging to differing musical genres, possessed similar overt anti-racist tendencies, such as The Clash (punk), The Specials (ska), Steel Pulse and UB40 (both reggae)⁵. Using this musical movement as a template, the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) founded Football Fans Against the Nazis, and a number of individual *ad hoc* fan groups were subsequently formed⁶. During this period, the focus of anti-racist groups was on the relatively specific area of organised fascism as opposed to racism in general, a demarcation that was evident within both football and wider anti-racist politics at the time⁷. As Gilroy (1987: 148) argues, the prevalent view was that racism was ‘an aberration or an exceptional problem essentially unintegrated into the social and political structure’. It was thus associated predominantly with so-called deviant subcultural groups, such as football hooligans or skinheads.

During the 1980s, English football endured what is widely believed to be its nadir, following the deaths of supporters at Heysel, Hillsborough and Valley Parade (see below). With racism evident and clearly audible amongst fans at some grounds, organised anti-racist football groups did not re-emerge in the public consciousness until the end of the 1980s. These initiatives were, again, formed by groups of supporters who were attempting to mobilise resistance against the use of the football stadium as a forum for the expression of Far Right ideology. The objectives of anti-racist groups were disseminated through the increasingly popular medium of the football “fanzine”⁸ and, indeed, their activities were primarily funded by sales of these publications. Many anti-racist fan groups emerged at clubs that had previously been targeted or infiltrated by the NF. Forerunners in the movement included Foxes Against Racism (FAR) at Leicester City, Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism (LFUARF), Newcastle United Against Racism (NUAR) and the Edinburgh-based Supporters Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (SCARF).

These disparate, localised initiatives created a conducive climate for a project to be designed and undertaken on a much wider scale. This was provided by Let's Kick Racism Out of Football (LKROF), the first major organisation to implement a national, "umbrella" anti-racist football campaign. The scheme was launched in 1993 by the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) Campaigns Unit. It was relaunched during the 1994-5 season and ninety-one of the ninety-two professional clubs officially pledged their support⁹. The establishment of a national anti-racist football campaign represented a more positive, proactive approach to combating racism in professional football as it necessitated an acknowledgement by the football authorities of the continuing existence of racism within the game. LKROF was able to oversee the various other organisations, provide advice and assistance to their members¹⁰, and co-ordinate their activities into a singular, unified anti-racist football movement. Partnerships were also developed with relevant football-related agencies, such as the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA)¹¹. In 1996, the campaign was taken over by the Advisory Group Against Racism and Intimidation (AGARI), a multi-agency organisation consisting of the football authorities, supporter groups and local authorities. The aims of AGARI were to promote anti-racism amongst young people and establish partnerships with relevant local agencies (Back et al 1996). The following year the campaign became independent from the CRE and was re-branded under the title it currently holds: Kick It Out.

Kick It Out established a number of specific aims related to combating racism and achieving equality of opportunity within football¹². It is important to point out, however, that in the campaign's original manifesto, the focus was not actually on racism in football *per se*. Instead, although a passing reference was made to the continued presence of racist chanting at professional matches, it was openly acknowledged that football was being used as a medium to combat racism in a wider social sense. The CRE Campaigns Unit states that:

The first campaign we did was a football campaign, *Let's Kick Racism Out of Football*, because we looked at the whole area of young people and how to get to

them, what medium we could use which would hold a message against racism and for equal opportunity and would also speak very clearly and directly to all people (cited in Garland and Rowe 2001: 54).

This approach echoed previous analyses of racism in football, in that racism was seen as “society’s problem”, an outside phenomenon that had infiltrated the game, rather than an inherent characteristic of football itself. It also represented a growing appreciation of the role of football as an educational medium, particularly with respect to the dissemination of anti-racism. As Back et al (2001b: 192) suggest:

Football then was seen as a medium for changing attitudes in the wider society rather than particularly a problem in itself. In the context of a popular mobilization, the campaign clearly invoked a mode of address that was directed at the fans and general public rather than a call to the football industry to look in on itself.

This tendency to focus on the potential capabilities of football as an anti-racist tool instead of on racism within football itself is reflected in the origins of many fan-based and independent anti-racist football organisations. In most cases, rather than being formed explicitly as anti-racist football projects, these initiatives developed from one of two initial sources: either as general anti-racist projects with no specific reference to football or, conversely, as football fan projects working in areas unrelated to racism. For example, LFUARF and Show Racism The Red Card (SRTRC) – a Newcastle-based organisation that uses videos of professional footballers denouncing racism as an educational resource – grew out of general anti-racist organisations¹³ (Thomas 1995, Show Racism the Red Card 1998). On the other hand, the Sheffield-based project, Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD), emerged from the Blades Independent Fans Association (BIFA), a Sheffield United fan group that was originally established to oust the unpopular chairman, Reg Brearley. When this task was accomplished, the organisation sought other issues to address within the club¹⁴, one of which was racism (Bradbury 2001a). In light of these trends, two key questions need to be asked. Firstly, how and why did anti-racism become such a prominent item on football’s agenda? Secondly, why did football become one of the most popular educational mediums for the wider anti-racist movement? These questions are answered in the following sections.

***This charming fan?* Transformations in football fandom in the late twentieth century**

It might be argued that the rationale behind the establishment of anti-racism in football requires no investigation. This line of thinking posits the idea that recognition of the need to address racism in football was simply a natural and rational response to a problem that continued to manifest itself in various forms within the game. However, this fails to explain both why this response took place specifically during the late 1980s/early 1990s and why the anti-racist football movement was able to burgeon so rapidly. The development of anti-racism in football cannot be understood if it is considered in isolation. Instead, it needs to be located as part of wider social processes that were taking place within the game during this period, i.e. sanitisation and bourgeoisification (cf. Taylor 1991, Armstrong 1998). The term *sanitisation* refers to the implementation of an increasingly stringent social control over the forms of fandom deemed socially acceptable within the football stadium. *Bourgeoisification* is used here to describe the processes through which watching football has become an increasingly middle-class activity. These processes are crucial to understanding the changes that occurred within professional football during the latter part of the twentieth century and, in particular, provided the climate for the development of anti-racism.

Whereas football in the 1990s was strongly associated with issues relating to (anti-)racism, during the 1980s football's political and legal agendas were dominated by issues of hooliganism, spectator control and safety, and policing (Home Affairs Committee 1991). Whilst the pre-eminent issues of these respective decades appear relatively unrelated, there is a need to position them as part of a continuum. Fundamentally, the events of the 1980s provided the background for the developments of the succeeding ten years. During May 1985, nearly 100 people died in three matches involving English clubs: in a fire at Bradford City, after rioting at Birmingham City, and during the disaster at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels¹⁵. Four years later, ninety-six Liverpool supporters were crushed to death on the Leppings Lane terrace at Hillsborough stadium, Sheffield. In the aftermath of the Taylor

Report into this latter tragedy (Taylor 1990), three major developments began to take place within the game. Firstly, professional clubs began to take responsibility for the behaviour and well-being of their supporters. Clubs started to appreciate that, as businesses, they had an obligation to provide a certain level of care with regard to the comfort and safety of the patrons within their stadia¹⁶. Secondly, the government¹⁷ and the police began to assert an increasing level of social control over the behaviour of football supporters. Thirdly, modifications were made to the architecture and construction of stadia that were to have severe implications on the forms of fandom that could be experienced and enacted within them. These transformations were to enforce changes on professional football of seismic proportions and provided the foundations for the development of anti-racism projects in the game.

The football terrace has traditionally been a key site for adult male social and psychological catharsis, as well as for the articulation and expression of specific discourses and behaviours largely discouraged in wider society (cf. Armstrong 1998). These have involved the exhibition of both carnivalesque¹⁸ – i.e. ‘gay and triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding’ (Bakhtin 1968: 11-12) – and hyper-masculine behaviours, together with associated activities, such as excessive drinking, fighting, swearing, and the use of sexist and homophobic language. The football ground has also been a key site for the articulation of discourses surrounding ‘race’ and, until recently, individuals have been able to express sentiments that would be unacceptable outside of this arena. It was these exact emotions and behaviours that were perceived by the game’s hierarchy to have contributed to the climate of disorder during the 1980s. The football authorities consequently endeavoured to undertake a process of “civilizing” this ritual warfare, and denying those aspects of male aggression that the drama of football has patently encompassed across the decades’ (Armstrong and Young 2000: 175). Professional football was thus subjected to a process of sanitisation which meant that a number of activities previously seen as synonymous with the matchday experience became increasingly unacceptable. Whereas previously the “control” of supporters had been

undertaken through the physical intimidation and violence of the police (cf. Armstrong 1998), and by cage-like terrace restrictions, the social control of football supporters was now carried out by modifying the parameters of what was acceptable – both socially and legally¹⁹ – in the context of supporting one’s team.

Together with the introduction of increasingly severe punishments for “hate speech”²⁰ within the football stadium (Gardiner 1998) and a reduction in the civil liberties of football supporters (Greenfield and Osborn 1998), more immediately visible changes were implemented. In the wake of the Hillsborough disaster, many stadia were redesigned or rebuilt entirely, and standing areas were, in accordance with the Taylor Report recommendations (Taylor 1990), gradually phased out to be replaced by all-seater grounds. In the place of vast banks of concrete terracing came distinct sections of seating, plus family enclosures (sponsored by supermarkets or multinational “fast food” outlets), executive boxes and corporate lounges. This change was deemed necessary to improve stadium safety but these new designs also made it both far easier for the police and stewards to control spectators, and less conducive to the more “expressive” displays of fandom previously witnessed. The contiguous rapid increase in admission prices was attributed to meeting the cost of these building developments²¹, but it managed to conceal the fact that the increasing cost of watching live professional football was also a means of excluding what were now perceived as the “less desirable elements” (i.e. vocal, passionate, working-class, young men) from the game (Horton 1997).

Throughout the 1990s, working-class supporters became increasingly alienated from professional football (King 1997, Giulianotti 1999a). Watching the game became not only less affordable, but also decreasingly an arena in which they could express notions of masculinity and topophilia, or ritually “defend” their territory. Football was intelligently marketed and rebranded in a way that would attract a “better class of fan” who could replace those perceived to be more (or too) “traditional” in their fandom. Watching football became more middle-class both in terms of the supporters it drew²² and the ways in which processes of fandom were

experienced and expressed. Giulianotti (ibid.: 151), for example, describes how the prevailing climate of the 1990s gave birth to the notion of *arrivistes*, ‘a strata of London-based white collar workers who “do football” to flesh out the popular culture dimension of their social curriculum vitae’. Similarly, Armstrong and Young (2000: 176) point out that ‘from the late 1980s, and because of a range of complex and interacting reasons – including instantaneous outside television broadcasting – football started to become *de rigueur* for middle-class pundits’²³. By the 1990s, a notion of new- or ‘post-fandom’ (Giulianotti 1993) had evidently emerged, representing a novel manifestation of football culture, both produced and consumed increasingly by the middle-classes. As Brick (2000: 158) suggests, the football fan in the 1990s can be perceived of as ‘a very different animal from that of the 1970s or 1980s’²⁴.

The marginalisation of “traditional” working-class supporters has been a central component in anti-racism in English football. This is exemplified by the current focus on the England national team and its supporters. In the post-Euro ‘96 epoch²⁵, the Football Association (FA) and its New Labour-esque “spin doctors” have made considerable (yet arguably unsuccessful) efforts to eradicate the presence of racism and xenophobia from England matches, and to make watching games a multicultural, carnivalesque experience. Their (related) objectives have been to eradicate hooligans from the England fan collectivity and to transform the national team followers into a more inclusive (middle-class) group²⁶. The rationale behind this approach is based on an essentialist and stereotypical representation of “traditional” – i.e. white, working-class, male – football supporters. Positing a line of thinking that Back et al (1998) refer to as the ‘racist-hooligan couplet’, the football authorities perceive this social grouping to be both the most *racist* and the most *violent* section of the national team’s supporters. The football authorities believe that if they are to portray a positive image of English football to the global football community, this cohort of England supporters needs to be marginalised. In order to achieve this, the FA has overhauled the England supporters’ club and, subsequently, in 2001 it launched Englandfans, a supporters’ association that holds

the express aim of generating greater appeal to minority ethnic groups (see Campbell 2001a, Chaudhary 2001b, Crabbe 2004). The FA's desire to increase the number of minority ethnic England supporters is clearly based upon their belief that these fans possess a superior moral calibre and are less prone to drunkenness, prejudice or violence than the white, working-class fan, who is believed to be an anachronism in the multicultural 'post-fan' era²⁷. It has been suggested, therefore, that the campaign for anti-racism in football can be seen as constituting one element in the wider process of sanitising football fandom (Back et al 2001b). Nevertheless, the development of anti-racism in football is not simply related to the marginalisation of white, working-class fans. It is also a result of the increasing involvement of the middle-classes in supporter group politics.

Racing down the left: the politics of fan groups

In response to the increasing bourgeoisification and sanitisation of professional football, a number of fan-based organisations were formed with the aim of canvassing and representing the views and requests of fellow supporters. Following the formation of the nationally-oriented FSA in 1985, the late 1980s witnessed the development of club-based Independent Supporters' Associations (ISAs)²⁸. The medium through which these groups disseminated their ideas was often the football fanzine. The fanzine was seen as both symbolising the ethos of the new fan organisations and a suitable means of accessing their target audiences. Inspiration was undoubtedly drawn from *The End* and *Boys' Own*, seminal post-punk fanzines of the early 1980s – based in Liverpool and London, respectively – which, uniquely at this stage, contained articles on both football and popular youth cultures (Redhead 1991). However, in contrast to the popular punk music fanzines of the late 1970s which, due to their "do-it-yourself" ethic, rendered class boundaries obsolete, the football fanzine movement was undoubtedly a more middle-class phenomenon (cf. Giulianotti 1999a). For example, the first major football fanzine with a national focus and readership was *When Saturday Comes* (started in 1986). Its editor at the time, Andy Lyons, stated that, 'The average reader is probably someone in their 20s, may be ex-student, or quite likely to be a student, and the *Guardian/Independent*

reader' (cited in Haynes 1993b: 49). Therefore, rather than creating resistance to the increasing bourgeoisification of football fandom, the fan-group/fanzine movement actually contributed to this process by augmenting the representation and influence of middle-class football fans. As Brick (2000: 161) points out, 'The fandoms of resistance that have emerged in response to the sanitization of the traditional fan culture are entirely consistent with, and compliant in, the development of new discursive and legislative regimes of regulation'.

One of the main consequences of the increasing involvement of the middle-classes in fan groups was that it allowed the game to be appropriated as a means of articulating left-wing, liberal political discourses, particularly anti-racism. Garland and Rowe (2001: 73) argue that fan-based initiatives have, in general, 'originated from fans with no broader political agenda, rather than being the products of established left-wing or anti-racist groups who may have seen football as a useful arena in which to become involved'. On the surface this appears a fair reflection as, in the majority of cases, ISAs and other fan groups were established as campaigns of resistance against specific footballing or club-related issues, such as an unpopular chairman or board of directors, proposed ground relocations, and government legislation, e.g. the Criminal Justice and Public Disorder Act (1994)²⁹. However, it appears that the authors have misunderstood the processes by which these organisations were initiated and the backgrounds of the people involved in them. Whilst some fan-groups were set up by people with altruistic motives and the wider interests of the game at heart, others evidently involved people harbouring broader political agendas. Members of the ISAs at Newcastle United (INUSA) and Sheffield United (BIFA) that led to the formation of SRTRC and FURD, respectively, were previously involved in wider political anti-racist projects (Show Racism the Red Card 1998, Bradbury 2001a). It was also pointed out by participants in this research that many other activists currently involved in the anti-racist football movement were originally involved in anti-fascist politics during the late 1970s. For example, as the co-ordinator of one anti-racist football organisation stated, 'I've been involved in anti-racist work through the youth work that I did for a number of years, right,

before there were any anti-racist football campaigns, before there was even an industry, if you like, developing around that' [Interview, 19th June 2002].

The bourgeoisification of football fandom meant that not only were middle-class activists bestowed a "voice" within the game, but the shifting socio-economic demographics of football supporters as a *market* also meant that the target audience for their anti-racist rhetoric was likely to be more welcoming and receptive. As the co-ordinator of one anti-racist/British Asian football scheme suggested :

[Anti-racism] has come at a time that coincides with the sanitisation, hasn't it? It's [sanitisation] what to some degree has made [anti-racism] possible as well because [beforehand] the tougher nuts couldn't be cracked, do you know what I mean? We can tell David Baddiel³⁰ not to be racist because he already knows. So in a way it's almost a non-industry, isn't it, that part of it.

[Interview, 20th February 2002]

As this statement highlights, by the 1990s, the socio-political climate had changed to such an extent that, in contrast to the preceding decades, the promotion of anti-racism within the game was now both ideologically and logistically possible. As one 'Asian' ex-professional/current semi-professional player suggested:

If you'd done [an anti-racism campaign] ten years ago, maybe there might have been a lot more fight-back from white people or whoever. But now people are not scared to stand up, you know, and help each other and try and make things better.

[Interview, 28th January 2002]

One might argue that changes within the game, together with the establishment of a more receptive and supportive – or, at least, less hostile – target audience, mean that undertaking an anti-racist campaign is far easier to accomplish at the present time than it has been in previous years. This argument is developed in the following sections.

The power of football: reconciliation, integration, education

For a considerable period of time, sport and, in particular, football have been regarded as key contexts for promoting integration and reconciliation in divided societies (see e.g. Sugden 1991, Armstrong 2002). Those that have initiated projects and schemes in these areas argue that football represents an appropriate medium because not only is it the most popular sport in the world and is played on a global basis – FIFA, the game’s governing body, has more member states than the United Nations – but it also transcends barriers of ‘race’, culture and nationality. Literally, “the language of football is football”. Consequently, the game is perceived as an appropriate tool for transmitting ideas to people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Football also has a relatively simple, yet symbolic, structure that can provide a foundation for processes of socialisation, particularly with regard to young people.

In many respects, football is thus now seen to have an existence far beyond that of being purely a game. For example, as Armstrong (2002: 479) points out, ‘The topic of football and reconciliation is relevant and even fashionable, and the influences that the game can have on people are thus recognized by a whole host of organizations’³¹. For example, in 2003, the England football manager Sven Goran Eriksson and his wife Nancy Dell’Olio formed Truce International, a charity that aims to use football in the pursuit of eliminating global conflicts. Also that year, as part of their contribution to the post-war reconstruction of Iraq³², the United States Soccer Federation sent 60,000 footballs to ‘help more Americans show their compassion for Iraqi youth’³³ (cited in MacAskill and Howard 2003). Furthermore, football has been appropriated for the promotion of social health messages. At the east and central Africa football tournament in Kenya in 1999, condoms were distributed to supporters and a minute’s silence was held before matches in recognition of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is destroying sections of the African population (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2004: 13). Similarly, during the 2002 African Cup of Nations in Mali, in a strategy clearly based on the ubiquitous ‘Kick Out

Racism' slogans that adorn the advertising hoardings at the majority of English professional grounds, spectators were encouraged to 'Kick Out *Polio*'.

Football has also been cited as a means of promoting social cohesion, especially through its role in integrating migrants and minority ethnic groups into different European national collectivities. For example, the national football teams of former coloniser countries such as England, France and Holland have all included players from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds³⁴. In this regard, football's integrative capacity is hugely symbolic and it is therefore believed to be a particularly appropriate medium for use in teaching and other educational activities. Fundamentally, football is regarded as exemplifying the benefits of multiculturalism and, in particular, demonstrating the advantages of respecting and accepting people of diverse backgrounds. Support for the notion of football as an educational tool in promoting 'race' relations is reflected in the work of those involved in the anti-racist football movement in England. For example, *Football Unites Racism Divides* (2004: 11) states that, 'Football in its true essence is quite capable of uniting; being able to use it from an educational angle is even more powerful'. Similarly, the co-ordinator of another anti-racist football organisation stated that:

If we went into, say, schools or whatever, on a Racial [sic] Equality Council angle then I think that would bore people and they would lose interest in it very, very quickly. The fact that we're using football as our tool excites the young people and especially with, like, the World Cup and everything going on and the Asian teams and the African teams doing so well this reinforces that.

[Interview, 27th June 2002]

However, although football has long been identified as a potential means of transmitting anti-racist education, it is as a result of the bourgeoisification and sanitisation of football fandom that this ideology has been institutionalised within the game.

Only fifteen years since it was believed to be synonymous with a variety of anti-social and criminal behaviours, supporting a football team is now a fashionable

activity. Few “celebrity” individuals would have associated themselves with football during the “dark days” of the 1980s, yet television celebrities, pop stars and politicians now eagerly emphasise their (often superficial) allegiances to various “glamour” teams. Their association has, in turn, helped to overhaul the game’s previously negative social image and, consequently, football and its players are now heralded as an ideal means for promoting positive social messages, including anti-racism (see Chapter Eight). This is demonstrated by the number of initiatives and organisations appropriating the game as a medium. As the Academy Director of one Premier League club stated:

I would think that the whole – hopefully positive – image that surrounds football at the moment is the reason why it has been used by the various groups. And, of course, it is fair to say it isn’t just Let’s Kick Racism Out of Football that has been involved. I mean, the NSPCC [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children], for example, have recently used football as a means to access their potential supporters and others are always trying to use football as a tool.

[Interview with, 21st November 2001]

Another pertinent example is the *Playing for Success* scheme. Through this initiative, professional football clubs have established study centres that aim to use the structures, personnel and semiotics of professional football to assist the learning process for those children who fail to thrive in more academic contexts³⁵.

The current positive image surrounding English football means that not only is the game seen as a suitable medium for use in educational projects linked to anti-racism, but it is also increasingly viewed as a *panacea* to a variety of social problems. The notion of football as a social panacea has been eagerly promoted by many people involved in the game, particularly the community relations and marketing employees that have become vital to the running of professional clubs. Rather than cautiously citing the positive social effects that it might generate, football is now heralded as a saviour from society’s ills³⁶. Certain schemes that use football for educational purposes, such as *Playing for Success*, have undoubtedly contributed to the improved educational attainment of some children³⁷. However, it

appears that many of the people involved in these initiatives now see themselves, somewhat arrogantly, as social *übermenschen* (supermen) and more capable of providing meaningful educational experiences than those institutions actually designed for this task, such as schools and colleges. For example, Sunderland FC's six listed key "community objectives"³⁸ include reducing social exclusion in north-east England, specific work with children, and involvement with health, education and coaching issues (Cope 2002). Similarly, the Community Affairs manager at a Premier League club boasted that:

We have eleven staff who work in our support centre, we have four fully-qualified teachers and we've just taken on two part-time teachers. And just to put it into perspective, the average school delivers about twenty-eight hours of learning each week. We deliver sixty in our centre. It's actually open Monday to Saturday from nine in the morning until eight o'clock at night. And *Playing for Success* is just one of the education programmes we deliver down there. We run adult courses during the day. We run study support classes for schools, GCSE revision courses, we do our *Learning Through Football* day and, as I said, we also do an anti-racism accreditation project in conjunction with [our local newspaper].

[Interview, 21st June 2002]

It would be churlish to criticise those who seek to promote and extend the educational and (re)conciliatory capabilities of football, yet it is crucial to recognise that football is ultimately, to cite an old cliché, only a game. Its ability to influence wider social issues will always be limited and affected by a variety of factors, both internal and external to it. The perception that football can act as a social panacea is certainly disputed by many figures within the game, as these comments testify:

It is interesting that, for a long period of time, football was saying that it shouldn't be used as a "fall guy" for society's problems, over violence on the terraces and so on. In terms of, now, football being used as a means of solving society's problems? Yes, if that's perceived as being the focus then clearly that's not something that the game alone can achieve.

[Interview with Academy Director, Premier League club, 21st November 2001]

Some people – no matter how hard they try – they won't be able to change. It depends how they're brought up, where they're from, their background, and that. Football can help to a certain extent because you won't be able to shout abuse at football grounds really no more. But some people won't be able to change because it's just the way they are, the way they were brought up.

[Interview with 'Asian' professional player, 11th February 2002]

These two participants clearly acknowledge the educational capacities of football, but they also recognise potential problems and question the rationale behind the reliance on football rather than other, more specialist agencies. Nevertheless, utopian perspectives of football's capabilities are widespread, especially among those involved in the anti-racist football movement. For example, the ex-chairman of a club-based anti-racist scheme stated that:

Football supporters, as I know them and encounter them, the vast majority – ninety-nine point nine per cent – are decent people with decent beliefs and hopes and aspirations, and outside the context of the rivalry on the pitch would bear no malice against any fellow supporter from any other club.

[Interview, 13th June 2002]

Similarly, the South London Kicking Racism Out Of Football initiative aims 'to set aside traditional rivalries that exist between the clubs and build upon individual [anti-racist] campaigns in the area' (Kick It Out 1998a: 18). The ubiquity and pervasive nature of anti-racism discourses within English football have meant that many practitioners in this area tend to overstate the game's positive social effects. Conversely, football's ability to *divide* people as well as to unite them (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001, 2004) is ignored.

Hell Is Other People: football and social inclusion

The (re)construction of football as an "acceptable" pursuit, with a widespread consensus regarding its role as an educational tool – and, indeed, a social panacea – has meant that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, football is a prominent item on political agendas. Football's conciliatory capacities have been strongly championed by New Labour. The game has been particularly conspicuous in terms

of its association with one of the current Labour government's most salient political issues – social inclusion/exclusion. According to the government's official website, 'Social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). A dedicated agency, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set-up by the Prime Minister in 1997, and since May 2002 it has been located within the newly-initiated Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

In its early manifestation as a tool for promoting social inclusion, football was seen as a medium for challenging dysfunctional behaviour and rehabilitating persistent offenders. For example, Potts (2002: 17) argues that 'playing football can also deter people from crime and anti-social behaviour and offers a source of self-esteem and friendship'. However, with increasing political and public attention being paid to recent racial tensions between, and urban unrest involving, British Asian and white youths in many areas of the country – together with debates over asylum seekers – discourses of social inclusion/exclusion have become synonymous with issues of 'race' and ethnicity (for examples see Social Exclusion Unit 2003). Football has been identified by the government as an appropriate activity for use in such projects. Once again football and 'race' have been coupled as bedfellows by a government that is seeking political achievement and public popularity, as well as attempting to portray itself as being sensitive to the cultural sensibilities of twenty-first century Britain. As Back et al (2001b: 200) argue, 'Politicians seeking to associate themselves with the game require a political hook on which to hang their banner, which the issue of racism can provide'.

The Home Office has proposed that local authorities should organise sport competitions in order to diffuse racial tensions, particularly those involving asylum seekers (Travis 2002c) and a number of football teams have been established that aim to facilitate the integration of refugees into British society (Arnot 2002, Olliver 2003). Dominant political discourses regarding football and 'race' have been rapidly

appropriated by various organisations and initiatives that aim to increase the social inclusion of minority ethnic groups. One example is Kickstart, a football project based in Southwark, south London. Funded by Positive Futures, the Home Office's national social inclusion programme, the original aim of the project was to use football to rehabilitate young offenders, but it now uses the game to tackle racial tensions between members of adjacent housing estates. In particular, the scheme has initiated a football league for teams representing local Bengali, Irish, Somali and Traveller communities (Stear 2002). Football has also been used within educational initiatives, such as the *We All Stand Together* project at West Bromwich Albion and the Arc Theatre Group's trilogy of anti-racist plays for schoolchildren: *Kicking Out* premiered in 1994, *Ooh Aah Showab Khan* – which focused specifically on British Asian footballers – in 1997, and *My England* in 2000. The activities of the Charlton Athletic Race Equality (CARE) partnership 'involve the use of arts and sports to break down different forms of barriers faced by many people living in the Borough, particularly members of ethnic minority communities' (Charlton Athletic Race Equality 2000: 1), whilst the Sports Participation and Cultural Equality (SPACE) project in Huddersfield states that, 'our main objective is to use sport as a social tool and use this approach to breakdown social barriers' (Kick It Out 2001: 7).

Many participants in this research perceive that there is a clear correlation between the growth in anti-racist football activity and the contemporary prominence of political discourses surrounding 'race' and social inclusion. As the Centre of Excellence Director at a Second Division club stated:

I think [pressure to conform to anti-racism] comes from the government. I think it's more of an overall social thing rather than football. But football being the high profile [activity], you know, that's obviously where [the focus] is going to be targeted because they can get through to a lot of people.

[Interview, 2nd November 2001]

The Academy Director at a Premier League club reiterated this belief:

I believe that the government is involved here. Whether it be through the DfES [Department for Education and Skills], in terms of the general education issues or

directly from those who have taken an active interest in the power of football such as Messrs. Blair and Blunkett in regards to using it as an opportunity to promote an anti-racist culture.

[Interview, 21st November 2001]

A number of participants believe that the current tendency for anti-racist football projects to focus specifically on *British Asian* players is also directly underpinned by socio-political developments. Whilst the under-representation of British Asians as professional footballers is an internal issue for the game itself, it is apparent that the rationales behind these projects have been influenced by contemporary governmental policies that aim to address the issues and problems facing young British Asians. The urban unrest during the summer of 2001 highlighted the disaffection experienced by some young, working-class British Asian men and their alienation from “mainstream” society. However, rather than examining the root causes of this exclusion, considerable attention has instead been paid to the involvement of some members of this group in deviant activities such as drug dealing and gang violence (see Chapter Three). Subsequently, their social rehabilitation, and by association that of other young British Asian men, has risen to the top of social inclusion agendas (Burnett 2004). Through this route football has rapidly become incorporated into projects that aim to overcome the social exclusion of young, working-class British Asian men (see e.g. Hastings 2003). For example, one ‘Asian’ amateur player argued that:

I think obviously social inclusion has, politically, risen to a high priority as far as this government is concerned and I suspect that in some parts of the country, “Asians in football” is being seen as a vehicle to promote social inclusion...At the moment I think Asian footballers are being used as sort of tokens by some organisations to promote, if you like, much wider sociological and political agendas. But they’re not agendas that are focused and centred on sport and the development of footballers.

[Interview, 23rd April 2002]

A member of an anti-racist football organisation added that:

The fact is that maybe some Asian lads are dealing in drugs, or whatever, but it’s like they [politicians] can’t say there are *some* Asian lads without saying they’re *all* at it, know what I mean? So now it will just be like, “Oh, we’ll divert them,

we'll get them to play football", you know, "If they're playing football then they won't be selling drugs or something".

[Interview with 16th July 2002]

For some organisations – and the agencies that fund them – the terms “British Asian”, “social inclusion” and “football” are a “match made in heaven”, and it is unsurprising that they have been combined in various projects. However, as the above quotations highlight, it appears that it is not always a desire to increase the representation of British Asians in professional football *per se* that underpins such initiatives. Instead, the aim of some projects is evidently to address wider social and political agendas regarding the social inclusion of British Asians and, again, football is simply being used as a medium. Social inclusion initiatives undoubtedly have considerable social relevance and importance, but the wisdom of professional clubs becoming involved in this type of project is questionable. By conflating issues related to social inclusion and the development of British Asian football, and attempting to address them within the same project, there is a danger that what *should be* the primary objective of professional football with regard to British Asians – to facilitate their participation as professional players – will be marginalised. However, by promoting the wider “social inclusion angle”, British Asian football projects are arguably more likely to ensure that they receive the necessary funding, resources and publicity. Football clubs and the football authorities have become implicated into wider socio-political agendas to such an extent that many people appear to forget that the aims of these clubs and agencies are to promote the inclusion of British Asians in *professional football*, rather than other social spheres.

The Colour of Money: commercial considerations and anti-racism

Anti-racism in football, like most forms of pressure group politics, emanated from the work of a small number of activists. However, the anti-racist football movement has grown to such an extent that, although many members of anti-racist football organisations refute the specific terminology, it now represents a quasi-*industry*. When an organisation or movement becomes mainstreamed in such a manner and

represents a means of employment for a large number of people, it unavoidably loses the necessary radical edge that it originally possessed. As with any campaign that develops in stature and generates a positive public image, external individuals and agencies have not been slow in their attempts to align themselves with the anti-racist football movement. It is therefore unsurprising that it has become increasingly commodified and subject to outside – particularly commercial – interests. It would be naïve to expect anti-racist football organisations not to take on commercial sponsorship. In fact, it is fair to say that the anti-racist football movement could not undertake much of its work without the support it receives from commercial companies. This section will explore how and, more importantly, *why*, these businesses have provided the funding for anti-racist football projects.

There appears to be a consensus amongst members of anti-racist football organisations that businesses are not keen to become involved in anti-racist projects. However, the following examples suggest that this perception is somewhat wide of the mark. The growth and subsequent successes of the anti-racist football movement have led to a variety of corporate companies pledging sponsorship and, at the same time, receiving the kudos, publicity and credibility arising from this partnership. For example, sportswear manufacturers Nike were quick to cash-in, donating £20,000 to the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign, and then using racism as the central focus for a prominent television commercial (Back et al 2001b: 210). HSBC (formerly Midland Bank) has sponsored various educational projects, particularly the work of the Arc Theatre Group which produces anti-racist plays (Commission for Racial Equality 1995). Football Unites Racism Divides has received funding from the Royal Mail, Walker's Crisps and Grant Thornton Accountants (Football Unites Racism Divides 2001), whilst Show Racism the Red Card has received sponsorship from Sky TV and Lloyds TSB (Show Racism the Red Card 1998). Photographic company Canon also pledged their support, primarily through sponsoring an educational anti-racist football magazine (National Union of Teachers/Football Association 1997). Professional football clubs – as they increasingly (need to) operate as businesses – have also identified the commercial

benefits than can be gained from establishing anti-racist schemes. For example, Kick It Out (1998a: 19) refers to the Foxes Against Racism initiative based in Leicester and highlights how Leicester City FC is:

represented at meetings by the club's Commercial Director for whom anti-racism is partly driven by the desire to widen Leicester [City]'s fan base at Filbert Street³⁹, and attract black and Asian fans to the club in order to reflect the make up of the city of Leicester.

The reasons for the involvement of commercial companies in anti-racist football are discussed by author Irvine Welsh. He argues that:

When establishment voices start sponsoring anti-racism, you have to be cynical. Racism is so prevalent in every other aspect of British life – including the immigration laws, the judiciary and the police – it seems positively incongruous to find such hearty endorsement of anti-racist measures around the game of football. It's important then, to remember that while the growing bandwagon for condemning racism at football is welcome, it's largely to do with commercial considerations and the sport's increasing commodification (cited in Kick It Out/Football Unites Racism Divides 2001: 3).

This view is replicated by many individuals within the anti-racist football movement, who clearly recognise the mutual benefits arising from alliances between commercial companies and anti-racist football organisations. As the co-ordinator of one anti-racist football organisation admitted, 'We're not naïve enough to believe that companies are in it for the love of the issue' [Interview, 20th June 2002]. In a similar manner, one player spoke of how a particular locally-based, large commercial company had financed matches between his club (based in inner London) and a touring side from Bangladesh:

We've had teams from Bangladesh come over for the last two years...It was sponsored by [a commercial company]. Now, you know, okay, at the end of the day, a company like [x] want to be involved with big major projects, you know, they want to be seen to be doing something with the Asian community, so they splash out thirty-five/forty thousand [pounds]. [Such a project is] a little bit trendy, it gives them a couple of lines in the papers, you know, and they turn around in their annual report and they say, "We've done *this* with our local community". As I said, it's all about PR, you know.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 16th March 2003]

It is evident that the rationale behind commercial companies' involvement with anti-racism in football is based primarily around the potential for generating positive publicity. In reality, the majority are not committed to any substantial financial investment.

Nevertheless, it is likely that anti-racist projects that use football as a medium receive more commercial funding than those using other methods or appropriating other forms of popular culture. This is partly a result of the general popularity of football in Britain, but it is also a consequence of the game's contemporary status as a fashionable bourgeois leisure activity and its concomitant promotion as an educational medium. For example, the Assistant Academy Director of one Premier League club posited that, 'I would have thought they'd [commercial companies] get more media attention through going with football and they get more funding and back-up as well' [Interview, 11th February 2002]. Similarly, a member of an anti-racist football organisation thought that, 'Because football and social inclusion are both very sexy things, you know, I think they're better placed to get funding than a lot of voluntary organisations I've ever worked for before' [Interview, 16th July 2002]. These quotations demonstrate how the symbiotic relationship between football and anti-racism is often influenced by those working outside of the anti-racist football organisations themselves. Fundamentally, commercial companies that provide funding can dictate the areas that receive their input. The desire of these businesses to be associated with football and to give the impression that they are sensitive to issues of 'race' and racism means that anti-racist *football* organisations are likely to receive the greatest financial support.

Being able to "piggyback" on the anti-racist football movement has a further advantage for those companies that are involved in selling a product or service to minority ethnic groups. This category includes a variety of businesses, such as travel companies specialising in trips to the Indian subcontinent or the Caribbean, finance companies that transfer money between people in Britain and their relations elsewhere in the world, and media groups that publish newspapers and magazines

aimed specifically at minority ethnic readers. Through their involvement in anti-racist football projects, these companies perceive that they will endear themselves to the individuals they are attempting to target. One example is the global money transfer company, Western Union. In October 2002, as part of Fulham FC's anti-racist weekend, Western Union sponsored a competition for a youth football team to win a training session with the club. The competition was advertised in specific minority ethnic press, such as *Eastern Eye* (4th October 2002), and hence aimed directly at the sort of people who would use the company's services. Western Union have also sponsored the visits to Britain by the Indian national football team. In 2003, the company also sponsored the Notting Hill Carnival⁴⁰, the London Tigers Asian Community Football Cup and the London Cricket League, a competition consisting of British Asian and African-Caribbean teams⁴¹.

A match made in heaven? English football and anti-racism

This chapter has demonstrated how and why anti-racism has become the most prominent anti-discrimination discourse in English professional football. This section further reiterates the high status attached to anti-racism in English football by placing it in a number of comparative contexts. Firstly, the plethora of anti-racist projects are contrasted with the marked absence of measures to counter other forms of discrimination, such as homophobia. Secondly, it is demonstrated that the association with anti-racism is far more evident in football than in other sports. Thirdly, anti-racist activity in English football is contrasted with that undertaken elsewhere in Europe.

Queering the pitch?

If wider demographic trends are to be believed, it is likely that a not inconsiderable number of professional footballers are gay, yet no current professional footballer has publicly "come out" as being homosexual. The only professional player to openly reveal his homosexuality was Justin Fashanu and the resultant admonishment that he received – both inside and outside of the game – is likely to have influenced other players to keep their homosexuality private⁴².

Professional football is dominated by an ethos of hyper-masculinity and hegemonic heterosexuality (Williams and Taylor 1994). The notion of being homosexual remains anathema and homophobic discourses are an intrinsic part of the exchanges that constitute both informal dressing-room banter (Parker 2001) and terrace chants. However, in English football, there is considerably less public recognition of homophobia than there is of racism. Whilst a large number of both African-Caribbean and white players have become actively involved in anti-racist work, no current player – gay or otherwise – has made a public stance against homophobia. Furthermore, the absence of openly homosexual footballers has also meant that, in contrast to racism, it has been easy for those within the game to ignore incidents of homophobia and to even claim that the problem does not exist⁴³. Subsequently, there is currently no organised campaign aimed at eradicating homophobia in English football⁴⁴.

This situation is symbolic of the different ways in which racism and homophobia are approached in “mainstream” British society. Generally speaking, whilst most people wish to align themselves with anti-racist causes, there is still a large percentage whose feelings are far more ambiguous with regard to homosexuality. Certainly the stigma attached to being accused of racism far outweighs the social reprehension given to people who express homophobic sentiments. As Miles (1989: 1) suggests, racism:

has a peculiarity in so far as it is heavily negatively loaded. Thus, to claim that someone has expressed a racist opinion is to denounce them as immoral and unworthy. In brief, racism is, in the late twentieth century, a term of political abuse.

Similarly, whilst little social stigma is attached to anti-racist work – in fact, it is the source of substantial kudos within certain social groups – anti-homophobia work possesses different connotations. The irrational perception remains that people involved in trying to eradicate homophobia are *ipso facto* gay themselves. Many people are unprepared to subject themselves to such associations. It is, therefore, unsurprising that anti-racism has gained a far more substantial footing in English

football than anti-homophobia. As the Academy Director of a Premier League club suggested:

I think in terms of homophobia...football will not lend itself as easily to anti-homophobia, partly because until recently it's been largely a single sex sport. That's changing so maybe, therefore, the issue of addressing gay and lesbian issues within football will become easier to entertain. But my notion is because it has been traditionally a male-dominated environment, a macho-orientated environment as well, it has been harder to address the issue of homophobia, and that is why, perhaps, the racism issue and anti-racism has fitted much more easily in football than I can imagine any of the other campaigns would.

[Interview with 21st November 2001]

Organising a campaign that focuses on an issue that most players and supporters recognise and believe should be eradicated (racism) is clearly much easier than trying to harness support for an issue that people either do not fully acknowledge exists or are uncomfortable in discussing (homophobia). As a result, anti-racism in English football has achieved greater support and a higher status than other anti-discrimination discourses. This has ensured that anti-racist projects are able to harness most of the funding and resources assigned to anti-discrimination and achieving equality of opportunity in the game.

The only game that counts?

No other sport in Britain has developed an association with anti-racism to the extent that football has. Admittedly, few other sports in Britain have endured the problems that football has in terms of terrace racism but, in recent years, some have witnessed incidents that are arguably more severe than those that have occurred in football. British rugby – both league and union codes – provides a pertinent example. In December 2000, rugby league club Leeds Rhinos were ordered to pay £16,000 to their black Welsh international player Paul Sterling, after coach Dean Lance was found guilty of “unconscious” racial discrimination against the player (Wilson 2000). In March 2002, British Asian teenager Ushanth Kantharuban, hooker for the Saracens under-15 side, was racially abused, and kicked and punched so severely during a match against Bath that the game was abandoned and the player

vowed never to play rugby again (Chaudhary 2002a). Whilst these incidents were reported in the press, the amount of coverage was far from substantial⁴⁵. The disparity between the media attention given to these incidents and misdemeanours that occur in football is striking. For example, with reference to a spate of racist and violent incidents that took place in rugby union in early 2002, Kitson (2002) hypothesises:

Imagine the following equivalent incidents had occurred in football: David Beckham cynically kicking a young player off the ball, Paul Scholes being spat at by an England squad colleague and Emile Heskey, say, finding himself the target of alleged racist remarks by one of Arsenal's French contingent which duly sparked a massive brawl at Highbury [Arsenal's ground]? All, it should be stressed, over three days. How quickly everyone would jump to conclusions about yobbish footballers, bemoan the rotting social fabric of Britain and worse.

Although the presence of racism in sports such as rugby league and cricket does receive coverage in the media and is subjected to analysis within academic reports (e.g. Long and Spracklen 1996, McDonald and Ugra 1998), it rarely receives the quantity or depth of investigation designated to racism in football. Furthermore, whilst anti-racism schemes do exist in cricket, for example, the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) Racism Study Group and *Hit Racism for Six*⁴⁶, they lack the status and public profile of football campaigns, such as Kick It Out.

The contrasting profiles of anti-racism in football and other sports are partly influenced by football's position as the most high status and popular sport in Britain. However, although such a recognition would never be publicly disclosed, it is also fair to say that the existence of racism in *football*, as opposed to other sports, suits the agendas of various individuals and groups. For anti-racist football organisations, highlighting the presence of racism is necessary for them to justify their existence, funding and activities. As Back et al (2001b: 199) point out:

The dilemma facing those who wish to organize [anti-racist] campaigns is how to play down the extent of the problem, for fear of generating a sensational backlash or alienating sponsors, whilst conceding the presence of racism in order to justify the activity and receive positive PR.

For the media, footballing reportage represents a key component in generating newspaper sales and accounts of scandals involving professional players are likely to increase readership. In the ‘post-Macpherson’ era, the media – especially the broadsheet press – also exhibit a particular sensitivity towards, and interest in, issues of ‘race’ (see Law 2002). Consequently, when footballers, managers, directors or supporters are involved in racist incidents, these receive substantial coverage⁴⁷.

Trying to change the world or looking for a New England?

Whilst it would be incorrect to imply that there is no anti-racist activity on the continent – for example, there is Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE), *Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Wiecej* in Poland, *Ultras Contrao Racismo* in Portugal and *Fans Gegen Rechts* in Germany – established anti-racist football movements trail England in terms of their status and development. This represents an interesting paradox, for racism in European football is far more severe and occurs more frequently than in the contemporary English professional game. Whilst racism still manifests itself in a number of forms within the English game, it is arguably eclipsed by the pernicious influence of racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-roma (gypsy) discrimination that remains a regular and visible/audible presence in numerous other European countries. In nations such as Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Poland, references to Adolf Hitler and contemporary right-wing politicians/military leaders (especially those in the former Yugoslavia) are common, as is the appropriation of fascist iconography, such as the swastika and the Celtic cross⁴⁸.

In the early twenty-first century, increasing attention has been drawn to the frequency of African-Caribbean players representing English club and national sides being racially abused when playing matches in Europe. In October 2001, Boavista of Portugal were charged by UEFA after their supporters racially abused Liverpool’s Emile Heskey, whilst during the 2002-03 season UEFA meted out further punishments after black players from Arsenal, Fulham, Ipswich Town, Liverpool, Newcastle United and the national team were all abused during matches on the

continent⁴⁹. Furthermore, whilst a number of English club managers, including Kevin Ratcliffe and Mark Wright, have been found guilty of racial abuse in recent years⁵⁰, few have acted as offensively as a number of their European counterparts. For example, in 1999, Kevin Campbell was labelled a “cannibal” and “discoloured” by the president of his club, Turkish side Trabzonspor (Morris 1999). The following year, in Italy, in reference to a confrontation between his captain Luigi Garzya and Torino’s Senegalese defender Djibril Diawara, Bari coach Eugenio Fascetti remarked, ‘The nigger Diawara spat in Garzya’s face! And the spit might even be infected! Why don’t they just stay home, these niggers?’ (cited in Carroll 2001: 41). In 2001, Hannes Kartnig, president of Austrian club Sturm Graz – who had previously referred to an opposing team as a *negermannschaft* (“negro team”) – labelled one of his own players, the Iranian Merdad Minavand, a “carpet maker” (FARE monthly e-mail bulletin, May 2001). In 2003, Kartnig labelled foreign players ‘cheeky and undisciplined’ (FARE Network News, 8th May 2003). The disparity between the situations in England and continental Europe, and indeed the significance attributed to anti-racist football activities in these respective nations, can be succinctly highlighted by a final example. Whilst it has been alleged that a particular “big Vienna club” divides its under-18 players into separate changing rooms for “Austrians” and “gypsies” (FARE Monthly Bulletin, March 2001), Arsenal – demonstrating the increasing use of English professional football as a means of promoting social inclusion – host a scheme that encourages young Jewish and Muslim players to play together (BBC TV 2002b).

These examples clearly reflect the disparity between the relative importance attached to anti-racism in English and European football. It is evident that England has elevated itself to the position of self-styled leader of the European anti-racist football movement, and it is undeniable that it is regarded as the most progressive nation and a model of anti-racist best practice. It was therefore no surprise that England was chosen to host a UEFA conference on racism in football in March 2003, at Chelsea’s Stamford Bridge stadium. As a consequence of their leading position in the anti-racist football “hierarchy” – together with a possible

complacency that racism in English football had been widely eradicated – for a period at the beginning of the twenty-first century the English anti-racist football movement sought the moral highground and broadened its remit to cover the rest of Europe. However, evidence of continuing problems in English football – in terms of terrace racism, the under-representation of British Asian players and the paucity of black players progressing to management – has meant that whilst English anti-racist organisations are not currently “trying to change the world”, they are still evidently “looking for a New England”.

It is acknowledged that this chapter may have given the impression that the development of anti-racism in football has been unconditionally supported and has faced no resistance. This is not the case. British Asian footballers in this study recognised the increase in the number and scope of British Asian football projects over the last five years. However, although they all welcome developments aimed at increasing their representation as professional players, many participants are critical of current projects. In particular, their concerns focus on the rationales that they perceive to be behind these schemes, the manner in which they have been implemented and the extent to which they have achieved their objectives. The following chapters develop this analysis. Chapter Seven takes a theoretical angle and discusses the implications that anti-racist strategies and practices have for British Asians, in terms of their participation in professional football. Chapter Eight offers an in-depth, empirical critique of the specific policies and activities currently employed by anti-racist football organisations, and investigates the reasons why, and the manner in which, they are being resisted.

Notes

- ¹ For a history of organised fascism in Britain see Bloom (2003).
- ² By 1973 support for the NF was growing at an unprecedented rate and local electoral successes were achieved throughout the country. That year NF candidate Martin Webster gained almost 5,000 votes (16% of the poll) in the West Bromwich parliamentary by-election. Electoral support for the NF peaked in 1976-77, when a 'moral panic' arose over the number of East African Asians being admitted into Britain. In 1976, 48 NF candidates won a total of 43,733 votes (20%) in Leicester – a destination for large numbers of East African Asian refugees – whilst the following year saw 119,000 votes cast for the NF in London (beating the Liberals in 33 out of 92 constituencies). However, the party's appeal was generally limited outside specific localities and it was met with considerable resistance by anti-racist organisations, such as the Anti-Nazi League (ANL).
- ³ Whilst the presence of the NF at football grounds during the late 1970s/early 1980s should not be underestimated, the number of fans who officially joined the party is probably fairly small. The NF was eventually fiercely resisted at many grounds, particularly those where it had previously achieved some degree of success, e.g. Leeds United (Thomas 1995).
- ⁴ RAR was formed in 1976 by a small group of activists associated with the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). The movement was initiated as a response to comments made by famous rock stars such as Eric Clapton and David Bowie, who had expressed their admiration for the staunch anti-immigrationist politician Enoch Powell. The objectives of RAR were disseminated predominantly through the *Temporary Hoarding* fanzine and large-scale rock concerts, such as the gathering in Victoria Park, east London in May 1978 (Gilroy 1987, Frith and Street 1992).
- ⁵ The lyrics to many of these bands' songs made explicit reference to racism, e.g. *Ku Klux Klan* by Birmingham's Steel Pulse, *King* by UB40 (also from Birmingham), and *Why?* and *Racist Friend* by The Specials (Coventry). UB40 and The Specials, together with other multi-racial bands that shared their musical genre, such as The Beat (Birmingham), The Selecter (Coventry) and Bad Manners (London), have been cited as playing an important role in forging relations between black and white youths in late 1970s/early 1980s Britain (see Marshall 1990).
- ⁶ These included Spurs Against the Nazis (SAN) and Orient Against the Nazis (OAN). These groups were not well received by their respective clubs, however. For example, the group based at (Leyton) Orient was threatened with legal action by the club's board of directors, who believed

that their presence was inflammatory and brought adverse publicity to the club (Garland and Rowe 2001).

- ⁷ This can be demonstrated by the fact that a prominent early strategy of the ANL was to disrupt demonstrations and marches by right-wing organisations such as the NF. This often resulted in violence clashes between opposing groups, e.g. in Bradford, Ladywood (Birmingham) and Lewisham (London).
- ⁸ Derived from “fan” and “magazine”, the term “fanzine” can be traced back to the United States of America during the 1940s. It was first attributed with any cultural significance in Britain during the punk era of the late 1970s. The idea behind the punk fanzine was to create low budget, home-made, cut-and-paste alternatives to the national music press. Titles such as *Sniffin’ Glue* and *Ripped and Torn* rapidly grew in popularity and eventually achieved mass readership. For further information on football fanzines see Jary et al (1991), Haynes (1993a), Haynes (1993b), Moorhouse (1994), Haynes (1995).
- ⁹ York City were the sole exception. In 1994, club chairman Douglas Craig defended the decision by declaring that ‘the only way to eradicate racism is for each individual to stop talking or thinking about it and actually do something about it. You are not really doing anything if you simply join a campaign or worse still tell someone else to join one’ (www.thisisyork.co.uk 2003).
- ¹⁰ Many of the individuals who had been involved in specific club-based initiatives went on to work with larger, national anti-racist football projects.
- ¹¹ The FSA was formed in 1985, in the wake of the Heysel stadium disaster, by Liverpool supporters Peter Garrett and Rogan Taylor. In particular, the FSA was originally concerned with issues of stadium violence, poor spectator facilities and the possible infringement of civil liberties that law-abiding fans would encounter as a result of anti-hooligan legislation.
- ¹² These included ensuring that the national anti-racist campaign was implemented by professional clubs; developing anti-racist educational resources for young people; eradicating racism from amateur football; increasing the representation of British Asians as professional players; increasing participation by local minority ethnic groups within their respective professional clubs; and developing pan-European anti-racist networks (Kick It Out 1998a).
- ¹³ LFUARF was formed in 1987 by members of Leeds Anti-Fascist Action (LAFA) and Leeds Trade Union Council (LTUC). SRTRC was set up in 1996 by Youth Against Racism in Europe

(YARE), the Independent Newcastle United Supporters' Association (INUSA) and the Race Equality Councils for Tyne & Wear and Cleveland.

- ¹⁴ After Brearley left the club, the membership of BIFA plummeted from over 1700 in 1995 to just 300 in 1997. BIFA was essentially a single issue movement that could not sustain mass involvement after its *raison d'être* had gone. The group then moved into the realm of equality 'charters' for fans and voicing the concerns of fans throughout the country. It is also evident that many individuals were unsure of BIFA's future role after the conclusion of the 'anti-Brearley' campaign (Nash 2002).
- ¹⁵ On 11th May 1985, fifty-seven supporters died after being trapped by a fire in a stand at Bradford City's Valley Parade ground. On the same day, a 15 year-old fan was killed after a wall collapsed on top of him during a confrontation between Birmingham City and Leeds United supporters at the former's St. Andrews ground. Later that month, on 29th May, thirty-nine Juventus supporters were crushed to death at the European Cup Final in the Heysel Stadium in Brussels. Pre-match fighting between Juventus and Liverpool fans caused a mass movement of Italian supporters that, in turn, caused a terrace wall to collapse.
- ¹⁶ This culminated a decade later when, in 1999, the Football Task Force recommended that to ensure a fairer deal for fans, clubs should introduce customer charters. Public charters were highly favoured by politicians during the 1990s and they were seen as a remedy to problems within a plethora of public services. They were implemented in a number of areas, e.g. the charter for rail passengers. The recommendation to introduce a football supporters' charter was fulfilled by all Premier League clubs for the start of the 2000-01 season.
- ¹⁷ This applies to both national and local government. Whilst the former is responsible for legislation, the latter license football grounds and pay police budgets.
- ¹⁸ For further analyses of carnivalesque behaviour amongst football supporters see Giulianotti (1991, 1995, 1999b).
- ¹⁹ The first football-specific government legislation, the Football Spectators Act, was introduced in 1989, although the behaviour of football fans had previously been restricted by the Sporting Event (Control of Alcohol, etc.) Act (1985) and the Public Order Act (1986). Since then, a number of legal interventions have been introduced to control football supporters: the Football (Offences) Act (1991), the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994), the Football (Offences and Disorder) Act (1999) and the Football Disorder Act (2000).

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- ²⁰ “Hate speech” refers to words or phrases deliberately aimed at denigrating an individual or group, usually in the context of their ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
- ²¹ The financial implications of ground redevelopment were highlighted by the findings of a Royal Town Planning Institute survey which found that 54% of clubs were considering relocation rather than redevelopment (Duke 1994). By the end of the 2003-04 season, twenty-two (out of ninety-two) clubs had relocated to new stadiums.
- ²² According to the 2002 FA Premier League fans’ survey, more than one-third of fans who watch live Premier League matches earn £30,000 or more per year. In London, a third of Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur supporters earn at least £50,000. The survey was undertaken by the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research at Leicester University and involved sending questionnaires to a sample of 80,000 season ticket and non-season ticket holders. The response rate was 37.2% (Chaudhary 2002b).
- ²³ This period witnessed a proliferation of literature by middle-class *soccerati* who wrote misty-eyed, somewhat apocryphal, accounts of their experiences as football supporters (e.g. Hornby 1992, Hornby (ed.) 1994, Kelly (ed.) 1995, Varley 1999). This burgeoning literary genre was supplemented by a growing desire for nostalgia and an increasing market for “retro” football shirts, both of which were perceived by these middle-class supporters as means of establishing credibility and authenticity.
- ²⁴ The demographic transformations within football’s fanbase were noted by the co-ordinator of a club-based anti-racist scheme. He retold the following account: ‘I came out of the Chelsea game and I saw an old man kicking a wall near the new stand, because Chelsea scored in injury time. He said, “They should kick this fucking stand down, this stand ain’t going to make us a good team, we want to buy some players who can pass and tackle, we don’t want a fucking stand”. And he was kicking it, actually kicking the stand! About [age] sixty. And I could see a lot of people jumping into their spacewagons [multi-person vehicles] wearing this year’s team shirt saying, you know, “Damn, it wasn’t our year” and tomorrow they’ll go to the pictures [cinema]. And for that man, albeit irrationally, his world had collapsed because [his club] had got knocked out of the cup. Some people don’t even come to the [cup] game because it’s an extra game to pay for on [top of] your season ticket, so why bother, you know? They’ve not even worked out that a cup game is significantly a step-up, traditionally, from a league game! “Oh I don’t need to pay fifty pounds for that, I saw Jimmy Hasselbaink play earlier on in the season for Chelsea” ’ [Interview, 20th February 2002].

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- ²⁵ The 1996 European Championships, held in England, are perceived to be a symbol of post-fandom, in that it is popularly believed that hitherto excluded groups, such as minority ethnic communities and women, gained inclusion within the national fan collectivity. For a critique of this analysis see Carrington (1998).
- ²⁶ An example of an attempt to make supporting England a more “multicultural” experience is a report for the Institute for Public Policy Research (sponsored by the FA, UK Sport, UNISON and Ladbrokes bookmakers) by Mark Perryman, a member of the Home Office Working Group on Football and Public Disorder (Perryman 2002).
- ²⁷ In May 2003, the FA was fined £68,000 by UEFA after English supporters were involved in incidents of violence and racism at the Euro 2004 qualifying match between England and Turkey in Sunderland the previous month. In response, the FA sent a special delegation of British Asian and black supporters to South Africa for England’s next match, a friendly against the host nation, to emphasise its commitment to anti-racist initiatives.
- ²⁸ ISAs were first started at Chelsea and Queen’s Park Rangers in the mid-1980s. Their aim was to offer more power to supporters with regard to the running of their clubs. By the mid-1980s ISAs had been established at over thirty-five clubs. For a further analysis of ISAs see Nash (2001). These groups have been joined in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century by Supporters’ Trusts, organisations that facilitate the presence of supporters as shareholders or representatives on the board of directors (see Hamil et al 2000).
- ²⁹ The Criminal Justice and Public Disorder Act (1994) had significant implications for football. It decreed that ‘a person is guilty of an offence if, with intent to cause a person harassment, alarm or distress, he [sic] – a) uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or disorderly behaviour, or b) displays any writing, sign or visible representation which is threatening, abusive or insulting, thereby causing that or another person harassment, alarm or distress’ (cited in Brick 2000: 164).
- ³⁰ David Baddiel is an author, novelist and television comedian. During the 1990s, he co-hosted (with Frank Skinner) *Fantasy Football League*, a television show that provided an ironic and irreverent analysis of the game and championed, somewhat superficially, football nostalgia. Broadcast on BBC2 late on Friday nights – in the “post-pub” slot – the programme mirrored the increasing popularity of watching matches at home on television (see Sandvoss 2003), rather than in the football ground. As a public school and Cambridge University educated, Jewish, middle-

class football supporter, Baddiel is a prime example of the production and consumption of ‘post-fandom’.

³¹ For a further synopsis of the use of football in global educational campaigns by multi-national, non-governmental organisations, e.g. the Red Cross and UNICEF, see Armstrong (2002), Armstrong (2004), Armstrong and Giulianotti (2004).

³² As part of this strategy, a football team representing the 1st Armoured Division of the US Army took on the Iraq national side in Baghdad, whilst the Royal Marines competed against a team from Basra. Football matches were also played in the immediate post-war period in Afghanistan, including a game between the British Army and an Afghan side in Kabul.

³³ The inappropriateness of these gestures was acknowledged by one Iraqi citizen who stated that, ‘We don’t want football, we want security and stability, electricity and water’ (cited in MacAskill and Howard 2003).

³⁴ France is a prime example. In recent years, parliamentary politics in France have been characterised by the increasing popularity of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s right-wing *Front National*. In response, anti-racist campaigners have highlighted the fact that the national football team – which won the World Cup in 1998 and the European Championships in 2000 – contained players from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. For example, Jocelyn Angloma, Marcel Desailly, Christian Karembeu, Bernard Lama and Patrick Vieira were born in Guadeloupe, Ghana, New Caledonia, Guyana and Senegal, respectively. Players with at least one parent born outside France include Lilian Thuram, Bernard Diomede and Thierry Henry (Guadeloupe), Alain Boghossian (Armenia), Patrice Loko (Congo), David Trezeguet (Argentina), Mikael Madar (Tunisia), Zinedine Zidane (Algeria) and Youri Djorkaeff (Armenian mother and ‘Kalmouk’ [Mongolian] father) (Marks 1999). However, the abject failure of the multi-racial French team at the 2002 World Cup – they were eliminated in the first round – together with Le Pen reaching the second round of the Presidential election, demonstrates the conditional and ephemeral nature of a sport-influenced multicultural consciousness (Hare 2003).

³⁵ *Playing for Success* was established in 1997 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in partnership with the FA Premier League, the Nationwide League, professional football clubs and Local Education Authorities. The objective was to establish after-school study centres, predominantly at professional football clubs, and to use the game as a means of motivating children in need of improving their literacy, numeracy and ICT (Information and Communication Technology). By May 2003, 58 professional football clubs had signed up to scheme. There has

been a degree of resistance, however. Chelsea, for example, have refused to endorse the scheme, despite their commitment to other education and community initiatives. In May 2003, the Education Secretary, Charles Clarke, labelled Chelsea chairman, Ken Bates, a “disgrace” due to the club’s failure to support the scheme. In response, Bates called *Playing for Success* a “gimmick” created by “Labour spin doctors” (BBC Radio 2003c).

³⁶ For example, in the autumn of 2003, coaches from Carlisle United were involved in delivering sessions on behalf of CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably), a government agency established in recognition of the fact that the biggest killer of young men in England and Wales is suicide.

³⁷ According to a study carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research on children involved in the *Playing for Success* scheme, the average “maths age” rose by seventeen months amongst primary children and by two years in secondary pupils (*Times Educational Supplement* 2003).

³⁸ In many ways the concept of “community” has replaced “family” as the dominant inclusion discourse in English professional football. Under the Conservative governments of the 1980s, measures were implemented that were designed to attract families to watch football, e.g. family enclosures. Under the current Labour government, policies related to issues of football and inclusion have tended to focus far more on the notion of “community”.

³⁹ The club moved to a new ground, the Walkers Stadium, for the start of the 2002-03 season.

⁴⁰ Western Union were a major sponsor of the 2003 Notting Hill Carnival. Together with advertising hoardings, the company also gave out children’s bandannas featuring their logo. The carnival organisers received considerable criticism over the amount of commercial sponsorship that was present at that year’s event (Chrisafis 2003).

⁴¹ Highlights of the London Cricket League are often shown on ACTV – a British satellite television channel aimed specifically at African-Caribbean audiences – thus increasing the exposure of Western Union to people that might use their services.

⁴² Justin Fashanu, the first black million-pound footballer in Britain revealed his sexuality in the *News of the World* newspaper in 1990. After coming out as gay, Fashanu was apparently disowned by his brother John, a fellow professional. Justin committed suicide in 1998 – he

hanged himself in a garage in Shoreditch, east London – having been accused of sexually abusing a boy in Maryland, USA (see Allen 2003).

- ⁴³ This can be highlighted by the unsubstantiated homophobic abuse that has been meted out to Chelsea's Graeme Le Saux throughout his career. Due to his interest in art and antiques, and his choice of a broadsheet rather than a tabloid newspaper, Le Saux has, irrationally, been widely believed to be gay. The fact that Le Saux is actually heterosexual – and both a husband and a father – has meant that the football authorities and the media have been able to dismiss this as banter and to play down the underlying sentiments behind such comments. In a match between Chelsea and Liverpool in March 1999, Le Saux was labelled a “poof” and a “faggot” by Liverpool's Robbie Fowler. As Le Saux went to take a free-kick during the second-half, Fowler stood in his way, gesticulated towards his own bottom and shouted “come on, come on, give it to me up the arse” (cited in Chaudhary 1999). A clash ensued during which Le Saux knocked Fowler to the ground by striking him on the head with his elbow. Whilst both players were charged with misconduct, the issue of homophobia was ignored by the FA.
- ⁴⁴ By the end of 2002, as part of its intention to broaden its agenda and cover other areas of discrimination, the German anti-racist football organisation *Buendnis Aktiver Fussballfans* (BAFF) was aiming to initiate anti-homophobia legislation. A similar development in Britain remains non-existent.
- ⁴⁵ The Kantharuban incident, for example, received only minimal coverage, within Vivek Chaudhary's Saturday *Guardian* comment column (Chaudhary 2002a).
- ⁴⁶ In the late 1990s, the ECB's Racism Study Group carried out an investigation into racism in English professional cricket. The steering group for the report, entitled *Clean Bowl Racism*, involved governing bodies, professional clubs, minority ethnic sports associations and academics (ECB Racism Study Group 1999). *Hit Racism for Six* is an independent lobbying group.
- ⁴⁷ Taking *The Guardian* as an example, in March 2003, news that singer Cheryl Tweedy of the pop group Girls Aloud had been charged with racially aggravated assault, after a fight with a black toilet attendant in a Guildford nightclub, was given a single sentence in a round-up column (*Guardian* 2003a). Later that month, a report citing allegations that Newcastle United and Wales striker Craig Bellamy had racially abused a man in a Cardiff nightclub was the leading article on the paper's back page (Taylor and Lloyd 2003). Bellamy originally faced one charge of using words or behaviour likely to cause racially aggravated harassment, alarm or distress and two charges of racially aggravated intentional harassment. The latter charges were dropped in August

2003. Two months later Bellamy was charged with using threatening, abusive or insulting words, although the racial nature of the charge was withdrawn. In October 2003, Tweedy was cleared of racially aggravated assault but was convicted of assault.

- ⁴⁸ Italian club Lazio is a case in point. Supporters of the club – particularly the politicised *ultra* hooligan element – have actively used the club’s Olympic stadium in Rome as an arena for the expression of far right ideology (BBC TV 2002a). These supporters have invoked racial hatred through the use of vocal chants and giant banners, particularly in matches against their local rivals – and stadium co-tenants – AS Roma. Lazio fans have focused on the fact that, in contrast to their own club, Roma have traditionally fielded a number of non-white players and are the more popular club with the city’s Jewish communities. Banners have included “Black team, Jewish supporters” and “Auschwitz is your town, the ovens your houses”. Many fans have also eulogised Arkan, the hooligan leader of Yugoslavia’s Red Star Belgrade, who later became the commander of The Tigers, a voluntary Serbian paramilitary unit (see Vrcan and Lalic 1999). Arkan is widely believed to be responsible for the murder of hundreds of people during the civil wars that took place in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. He was indicted by the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague but never stood trial. In January 2000, he was murdered by gunmen believed to be connected to the ruling post-war government.
- ⁴⁹ During the 2002-03 season, PSV Eindhoven, FK Sartid (of Yugoslavia) and Valencia were fined by UEFA’s Control and Disciplinary panel after their supporters had racially abused black players from Arsenal, Ipswich Town and Arsenal again, respectively. PSV Eindhoven were originally fined £13,000 but in an unprecedented move, UEFA appealed against its own decision and the penalty was increased to £22,500. In June 2003, the Court of Arbitration for Sport reduced the fine to £14,000. In October 2002, England’s Ashley Cole and Emile Heskey were racially abused by Slovakian supporters during a Euro 2004 qualifier in Bratislava. In December 2002, UEFA fined the Slovakian FA £27,000 and Slovakia were forced to play their Euro 2004 qualifier against Liechtenstein in April 2003 behind closed doors.
- ⁵⁰ In 1997, Chester City apprentice James Hussaney was awarded £2,500 by a tribunal after he had been racially abused by his manager Kevin Ratcliffe. Ratcliffe labelled Hussaney “a black cunt” after the player had put the wrong studs into his manager’s football boots (Gardiner and Welch 2001). In 2001, Oxford United manager Mark Wright was fined £1,750 and given a four-match touchline ban by the FA after racially abusing referee Joe Moss during a match against Scunthorpe United.

Chapter 7

***Paint it Black?* Identity, difference and conflict in British Asian communities:
the implications for football and anti-racism**

Introduction

This chapter builds on the analysis in the previous chapter and traces the wider development of anti-racism over the last quarter of a century. Rather than focusing on the anti-racist *movement*, the aim here is to identify some of the most significant theoretical shifts in anti-racism as an *ideology* and to examine how these have been encompassed and reflected in English football. This thesis provides a re-conceptualisation of what it means to be young, male and British Asian in the early twenty-first century and this chapter analyses the extent to which the ideologies underpinning the anti-racist football movement are reflective of current articulations of “Asianness”. The first part of the chapter examines the reasons for the decline of multiculturalism as the hegemonic discourse in ‘race’ relations thinking and its replacement with the ideology of anti-racism. It outlines the subsequent transformations in the politics of anti-racism, from the concept of ‘political blackness’ in the late 1970s/early 1980s to a contemporary framework that appreciates the diversity of Britain’s minority ethnic groups. The following sections highlight how traditional notions of anti-racism have been challenged by a recognition of the differences in the identities and experiences of the various British Asian communities and their divergent levels of inclusion in “mainstream” British society. This involves an examination of both the rise of Islamophobia¹ over other anti-British Asian discourses in the late twentieth century and the different levels of socio-economic success achieved by respective British Asian groups. These developments and phenomena have significant implications for the involvement of British Asians in professional football and, in each case, the responses made by the anti-racist football movement are analysed. The final part of the chapter investigates communal tensions within British Asian communities and the potential repercussions for the pursuit of anti-racism in football.

‘Now when I say black I mean non-white. Black, brown, red or yellow’: Anti-racism from ‘political blackness’ to ethnic diversity

In the immediate post-World War Two era, Britain experienced a severe labour shortage in a number of areas of employment. In order to overcome this deficiency,

the government actively recruited workers from its former colonies and dependent territories in the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean. As a result, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of South Asians and African-Caribbeans migrated to Britain². South Asians were recruited mainly to work in the manufacturing and textile industries, whilst African-Caribbeans were employed predominantly in the public sector, e.g. London Transport and the National Health Service (NHS). Due to the differences in their types of work, the respective groups settled in different areas of the country (Rees and Phillips 1996) or, in the case of large cities such as London or Birmingham, in different districts (Storkey and Lewis 1996). South Asians and African-Caribbeans established separate migrant communities, each with their own distinct cultural, religious and social institutions. Consequently, during this period, there was minimal social interaction between these communities, and the issues and problems that they faced were often specific to their particular ethno-cultural groups.

Ever since the migrants arrived in Britain, they experienced animosity and hostility from sections of the indigenous population. For example, in 1958, attacks on African-Caribbeans by Teddy Boys took place in St. Ann's, Nottingham and Notting Hill, west London³ (MacInnes 1959). The incident in St. Ann's was a spontaneous outbreak of mob violence by local white residents whilst the occurrences in Notting Hill were part of an organised terror campaign, orchestrated by the White Defence League, the National Labour Party and Oswald Moseley's Union Movement, under the slogan *Keep Britain White*. Violent opposition to minority ethnic groups continued throughout the following decade and reached unprecedented levels during the 1970s. Public fears about insufficient immigration controls – particularly with regard to the influx of South Asian refugees from East Africa – were ignited by politicians, such as the Conservative Enoch Powell⁴, leading to a 'moral panic' (cf. Young 1971, Cohen 2002) over the presence of non-white migrants in Britain. A widespread perception that migrants were taking the jobs of indigenous workers – in actual fact they accepted the jobs and shift patterns that many white workers had rejected – and an associated increase in support for fascist groups such as the National Front and the British Movement led to an

increase in violence against minority ethnic groups. A phenomenon that was to become known as “Paki-bashing”⁵ began to manifest itself in a number of towns and cities (see e.g. Pearson 1976) and the latter part of the decade witnessed the murders of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in Southall, Altab Ali in Whitechapel and Akhtar Ali Baig in Newham. By the end of the 1970s, it had become apparent that, despite their diverse backgrounds and histories, Britain’s other non-white migrant communities – i.e. those from the Caribbean – were, to some extent, experiencing a similar fate. These groups were all victims of racism, whether it be racial violence or discrimination in employment and housing. In certain locations, a recognition of their common experiences as migrants in Britain and a prevailing belief that racism could only be challenged by forming a coalition of non-white groups meant that a sense of unity developed between South Asian and African-Caribbean communities (Sivanandan 1981/2).

In response to the increase in racial violence, the anti-racist movement – initiated in the 1960s by the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) – began to expand during the late 1970s/early 1980s. This movement incorporated radical independent organisations, such as the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP), together with left-wing municipal agencies, e.g. the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). As Lloyd (2002: 62) suggests, ‘As a political movement anti-racism may be best understood as occupying different points on a continuum between well-organised, bureaucratic organisations, pressure groups and protest or social movements which challenge dominant social practices and preconceptions’. Before the advent of anti-racism, the ideology of multiculturalism had been to celebrate the differences and diversity of migrant groups – it was often irreverently labelled “saris, steels bands and samosas” by its critics⁶ – but anti-racism was characterised by a focus on the (perceived) *commonalities* experienced by all non-white groups. As Mac an Ghail (1999: 103) states, ‘A key element of anti-racism was to define itself against what was seen as multiculturalism’s politically divisive focus on ethnic difference’. In this respect, the development of anti-racism in Britain drew considerable inspiration

from the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements in the USA during the 1960s (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). In particular, the American definition of the term “black” was appropriated and became the main operating concept of anti-racism in Britain. In the USA, the term “black” was inverted from a term of abuse to a signifier of ‘race’ *pride*. Intrinsic to this definition was the belief that “black” referred to all non-white minorities. As Black Power leader Malcolm X stated, ‘Now when I say black I mean non-white. Black, brown, red or yellow’ (cited in Bonnett 2000: 121). Similarly in Britain, ‘race’ equality professionals insisted that being non-white was synonymous with being “black” and during the late 1970s/early 1980s, the concept of ‘political blackness’ received widespread adherence. The term was conceived to facilitate a unity between diverse, powerless minorities and it was perceived that this collective identification was necessary to form an effective anti-racist movement (cf. Patel 2002). As Hall (1996: 441) states:

The term “black” was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities.

This perception ensured that during the early years of the British anti-racist movement, ‘political blackness’ became the dominant, or hegemonic, concept in ‘race’ relations discourse.

However, during the 1990s, the ‘cultural turn’ (cf. Hall 1997) in ‘race’ relations thinking and the emergence of ethnicity as the hegemonic concept in this field of social sciences meant that the framework of ‘political blackness’ begun to lose status and support. According to Pilkington (2003: 1-2), the cultural turn ‘entailed deconstruction of the central categories, White and Black, sensitised us to diversity among members of both the majority group and minority groups, and highlighted how all human beings have multiple and shifting identities’. One of the earliest, and subsequently most vehement, critics of the category “black” was Tariq Modood, who argued that it marginalised and alienated British Asians. Modood (1992b) points out that British ‘race’ relations thinking has traditionally been characterised

by *racial dualism*. In particular, he claims that this ideology has been over-influenced by the assumption that:

Being white or not is the single most crucial factor in determining the sociological profile of any non-white group in contemporary Britain, dwarfing class, employment, capital assets, skills, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, family, geography and so on, all of which will be secondary in the sense that race determines each of these factors more than they determine race or each other in the total sociological outcome (ibid.: 28).

As this quotation demonstrates, a problem with the concept of 'political blackness' is that it equates racial discrimination with *colour* discrimination. Modood (1997b) argues that any form of anti-racism that emphasises one's skin colour above other aspects of identity is likely to exclude British Asian groups and will be insensitive to their concerns and vulnerabilities. He claims that this approach ignores the specificities of anti-Asian racism and, particularly, the significance of a *cultural* component in the construction and manifestations of anti-Asian prejudices (Modood 1994). Fundamentally, the discrimination that British Asians experience is a result not just of their skin colour, but also of the extent to which their cultures are (to varying degrees) believed to be incompatible with white, "mainstream" British society (see below). To illustrate his argument, Modood (1992b) refers explicitly to British Muslims. He states that Muslims hardly ever perceive themselves in terms of notions of colour or 'race' and so the taunt of 'Rushdie' will generate greater offence than that of 'black bastard' (ibid.: 55). An anti-racism that invokes connotations of identity as being synonymous with colour will thus marginalise and alienate Muslim groups. Modood (1990) argues that sociologists and 'race' equality professionals have been unable to link what he labels an individual's *mode of being* with their *mode of oppression* and thus issues such as ethnicity, identity and group pride have been ignored. He proposes a need to develop a model of 'race' relations which understands that any oppressed group experiences its oppression in relation to the identities that *it* and not the oppressor values the most. He posits that 'antiracism begins (i.e. ought to begin) by accepting oppressed groups on their own terms (knowing full well that these will change and evolve) not by imposing a spurious identity and asking them to fight in the name of that' (Modood 1992a: 272).

Modood (1997b) argues that the identities and experiences of British Asians have been particularly marginalised within discourses of ‘political blackness’ due to its associations with migrants from the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. Notions of “blackness” have become inextricably linked to the social histories of the Caribbean and the African continent, as well as with issues such as slavery and politico-religious movements, for example, Rastafarianism⁷. This means that “blackness” remains an ethnic category and cannot be used for political purposes in a neutral capacity for all non-white groups, because it will not be of equal relevance (Macey 1995, Hall 2000). British Asians have been further alienated by a tendency for the term “black” to be used ambiguously within the same context, with reference to all non-white populations in one instance and then purely to African-Caribbeans in another. The effect of this is that non-white groups are homogenised, and their lives and identities are interpreted and represented in terms of the experiences of African-Caribbeans (Modood 1994). The work of Paul Gilroy (1987, 1993, 1995), for example, is symptomatic of this tendency. As Miles argues, Gilroy is guilty for having:

posited the existence of a “black” social movement involving people of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian origin...[he] ignore(s) the nature and content of cultural forms of South Asian origin. As a result, we are left with an analysis in which it appears that people of South Asian origin are granted a “walk-on” part in a cultural context shaped largely, if not exclusively, by young British people of Caribbean origin (cited in Modood 1994: 866).

Empirical evidence suggests that British Asians are decreasingly likely to use the term “black” in processes of self-identification and self-description. For example, Saeed et al (1999) point out that young British Asians are far more likely to identify themselves in terms of their religions, ethnicities or nations of ancestry than in relation to the category “black”. Similarly, in his ethnography of communities in Southall (west London), Baumann (1996) claims that most British Asians are unfamiliar with the use of “black” as a political colour. He argues that many feel alienated by the concept, whilst some actually perceive it to be rude⁸.

Pilkington (2003: 2) states that the most recent theoretical framework to have emerged is that of *racial disadvantage and ethnic diversity*. This framework appreciates the disadvantages faced by groups who, due to their skin colour, are seen to be racially different by the majority group, but it also recognises their diversity. Furthermore, it stresses that individuals' identities and socio-economic positions are not only structurally determined but are also, to some extent, the product of human agency. Hall (1996: 443) argues that a rejection of the essentialist "black" subject represents:

The recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category "black"; that is, the recognition that "black" is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects.

The deconstruction of the term "black" and a growing recognition of the different identities and experiences of minority ethnic groups are clearly welcome developments. However, some of the terms that have replaced "black" are also potentially problematic and have been widely contested. For instance, Kaur and Kalra (1996) point out that the term "Asian" has often been used inconsistently, both historically and globally, and criticism over its usage has focused on the manner in which it often homogenises the diverse groups that constitute it. Sharma (1996: 33) argues that:

The term "Asian" marked as an ethno-cultural category in both popular and academic discourses has so far been confined to the simplistic describing and subsuming of specific, national, ethnic and religious identities. Those accounts that have attempted to explore the category "Asian" in more political terms have only served to reassert an essentialist and culturalist understanding of Asian identity formation.

For example, Solomos and Back (1996) argue that in attempting to differentiate British Asians from other minority ethnic groups, Tariq Modood actually essentialises British Asian ethnicities and identities. They argue that different groups are subsumed within the category "Asian" and, in this respect, Modood is equally

guilty as those who propose a spurious “black” identity. The authors also challenge Modood’s assumption that the coupling of being of South Asian heritage and British – i.e. British Asian – makes “Asianness” the most important component of identity. This point represents a key source of contention within the contemporary politics of identity. It is of particular significance for this research, for it has been demonstrated that in the context of football, at least, many young, British Asian men actively *under-emphasise* their ethnicities and promote other aspects of their identities (see Chapter Five).

The policies and activities of the diverse agencies and institutions operating in the sphere of anti-racism in Britain have been influenced, to varying degrees, by the ideological shifts discussed above. In parallel to wider political trends, the early discourses and practices of the anti-racist football movement were characterised by *racial dualism* and racism was interpreted simply as a “black/white” issue. This was because the only minority ethnic group represented as professional footballers were African-Caribbeans. Furthermore, an emphasis on racism in *professional* football – still evident within the movement today – meant that no attention was given to the diverse ethnic groups participating in *amateur* football in Britain [see e.g. Highfield Rangers Oral History Group 1993]. In addition, in terms of match-going spectators, all minority ethnic groups were, and remain, under-represented in proportion to their numbers in the overall population (Malcolm et al 2000, Independent Football Commission 2004). It has been widely believed that their involvement as “live” spectators is inhibited by similar factors, i.e. racism within stadia and economic disadvantage. The “invisibility” of British Asians in the professional game meant that their specific interests and identities were not acknowledged, and the issue of racism was interpreted solely in relation to the experiences of African-Caribbeans. This homogenisation of minority ethnic groups can be detected in the approach originally utilised by Kick It Out who often made reference to working with “local black community groups” (e.g. Kick It Out 1998a).

In contrast, in recent years, increasing recognition has been given to the different forms of racism that exist in the game and anti-racist football organisations are now seeking to combat discrimination against a variety of minority ethnic groups, e.g. British Asians (Kick It Out 1998b, 2000a), Irish people (Kick It Out 2000b) and refugees/asylum seekers (Show Racism The Red Card 2002, Football Unites Racism Divides 2004). The anti-racist football movement has thus progressed from utilising a simplistic framework of ‘race’ and racism to a position in which its member organisations are seeking to work with every minority ethnic group that they can think of. However, whilst this is certainly a positive development, a number of inconsistencies and problems exist with the approaches that these organisations adopt. Although there is a growing acknowledgement of the diverse ethnic groups that participate in football, there appears to be less recognition of the social, economic, political and religious cleavages that exist both *between* and *within* them, and the specific problems they experience. As a consequence, interpretations of “Asianness”, in particular, remain inaccurate and unrepresentative. This issue is examined from a theoretical perspective in this chapter and in an empirical context in the succeeding one.

They think it’s all fatwah: Islamophobia in late twentieth/early twenty-first century Britain

The single most significant episode to challenge the hegemony of ‘political blackness’ in British anti-racist discourses was the Rushdie Affair of 1989 (see below). In an era in which the dominant emphasis within the ‘race’ relations industry was on the commonalities shared by non-white groups, this incident brought to public attention the different experiences and social positions of minority ethnic groups in Britain. In particular, it demonstrated the diversity in the manners in which they construct and interpret their identities and lifestyles, together with the different ways that they make sense of the prejudices that they encounter. Fundamentally, it showed that the existence of a pan-British Asian unity, let alone a pan-minority ethnic one, is indeed a fallacy. Dominant reactions to the Rushdie Affair also signified a growing tendency for prejudices against British Asians in general to be

replaced by specifically anti-Islamic discourses⁹. This increase in Islamophobia¹⁰ has significant implications for British Asian Muslim footballers – at professional and amateur levels – in terms of both their inclusion and the degree to which they choose to articulate/celebrate their “Muslimness” and/or “Asianness”. Parallel to wider social trends, it is also possible that British Asian players of other religious denominations will be affected. These issues are analysed below but, in order to contextualise them, it is first necessary to examine wider social manifestations of anti-Islamic sentiment.

In 1988, British-based Indian novelist Salman Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*. In the book, Rushdie made a number of references that were perceived by Muslims to be blasphemous against Islam and derogatory to their communities. The following year, the author was issued with a *fatwah* (death sentence) by the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini and he was consequently forced into hiding¹¹. Not all British Muslims supported the *fatwah*¹², but young, militant, Mirpuri (Pakistani) youths in Bradford, in particular, issued a demand that the decree be enforced in response to the humiliation that Rushdie had brought upon them¹³. Support for the *fatwah* amongst Bradford Muslims saw them sensationally attacked by both a Eurocentric British press and the main political parties (Appignanesi and Maitland 1989). For many people, this episode confirmed their perceptions that Islam was incompatible with, and a threat to, British society. To a modern, libertarian state such as Britain, which claimed to champion individuals’ rights to free speech, groups that called for someone to be killed because of what he had said or written were anathema¹⁴. Popular interpretations of nationhood and British citizenship were reconstructed along religio-cultural rather than colour-based lines: the crude “white/black” or “white/Asian” racial divisions and categorisations that had been commonly articulated in previous decades were rapidly replaced with “British/Muslim” (Asad 1990, Samad 1992, Asad 1993). Muslims were racialised as inferior and foreign but, importantly, also as dangerous – literally a “fifth column”¹⁵ – and therefore, situated outside the boundaries of the national collectivity. In many

respects, Muslims had become the ‘new social and cultural pariahs’ (Alexander 2000b: 13).

The Rushdie Affair demonstrated that the levels of inclusion achieved by different British Asian groups are by no means uniform. It highlighted that whilst many Hindus and Sikhs have achieved significant levels of integration within “mainstream” British society, the inclusion of British Muslims has generally been more problematic. Many of the key theological tenets of Hinduism and Sikhism are perceived by the white “mainstream” to be not too dissimilar or contradictory to Christianity and most differences are now believed to be reconcilable. Conversely, the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims – particularly with regard to the position of women – are still seen to impede their ability and desire to integrate into British society. Modood (1992b: 54) proposes that the differential inclusion of the various British Asian groups is a consequence of the fact that:

The more distance an individual or group is from the norm of white middle-upper class British Christian/agnostic, the greater the marginality and exclusion. The hostility of the majority is likely to be particularly forceful if the individual in question is a member of a community (and not just a free-floating or assimilated individual) which is sufficiently numerous to reproduce itself as a community and has a distinctive and coherent value system which can be perceived as an alternative and possible challenge to the norm.

As the latter part of this quotation highlights, perceptions of an antagonistic relationship between Islamic values and those of British society have been further substantiated by the fact that British Muslims have mobilised themselves socially, politically and religiously, in a manner unmatched by other British Asian communities (July 1988, Nielsen 1992).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Islamophobia in Britain is again clearly evident. This is a direct consequence of a number of incidents involving Muslims, on both a local and a global scale – urban unrest by British Muslims in Lancashire and Yorkshire during the summer of 2001, the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York City on September 11th 2001, and the subsequent global

“war against terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the immediate aftermath of “September 11th”, a number of mosques and Islamic cemeteries and schools were vandalised in Britain¹⁶ whilst, according to figures compiled by Islamic organisations, attacks on British Muslims increased to a rate thirteen times higher than that of a typical year (Herbert and Burrell 2002). Unlike Sikhs or Jews, for instance, Muslims are not automatically protected by law because they were not classified as a ‘race’ under the 1976 Race Relations Act. Consequently, as Massoud Shadjareh of the Islamic Human Rights Commission states:

We have got a situation [where] discrimination laws outlaw discrimination against the Jewish community and the Sikh community, but the same protection is not given to Muslims. That actually gives the message out to the racist thugs outside that they could attack Muslims and it is almost acceptable and legitimising those actions (cited in BBC TV 2001a).

In 2003, there were concerns that al-Qa’ida, the organisation believed to be responsible for the terrorist attacks in the USA on “September 11th” were actively recruiting within British mosques, whilst the discovery in London of quantities of ricin – a substance used in biological warfare – by the Metropolitan Police accentuated concerns that Britain would be the target of a terrorist attack¹⁷. Surveillance of, and legislation against, Muslims has subsequently increased as, in the eyes of many, the line between Islamic extremists involved in global terrorism and the Muslim communities of Britain has become increasingly blurred. The Home Secretary, David Blunkett, has declared that, from 2004, every migrant that is awarded British citizenship must undertake “citizenship tests”, which will include signing a Canadian-style oath of allegiance to Britain. Considerable restrictions have also been placed on Muslims wishing to visit relatives in Britain, through the refusal of visas¹⁸, whilst many students from Muslim countries wishing to study certain postgraduate disciplines in Britain – for example, biotechnology and nuclear physics – have had their applications referred to the non-conventional weapons section of the Foreign Office’s non-proliferation department.

Muslims represent the archetypal 'Other' in dominant contemporary socio-political discourses (Said 1997, Ali 2002). In the aftermath of the urban unrest in 2001, the British National Party (BNP) quickly targeted the towns and cities in which the violence had taken place – Bradford, Burnley, Leeds and Oldham – for electoral support. A central tenet of the BNP's campaign was their contention that it was Muslims, rather than British Asians *per se*, that represent a threat to the stability and cohesion of Britain. The BNP have labelled British Muslims "the enemy within"¹⁹ and hold them directly responsible for the social problems that exist between white and British Asian communities in many areas of northern Britain. The organisation have produced a leaflet stating that Islam 'creates ferocious hatred, spawning psychotic mass murderers abroad, and vicious rioters in our own towns' (cited in Vasagar 2001). BNP chairman Nick Griffin stresses unequivocally that people should:

Stop saying Asian. It is not a question of Asian versus white. This is a Muslim problem. There's Hindus in Oldham who have been burnt out of their houses and pushed out. There's West Indians who have been pushed out of their houses as well. This isn't an Asian problem. This is a Muslim problem (cited in BBC TV 2001a).

The BNP have been rightly condemned for inciting anti-Muslim hatred, yet they are by no means the only political party to contribute to the present climate of Islamophobia in Britain. Such is the pervasiveness of anti-Islamic discourses in twenty-first century Britain that even *left-wing* politicians are making statements that would have been inconceivable in previous decades. For example, politicians such as David Blunkett, Ann Cryer and Denis MacShane have all spoken of an inherent incompatibility between Islamic and British values²⁰.

One might conclude that Islamophobia is arguably the socially acceptable face of British racism. Said (1997: xii), for example, argues that:

Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians.

Similarly, Alibhai-Brown (2000: 193) argues that ‘high-minded thinkers and writers, who would not dream of denigrating blacks and Jews, regularly portray all Muslims as barbaric and ill-suited to fit into a secular modern nation’²¹. Furthermore, as was the case during the Rushdie Affair, the British media have been particularly prominent in promoting anti-Islamic discourses²². As Younge (2001) argues, in the aftermath of “September 11th”, ‘to be a Muslim is to be under suspicion, under threat and, given the huge increase in racial violence, under attack’.

***Let’s go fundamental!:* Islamophobia, British Asians and English football**

The rise of Islamophobia in British society is reflected in contemporary manifestations of football fandom. This has significant implications for British Asian Muslim players, but its effects may extend to British Asians of all denominations. In comparison to other forms of racial prejudice, Islamophobia in football is a relatively recent phenomenon. This is a result of two main factors. Firstly, the absence of British Asian and, until the late 1990s, imported African players in English professional football has meant that a Muslim ‘Other’ has not been present. Secondly, England never competes against South Asian countries and very rarely plays Middle Eastern nations. Until recently the only Islamic countries (or those with significant Muslim populations) that England has played have – with the exception of Saudi Arabia – been African nations, e.g. Cameroon, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and Tunisia. In such instances, there has been little public acknowledgement of players’ religious denominations. Instead, media discourses have tended to focus on crude *racial* stereotypes based on the notion of the overtly physical yet undisciplined African footballer. In contrast to cricket, in which Anglo-Pakistani relations have a long and acrimonious history²³ (Williams 2003), Islamophobic sentiments have traditionally failed to find an outlet within English football.

However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new source of antagonism has been added to the equation – the development of anti-Turkish sentiment in English football. This is the direct result of the murder of two Leeds

United supporters, Christopher Loftus and Kevin Speight, by a Turkish supporter, Ali Umit Demir, during street clashes in Istanbul before a UEFA Cup semi-final match against Galatasaray in April 2000²⁴. Anti-Turkish songs have become key numbers in the “repertoire” of some England supporters and many of these have begun to adopt an anti-Islamic, as opposed to simply an anti-Turkish, content. For example, chants at the European Championship qualifying match between England and Turkey in Sunderland²⁵ in April 2003 included “Die Muslim die” and “Kill all Muslims” (Bailey 2003, Kelso 2003). Coaches transporting Turkish supporters to the match were attacked by English hooligans. Supporters of English club and national sides have also frequently been involved in violence with Turkish migrants in cities in Belgium, Germany, Holland and Switzerland (see e.g. Nicholls 2002).

The reaction by the anti-racist football movement to the violence and racism at the England-Turkey match in April 2003 was somewhat contradictory. Whilst racism was evident amongst substantial sections of the England support, most of the serious violence was undertaken by specific groups and for a specific reason. One hundred-and-five arrests were made at the game. Half of those arrested were from Yorkshire, of which twenty-nine came from Leeds (Taylor and Kelso 2003a). This strongly suggests that much of the trouble was orchestrated and undertaken by Leeds United supporters seeking revenge for the deaths of their fellow supporters three years previously. On one hand, the anti-racist football movement acknowledged that relations with Turkey formed a specific antagonism for many England supporters. However, on the other, a variety of organisations publicly expressed considerable anxiety – later proved unfounded – that the scenes would be repeated at England’s next match against Serbia and Montenegro. The concerns appear particularly incongruous due to the fact that this was the first time the nations had met, the game was only a “friendly” and Muslims constitute a minority in Serbia and Montenegro.

So far anti-Islamic sentiments in football have been directed predominantly towards Turkish people rather than British Asians, but local repercussions of recent global events are difficult to measure or predict. In a striking example of the

‘glocalisation’ (Robertson 1995) of Islamophobia, one British Asian Muslim professional player recounted an exchange that he had with a teenage academy player in the aftermath of “September 11th”:

That thing that happened in America, and all that stuff going on about terrorists and stuff like that. One of the kids at [my club], he was late for football and I said, “What are you late for?”. And he went, “Shut up you terrorist!”. He called me a terrorist! And I just thought, like, you ignorant little kid. I was going to actually whack him. It was on a Saturday when a match was on but I just ignored him. I told my manager and that, and he got a bollocking. I just felt like hitting him. On the pitch sometimes, they say, “You Paki”, and this and that. It gets to me sometimes.

[Interview, 20th March 2002]

With *amateur* football, the majority of British Asian players in this research did not explicitly mention any incidents of Islamophobia in their careers. However, anti-Muslim sentiment evidently exists in a variety of other British sporting spheres (Nayak 1993, Searle 1993)²⁶. For example, in August 2003, British Muslims playing for St. Chad’s in the amateur Wetherby Cricket League (in Yorkshire) were racially abused and labelled ‘al-Qa’ida members’ by white opposition supporters (Wainwright 2003). As this thesis has highlighted, Muslim clubs are well represented within the sphere of British Asian amateur football, which would suggest that Islamophobia exists in football as well. The likelihood of this scenario is increased when one considers that a number of these clubs – such as London APSA and Sporting Bengal United – participate in predominantly “white” leagues, where the probability of players experiencing racial – and thus also Islamophobic – prejudice is far higher than in all-Asian leagues.

It is also apparent that *non-Muslim* British Asians have been implicated by an increase in Islamophobia. In the aftermath of both the Rushdie Affair and “September 11th”, a significant number of non-Muslim British Asians – particularly Sikhs²⁷ – were victims of verbal and physical racist attacks. In football, in the aftermath of the death of two Leeds United supporters in Istanbul in 2000 (outlined above), the (then) club chairman, Peter Ridsdale, claimed that reports of racism at their Elland Road stadium increased and that, in particular, a number of British

Asians were assaulted in the vicinity of the ground (Football Unites Racism Divides 2000). A widespread failure to distinguish between different British Asian groups means that current manifestations of Islamophobia in football could affect the inclusion/exclusion of *all* British Asians, not simply Muslims, at both amateur and professional levels.

Another, and related, implication of Islamophobia is that non-Muslim groups have endorsed dominant perceptions of the Muslim ‘Other’ and sought to construct divisions between themselves and Muslims. After the urban unrest in 2001, many British Asians sought to avoid being implicated in an anti-Muslim backlash. Some British Asian groups, e.g. the World Hindu Council (VHP), denounced the Muslims that were involved and sought to differentiate themselves from Muslims in general (Kundnani 2002a). Furthermore, in 2002, Sunrise Radio, Britain’s biggest commercial minority ethnic radio station proposed to stop using the word “Asian” after many Hindus and Sikhs complained that they were being too closely associated with Muslims. Incredibly, some Hindu and Sikh political movements have even developed allegiances with the BNP and jointly condemned the involvement of Muslims in urban unrest and global terrorism. For example, in 2002, the BNP collaborated with *Shere-e-Punjab* (Lions of Punjab) – a Khalistani separatist movement that calls for a separate Sikh homeland of Khalistan in the Punjab – in anti-Muslim propaganda²⁸.

It is clear that there is an absence of a pan-British Asian unity and a growing division between Muslim and non-Muslim British Asians. Stereotypes of the Muslim ‘Other’ are thus reproduced and condoned by Hindus and Sikhs as well as by the bulk of the rest of the predominantly white population. As a member of an independent anti-racist organisation stated:

I think it’s interesting what’s happening in Sikh and Hindu communities, in terms of how they see their own relationship to Muslim communities. It’s actually quite a fraught time for them because on the one hand – particularly Indian communities in Britain – obviously they’re concerned that some of the anti-Muslim stuff is going to affect them and so they’re having to decide, “Okay, are

we going to stand in solidarity with those people or are we going to ditch them?”. And a lot of people are saying, “No, we can now actually afford to ditch them because we can actually say to the white mainstream that we are different” and a lot of white people will sort of like say, “Okay, we accept that”.

[Interview, 4th December 2001]

This suggests that, in general, Hindus and Sikhs might be more able to gain acceptance within football than Muslims. By highlighting their difference from Muslims and aligning themselves with white players and supporters against the mutual Muslim ‘Other’, Hindus and Sikhs may be granted a degree of contingent inclusion in “mainstream” player and supporter subcultural collectivities. Whatever the specific, immediate repercussions of Islamophobia in football, anti-Muslim sentiment will have further, long-term consequences. It is likely to ensure that British Asian players – both Muslims and non-Muslims – seek to disguise those outward symbols that demarcate them as ‘Others’, thus accentuating a widespread tendency for them deprioritise their “Asianness”. Nevertheless, as the situation currently stands, the anti-racist football movement currently pays little direct attention to the issue. It is imperative that the movement establishes policy agendas that are relevant to the ways in which British Asian Muslim players experience specifically anti-Islamic prejudices in English football and the manner in which this influences their articulations of “Asianness”.

Just the ticket? Ethnicity, socio-economic disadvantage and the “underclass” thesis

This section seeks to further analyse the differences within the British Asian population and to highlight the contradictory responses made by the anti-racist football movement to these divisions. Differences in the identities and experiences of the various British Asian communities and their varying levels of inclusion into “mainstream” British society can be demonstrated by examining the levels of economic success achieved by these groups. Until recently, Britain’s minority ethnic groups were believed to possess a common low socio-economic status. Modood (1992b: 28), for example, argues that British ‘race’ relations thinking has

traditionally been characterised by *racial dualism* and has been over-influenced by the assumption that ‘until racial prejudice and discrimination in all its forms is eliminated, although some non-white individuals will be allowed to succeed, all non-white groups will share a below-average socio-economic profile: they will form a racial underclass’. The concept of the “underclass” was first developed in the United States during the 1960s (Myrdal 1963). It was first used in Britain during the 1970s, predominantly in the context of minority ethnic groups (e.g. Rex and Tomlinson 1979). In his analysis of the “underclass”, Chaney (1996: 97) states that:

The lack of relevant skills amongst such a group and their consequent long-term exclusion from the production process means that they are the first exclusively consumption class of post-industrial society. That is, what differentiates this group is both their dependence upon and marginalisation from the markets of advertising, fashions and other leisure industries. The underclass in this view lack the autonomy to sustain a way of life but are at the same time permanently excluded from recruitment to any lifestyle fractions.

The concept of the “underclass” continues to exist in contemporary ethnic and racial studies. However, it is now generally recognised that whilst certain minority ethnic groups face more disadvantage than most white Britons, the contention that minority ethnic groups *en bloc* constitute a racialised “underclass” is incorrect (Pilkington 2003).

Instead, it has become increasingly apparent that levels of socio-economic disadvantage vary considerably amongst Britain’s minority ethnic groups. There is, therefore, a need to modify the link between socio-economic disadvantage and racial discrimination. Until relatively recently, British Asians were perceived to constitute a “model minority”. They were regarded as being passive, hard-working, educationally-minded and possessing good business acumen. In this respect, it was widely believed that they would experience a “Jewish future”, i.e. one of economic success and cultural conservatism (Kundnani 2002c). However, whilst this has happened to some British Asian groups, others have continued to suffer socio-economic disadvantage. Indians and East African Asians, for example, have attained considerable economic success, to the extent that they have been labelled ‘white in

achievement and black in discrimination' (Modood 1992b: 41). Conversely, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have tended to be far more limited in terms of their socio-economic achievement (Berthoud 1997). According to Pilkington (2003: 68), whilst 6% of whites and 8% of Indians are unemployed, the figure is 16% for Pakistanis and 24% for Bangladeshis. Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are also likely to be unemployed for considerably longer periods of time than other groups. The white, Indian and East African Asian workforces are divided fairly evenly into manual and non-manual categories yet two-thirds of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have manual jobs. The former groups are also far more likely to reach the higher positions within their respective occupations (Modood 1997c, Mason 2003b). Furthermore, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are more likely to experience deprivation in housing (M. Harrison 2003) and, according to Home Office figures, more than half of each of these groups live in the most deprived 10% of Britain's electoral wards (Wintour 2001b).

Within the anti-racist football movement, the divergent socio-economic statuses of Indians and East African Asians on the one hand, and Bangladeshis and Pakistanis on the other, are not always acknowledged. An over-emphasis on the link between racial discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage – and thus an inaccurate interpretation of “Asianness” – is still clearly evident in the work of some organisations and initiatives. British Asians – indeed, to some extent, all minority ethnic groups – are seen *en bloc* to represent a racialised “underclass” that lacks the necessary economic status to participate in various football-related activities. In particular, this common-sense ideology applies to the under-representation of minority ethnic groups as “live” supporters. For example, John Williams, author of the annual FA Premier League Fans' Survey, states that ‘many ethnic minority fans are not being recruited into the game because of the cost’ (cited in Chaudhary 2002b). This assumption was one of the key points raised by the government's Football Task Force and, as a result of their recommendation, tickets are given away by a number of clubs to minority ethnic community groups for free, or at vastly reduced prices, e.g. Charlton Athletic, Sheffield United and Northampton Town

(Charlton Athletic Race Equality 2000, Football Unites Racism Divides 2001, Frampton *et al* 2001; see also Independent Football Commission 2004: 33)²⁹. This represents an interesting paradox, for the belief that low economic status prevents minority ethnic fans attending football matches appears to contradict the claims made by the anti-racist football movement that racism is the main problem. Whilst the provision of free tickets has enabled some minority ethnic people to make their first visits to their local stadiums, these schemes have also caused a number of problems. Sheffield United, for example, had to reduce their allocation after some local Somali youths were found to be selling their tickets on the “black market” (Bradbury 2001a). Attempts to increase the representation of minority ethnic groups as “live” supporters have also operated at international level. Chapter Six highlights how the Football Association (FA) has tried to make watching England a more multicultural experience by attracting more British Asian and African-Caribbean supporters. For the FA, profit remains the most important consideration though and tickets are very rarely given away. Whilst there is a proportion of British Asians who cannot afford to watch live professional football, many *can* afford to attend. There are also huge numbers of white people who do not have sufficient finances to watch live football yet, although minority ethnic groups are not the only benefactors of free tickets, white people appear less likely to receive them. White communities are not associated with poverty in the way that non-white groups are and various footballing agencies are also seeking to marginalise “traditional” white, working-class supporters in order to attract minority ethnic groups to the game (see Chapter Six).

In many popular and academic analyses of the lifestyles and leisure activities of British Asians, their roles as determining agents is overlooked. Unsurprisingly, the fact that they are believed to need the charity of free tickets is quite offensive to many British Asians, as these statements testify:

It's slightly insulting if I might say so. We get offended and rather pissed off by people offering us free tickets because our view is, you know, we're quite able to afford our tickets just like anybody else. If there's one thing that clubs like us don't like, it's tokenism. And so handing out freebies or saying that actually

somehow you're deprived, you're disadvantaged and you need to be helped is actually something that is quite offensive, I think, to the modern Asian.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 23rd April 2002]

It is patronising. I think there are various reasons why people don't go to see matches...Going to a ground to watch a live match, I think, is like a tradition. I mean, a lot of white kids, the first experience they have is going with their father or, you know, someone from their family and that continues. Those people are not any richer than an average Asian here but it's the tradition that's there, you know. You go to see a football match, you support a team involved, but this tradition is not there in the Asian communities. There are other traditions that are more important or people see as more important. So that's one of the key reasons rather than money because if kids can spend ten grand on a car, they can spend fifteen pounds, twenty pounds a week on watching a game.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 25th April 2002]

As these quotations demonstrate, many British Asians can afford to attend football matches but choose not to for other reasons. Some are deterred by the possibility of racism whilst a huge proportion of young British Asian men who are interested in football are actually *playing* the game or working at weekends. Fundamentally, the cost of watching football cannot account for the under-representation of British Asian supporters. This can be further demonstrated by the increasing consumption of luxury goods by young British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, even those in lower economic brackets. A cursory glance at the young British Asians involved in the urban unrest of 2001 highlighted a penchant for Lacoste, Rockport and Burberry sweaters, Giorgio Armani or Moschino jeans and expensive training shoes. During the fieldwork for this thesis – attending football matches, training sessions and socialising with British Asian players – many players were observed sporting expensive designer clothing or sportswear and driving high-powered cars. Many young British Asian men are adopting similar consumer choices and patterns as numerous young white and black youths. The type of clothes that are being worn and the cost of designer labels are significant aspects in the identity construction of second and third generation urban British Asian men, as well as those of other

ethnicities. Contemporary, westernised lifestyles and clothing clearly symbolise a shift away from traditional images of “Asianness” in Britain.

Mosques, militants and massacres: communal tensions in the subcontinent and its diaspora

The mythical notion of a single, unified British Asian community and a pan-British Asian consciousness is increasingly clear, but it is also the case that British Asian communities are often characterised by intra-group antagonisms and tensions. For a long time there was a reluctance to discuss issues of communalism or ethnic conflict within, or between, British Asian communities (Kundnani 2002a). This is still evident, to some extent, today. In Britain generally, there has been an over-emphasis on *inter-* rather than *intra-* racial differences, both within the ‘race’ relations industry and in academe (Mac an Ghail 1999). This is partly due to the fact that British Asians have traditionally been perceived as a singular, homogenous community and thus the existence of ethnic, religious and caste conflicts have tended to go unrecognised or have been ignored. It is also the case that the ‘race’ equality professionals who have promulgated the idea of ‘political blackness’ and an essentialist anti-racism that revolves around the solidarity of all non-white groups have been reluctant to acknowledge such antagonisms, for fear that doing so will undermine their work. This has prevented a recognition of the nuanced and multifarious ways that notions of “Asianness” are articulated and contested.

Nevertheless, the political and religious traditions and rituals of the Indian subcontinent continue to play a significant part in the lives of some British Asians. For example, an increase in “honour killings” has been detected in recent years (Shaw 2000, Channel Four TV 2003a). Similarly, the communal tensions of the subcontinent tend to be played out in microcosm in Britain. Communal tensions in India – primarily between Hindus and Muslims but also between other ethnic and religious groups (Kinnvall 2002) – existed long before the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 but increased considerably in the post-Independence epoch. Three major issues have contributed to, and been influenced by, these tensions. Firstly, the

disputes and armed conflicts between India and Pakistan over their shared border (the Line of Control) in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (see Ganguly 2001). The second major source of contention revolves around the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, northern India by Hindus – who claim that the site is the birthplace of the god Lord Ram – in 1992. In the succeeding decade, disputes between Hindus and Muslims over the original religious designation of the site have resulted in widespread riots and massacres³⁰. The third issue is the resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing nationalist organisation that espouses pro-Hindu and anti-Islamic sentiments. BJP-led governments have imposed pro-Hindu values by renaming Muslim provincial cities, refusing to recognise Urdu as a language and introducing state education systems that, in certain cases, employ curricula and educational publications that promote anti-Muslim propaganda³¹. Significant tensions also exist between particular Hindu and Sikh groups³².

Lewis (1997: 126) argues that ‘Britain is not immune to the impact of inter-religious tensions in South Asia or the Middle East, and this renders any homogenising discourse about black and Asian identity increasingly problematic’. He adds that ‘[British Asians] see each other in some British contexts as rivals, rehearsing ancient antagonisms, fuelled by the recrudescence of what has been called “religious fundamentalism”’ (ibid.). Communal tensions in the subcontinent have been replicated in Britain ever since the first stages of mass South Asian migration³³. For example, the repercussions of the India-Pakistan wars of the late 1960s and early 1970s extended from the subcontinent to the diaspora. Whilst these conflicts accentuated social divisions between different British Asian communities, they did not result in violence to any significant degree (Kundu 1994). However, the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in 1992 had a major effect on Hindu-Muslim relations in Britain and led to a previously unprecedented level of violence between the two groups (ibid., Burlet & Reid 1995). Similar consequences from September 11th 2001 were also apparent. A poll carried out shortly after the disaster revealed that 44% of British Asians believed that the incident had accentuated divisions between the various British Asian communities (Neiyyar 2001). Violent incidents

have taken place in Britain between Muslims and Hindus, e.g. in Bradford (see Macey 2002) and Derby, and between Muslims and Sikhs, e.g. in Derby and Slough. In Derby, a Hindu schoolgirl suffered a fractured skull after being hit on the head with a hammer during an attack on her school by a mob of Muslim youths (Britten 2001). Tensions had been developing in the town as a result of the distribution of a fictitious letter, claiming to be from a Muslim group called *Real Khalifa* (actually non-existent), which encouraged Muslims to take Sikh girls out on dates, get them drunk and convert them to Islam.

Waiter, waiter, what's the score?: sport and intra-British Asian conflict

As long as sport operates as a microcosm of the wider society, it will exist as an arena for the celebration and contestation of identity for a variety of social, ethnic and religious groups (cf. Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001). It is unsurprising, therefore, that communal tensions in the Indian subcontinent have often spilled over into sport. Cricket, in particular, has traditionally been a site for Hindu-Muslim tensions (McDonald 1999). For example, parallel to the comments made by Conservative MP Norman Tebbit with regard to the sporting affiliations of Britain's minority ethnic groups (see Chapter Five), Bal Thackeray, leader of the militant Hindu nationalist party, Shiv Sena, once infamously claimed that he wanted Indian Muslims to prove their loyalty to the nation with 'tears in their eyes' whenever India lost to Pakistan at cricket. On the eve of a tour in 1990, his party announced that the presence of the Pakistan team in India was an 'insult to the nation's integrity' and represented a security threat (Talbot 2000: 193). In February 2004, the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, announced that, despite fears over the security of the players, the Indian team would tour Pakistan for the first time since 1989. With regard to football, Dimeo (2001c, 2003) has highlighted the communal tensions that exist in the game in India, particularly with regard to the Mohammedan Sporting (Muslim) and East Bengal and Mohun Bagan (both Hindu) clubs in Calcutta. Similarly, Edensor and Augustin (2001) and Edensor and Koodoruth (2004) describe how football acts as an arena for the articulation of Hindu-Muslim antagonisms in Mauritius. Corresponding to the influence of communal tensions in Britain, sporting

antagonisms have also been replicated in British sport. For example, in 1992, a cricket match between an Indian XI and a Pakistan XI at Crystal Palace, to raise funds for former Pakistani international Imran Khan's cancer hospital, was abandoned after fighting broke out between rival supporters. In 1996, Indian and Pakistani supporters fought on the pitch at Lord's after India won a match between the two nations in the Lombard World Challenge Under-15 Cricket World Cup. In 1999, police were called to a cricket match in Leicester between Hindu and Muslim sides after a player assaulted an opponent with a cricket bat (Williams 2001: 177).

This research did not uncover any specific evidence of similar occurrences in English amateur football. In fact, a number of participants were keen to play down the likelihood of such incidents. For example, one 'Indian' amateur player stated that:

Certain clubs don't like certain other teams. Like within these [British Asian football] tournaments you will find there are always individuals who, you know, don't like one team or another team, or don't like individuals. But it's not racial, if you see what I'm saying. Whereas in society there are racial issues within Asian communities, you know, like Pakistanis and Sikhs, and they do have problems like that...But I don't think there's racial tension in sport in Asian games, there can only be tension between individuals.

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

[Intra-Asian tension] certainly is evident at the moment. I must be frank, purely on the basis of the Muslim activity both following September 11th and very recently the Hindu and Muslim [conflict] in terms of the temple and the mosque issue [in Ayodhya] in India. But beyond that, within our organisation, in terms of [our] Football Federation, it's been predominantly footballing banter – if I may call it that – where, you know, one would swear at somebody and you'd possibly use a particular phrase which, if you were standing in the pub, or whatever, you wouldn't necessarily use but that's just at the heat of the moment. But beyond that there certainly isn't anything evident.

[Interview with member of a British Asian football federation, 19th March 2002]

One (Muslim) 'Asian' amateur player spoke of his involvement in tournaments run by the Khalsa Football Federation (KFF), a Sikh-based organisation:

The Khalsa Federation is based [on] a religious background. The Khalsa Federation is a Sikh organisation, so they are Sikhs and those tournaments that do happen are, I guess, primarily meant to be for Sikhs. But there is such a good mix of Asians it's not necessarily just for the Sikhs. Although there are supposed to be huge sort of, like, conflicts between the Sikhs and the Muslims – religiously, you know, in Sikhism, Muslims seem to be the enemies really, just like the Muslims and the Jews see each other as enemies – in the events that the Khalsa Federation have organised – I've played in some of the tournaments – I've not seen any tensions whatsoever. Actually they organise it really well, I must say, and they treat you like you're one of their own really.

[Interview, 16th March 2002]

Although the participants in this research did not provide evidence of intra-Asian tensions in football, it is highly likely that they exist in the amateur game, especially since they are present in other social and sport/leisure spheres where young, male British Asians are seeking to express their identities and masculinities, such as bhangra-beat concerts (Bennett 2000). Violence is not the only outcome of such tensions though – evidence suggests that differences between British Asians have been articulated through the vernacular of “terrace banter” in football. For example, during the match between Bangladesh and India, at Leicester City's Filbert Street stadium in July 2000, Indian supporters openly celebrated not only the ethnic differences, but also the increasing socio-economic divide between the two populations in Britain. Referring to the large number of Bangladeshi men that work in the restaurant trade – one third of all British Bangladeshi men work as cooks or waiters (Walker 2002) – some Indian supporters were chanting, “Waiter, waiter, what's the score?” and “Curry and chips”³⁴. However, tensions do not simply exist between British Asians. In London, for example, violence between gangs of Bengalis and Somalis has frequently occurred (Taylor 2001, Nettleton & Davenport 2002), whilst antagonisms between British Asians and asylum seekers have been noted in Derby (*Eastern Eye* 2003a). Tensions also exist between Jamaicans, Nigerians and Somalis under the guise of what is popularly (yet simplistically) known as “black on black” violence (Channel Four TV 2001, 2003b). In such instances, any notions of a pan-non-white consciousness are superseded, not only by ethnic identifications but also the equally important issues of territory, machismo, upholding “street” reputations and the control of drug markets.

Conflicts between different minority ethnic groups do not correlate with dominant perspectives of anti-racism in English football. Football is still believed to be a unifying force between various ethnic groups and to acknowledge the possibility of problems between these groups would undermine this standpoint. As a result, antagonisms between different British Asian groups tend to remain unrecognised or ignored by the anti-racist football movement and, at the current time, there are no guidelines or policy agendas that might lead to a change of perspective. This failure to realise the realities of British Asian lives, identities and conflicts further contributes to the inaccuracy that characterises interpretations and portrayals of “Asianness” in the anti-racist football movement. Given the increase in football competitions involving different minority ethnic populations – including refugees/asylum seekers, for example, the national Unity Cup, held in Manchester in August 2003³⁵ – divergences between these groups need to be acknowledged. According to Kick It Out co-ordinator, Piara Powar, the aim of the Unity Cup is ‘to bring together footballers in an act of solidarity through sport for what has rapidly become the most ostracised section of the population in Britain’ (cited in FARE e-mail bulletin, 23rd June 2003). Whilst the objective is admirable, the potential that football has as an outlet for ethnic tensions and, in particular, contrasting and competing manifestations of “Asianness” should not be ignored³⁶. The issues raised in this chapter are further analysed in the final chapter through an in-depth critique of the specific policies and activities undertaken by anti-racist football organisations with regard to increasing the participation of British Asians in professional football.

Notes

- ¹ The term “Islamophobia” was first employed within the realms of academe and social policy in the mid-1990s. By the beginning of the twenty-first century it had developed a more common usage. According to Conway (1997: 10), Islamophobia ‘refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslims and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs’. Before this period, the suffix “phobia” was predominantly used in the context of psychological fears, e.g. of being in confined spaces (claustrophobia) or of water (aquaphobia). “Phobia” is now, somewhat incorrectly, also used to describe a *dislike* – rather than an actual fear – of a variety of social groups.
- ² The number of migrants entering Britain from the Caribbean rose from 15,000 in 1951 to 238,000 in 1962. The number from India increased from 5,800 in 1955 to 19,050 in 1962, whilst the number of Pakistani settlers increased from under 2,000 to over 25,000 during this period (Bloom 2003: 377-78). The bulk of migration from India and Pakistan was to take place in the late 1960s/early 1970s, with most Bangladeshi migrants coming to Britain in the early 1980s. Before 1962 – when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was introduced – most of the migrants were “new” migrants. After this year, the majority were the families of these settlers, although others gained entry as a result of their professional qualifications. For comprehensive accounts of the migration to, and settlement of, South Asians in Britain see Ballard (1994a), Ramdin (1999), Shaw (2000), Visram (2002) and Shukla (2003).
- ³ Violence against African-Caribbean migrants in this part of London culminated in the murder of Kelso Cochrane, an Antiguan, the following year.
- ⁴ Enoch Powell was Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West in the 1960s. In 1968, he made a (now infamous) speech regarding the problems that he believed would emanate from the presence of non-white migrant groups in Britain (see Chapter Four).
- ⁵ According to Bloom (2003), the term “Paki-bashing” originated in the media in April 1970, after a group of British Asian workers were attacked at the London Chest Hospital in Bethnal Green.
- ⁶ Strategies to promote multiculturalism – particular those within the education system – attempted to celebrate the ethnic diversity of Britain’s minority groups. Focusing on the clothing, music and cuisines of minority ethnic groups was perceived to be an appropriate method for familiarising the white “mainstream” with their identities and lifestyles. The notion of multiculturalism was

criticised by the political New Right who argued that the concept encouraged minority ethnic groups to retain the cultural elements of their mother countries rather than those of Britain, and to eschew assimilation with the majority population. The main argument from the radical Left against multiculturalism was that it ignored the power of racism.

⁷ Rastafarianism is a religion that was formed in Jamaica and is based around the belief that Ras Tafari Makonnen (1892-1975) – former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie – is God. For analyses of Rastafarians in Britain see Hebdige (1974), Miles (1978) and Cashmore (1979).

⁸ In Punjabi, for example, the equivalent of “black” is *kala*. In India, it is perceived that darker skin tones are synonymous with lower caste backgrounds and to be labelled *kala* is offensive to many people. In a similar manner, for many British Asians, being referred to as “black” also causes offence.

⁹ Whilst contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia in Britain can be directly attributed to a range of recent social episodes involving Muslims, it should be acknowledged that Islam has been situated as the antithesis to western religions, “civilisation” and modernity since the Middle Ages (Said 1985). Kabbani (cited in Miles 1989: 19) argues that ‘Islam was seen as the negation of Christianity; Muhammad as an imposter, an evil sensualist, an Antichrist in alliance with the Devil. The Islamic world was seen as Anti-Europe, and was held in suspicion as such’. There is, however, evidence that contradicts beliefs regarding a uniform, historically-grounded, anti-Islamic sentiment in British society. For example, Dalrymple (2002) argues that during the colonial period, many British men not only adopted Indian lifestyles but also converted to Islam. Similarly, the fondness that Queen Victoria had for her Muslim servant Abdul Karim is widely acknowledged (BBC TV 2003f).

¹⁰ Halliday (1999) argues that contemporary prejudice is not against Islam as a faith *per se*, but is directed against Muslims themselves, particularly those who are migrants. He argues that a more accurate term is thus “anti-Muslimism”, rather than Islamophobia. Nevertheless, the term Islamophobia is used more frequently in popular and media discourses and, for purposes of consistency, it is used in this thesis.

¹¹ After the *fatwah* had been declared, Rushdie converted to Islam. This meant that attempts on his life would be less likely, as the Koran forbids Muslims to kill other members of their faith. The *fatwah* was officially renounced in 1998, yet Iran’s hard-line Revolutionary Guards renewed the death sentence in 2003.

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- ¹² Pilkington (2003) points out that most British Muslims belong to the Barelvi and Deobandi sects, which do not support the Shi'ite fundamentalism of Ayatollah Khomeini. Whilst the majority were offended by the book and supported calls for its withdrawal, many opposed the *fatwah* (Shaw 2000). For example, Samad (1992) highlights the relative inactivity of the large Bangladeshi Muslim community in east London in protests against the book.
- ¹³ Copies of the book were first burnt in public demonstrations in Bolton, yet such acts only received significant media coverage in Bradford. It is not coincidental that Bradford formed the nucleus of Muslim opposition to Rushdie in Britain. The behaviour of Bradford Muslims needs to be located within the context of the city's recent political history. Bradford's (predominantly Mirpuri) Pakistani population had first mobilised itself in a political sense in 1981, as a result of the arrests of the "Bradford Twelve", a group of young British Pakistani men who were charged with possession of petrol bombs. The group claimed that they were simply planning to defend themselves against a threatened attack by racists. Furthermore, between 1982 and 1984, Ray Honeyford, a Bradford headmaster and New Right ideologue, wrote a number of articles in the *Salisbury Review* that made negative references to British Asians, particularly Pakistanis. Honeyford was perceived by Bradford's Mirpuri population to have insulted Islam, Pakistan and their community. The support that Honeyford received from many white people in Bradford, as well as the Conservative Party, added to the feelings of isolation and alienation amongst Bradford Pakistanis. Their reaction to the Rushdie Affair can only be interpreted within the context of these previous events.
- ¹⁴ North London's middle-class *literati*, for example, who have traditionally advocated freedom of speech and the defence of any minority cause, petitioned against the *fatwah*.
- ¹⁵ The Fifth Column were originally a group of Falangist sympathisers in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. Today the term "fifth column" is used to refer to any group of subversive infiltrators or an enemy within a collectivity.
- ¹⁶ Attacks on mosques were reported in locations including Balham, Belfast, Bolton, Bromley-by-Bow, Edinburgh Exeter, Glasgow, Limehouse, Manchester, Oldham, South Shields and Southend, and on Islamic schools in Derby, Kingston-upon-Thames and London.
- ¹⁷ Of the twenty-one global organisations proscribed by the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2001) – a defensive measure against existing political terror groups but also against the growth of so-called Muslim fundamentalist organisations – fourteen were Islamic. The full list of organisations is: al-Qa'ida, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al-Gama'at al-Islamiya, Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Salafist

Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), Babbar Khalsa, International Sikh Youth Federation, Harakat Mujahideen, Jaish e Mohammed, Lashkar e Tayyaba, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Hezbollah External Security Organisation, Hamas – Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ – Shaqaqi), Abu Nidal Organisation, Islamic Army of Aden, Mujaheddin e Khalq (MKO), Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Revolutionary People’s Liberation Army – Front (DHKP-C), Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA), 17 November Revolutionary Organisation.

- ¹⁸ Analysis of figures from British embassies and high commissions by Citizens’ Advice – the charity and national body for the bureau – has found that visa refusals are highest in relation to applicants from countries with large Muslim populations. In the latter half of 2002, applications to visit relatives in Britain from these individuals were twice as likely to be refused than they were in the first part of the year. Rates of refusal increased from 38% to 60% in Dhaka, from 16% to 34% in Mumbai and from 29% to 59% in New Delhi (Prasad 2003).
- ¹⁹ The phrase “the enemy within” has often been used by various individuals and agencies to refer to a group or organisation that is seen to threaten the stability of the nation or the hegemony of particular institutions. For example, in 1984, the term was used by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in reference to the National Union of Miners (NUM), who were organising widespread strike action at the time. In the 1990s, the term was used by the National Football Intelligence Unit (NFIU) with regard to football hooligans.
- ²⁰ For example, the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and Labour MP Ann Cryer have cited problems that they perceive to be associated with the entrenched “Islamic ghetto culture” of British Muslims. Blunkett suggested that only by speaking English, as well as other languages, in their home environments could Muslims overcome the ‘schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships’ (cited in Pallister 2002). Cryer, MP for Keighley in West Yorkshire, argued that Muslim migrants who cannot speak English should be refused entry to England because they are ‘importing poverty’ (cited in Dodd 2001). In response to Ann Cryer’s comments, Shahid Malik – a member of the executive committees for both the Labour party and the Commission for Racial Equality – claimed that she was ‘doing the BNP’s work for them’ (cited in Institute of Race Relations 2001: 53). Similarly, in October 2003, Bill Morris, leader of the Trade and General Workers’ Union (TGWU), argued that, through their treatment of asylum seekers, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and David Blunkett were leaving “footprints” for the BNP to follow (Clement 2003). In November 2003, Europe minister Denis MacShane was forced to withdraw a speech in which he proposed to challenge British Muslims to choose between the “British way” or the “way of terrorists” (Hall and Taylor 2003).

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- ²¹ For example, author Martin Amis has argued that ‘the key to radical Islam is that it is quivering with male insecurity’ (cited in Malvern 2002a); novelist Sir Vidia Naipaul has compared Islam with colonialism (cited in Malvern 2002b); French philosopher Michel Houellebecq was taken to court in 2002 by the Paris Mosque after stating that ‘Islam is the most stupid religion in the world’ and describing the Koran as ‘appalling’ (cited in *ibid.*); and the Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between People started legal proceedings against an Italian author to prevent the distribution of Oriana Fallaci’s *La Rabbia e L’Orgoglio* which states that Muslims ‘breed like rats, and...piss in baptismal fonts’ (cited in *ibid.*).
- ²² For example, in 2001, Carol Sarler, columnist for the politically right-of-centre *Express* newspaper, labelled the Koran ‘a bloodthirsty little book’ (Sarler 2001). In May 2002, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia blamed the British media for promoting negative stereotypes of Muslims. The implications of this are potentially dangerous when one considers that, according to a poll undertaken by YouGov for the Islamic Society of Great Britain in 2002, two-thirds of people in Britain take their information about Islam from the media (Dodd 2002).
- ²³ Relations between England and Pakistan reached their nadir during the late 1980s/early 1990s with the re-emergence of English accusations of cheating by Pakistani players and umpires. In particular, full-scale scandals developed over allegations of “ball tampering” – altering the condition of a cricket ball in an illegal manner, such as adding sweat, grease or dirt to influence the movement of a delivery – by Pakistan bowlers and the on-pitch confrontation between England captain Mike Gatting and Pakistani umpire, Shakoor Rana, during a match in Faisalabad in 1987. Rana allegedly accused Gatting of cheating, whilst Gatting labelled Rana a “shit awful umpire” (cited in Williams 2001: 138). The following day’s play was suspended as Rana refused to take the field until Gatting apologised to him, which he did in a letter written on a piece of scrap paper.
- ²⁴ In 2002, Ali Umit Demir was jailed for fifteen years for the murder of Christopher Loftus and Kevin Speight. However, in June 2003, an appeals court quashed the verdict after questions arose concerning the prosecution’s evidence. A retrial has been ordered. In January 2004, in an inquest into the deaths of Loftus and Speight, West Yorkshire coroner David Hinchliff recorded a verdict of unlawful killing.
- ²⁵ It is interesting to note that racially-motivated attacks in Sunderland increased by 25% between 2002 and 2003 (Tyne and Wear Ant-Fascist Association 2003). In the 2003 local council elections, the BNP fielded candidates in all of the twenty-five seats in the town.

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- ²⁶ Searle (1993) proposes a correlation between the continual racist and Islamophobic discourses of the British tabloid press during the Test series against Pakistan in the summer of 1992 and the murder of three British Asian men – Ruhallah Aramesh in Thornton Heath, Ashiq Hussain in Birmingham and Rohit Duggal in Greenwich – in racist attacks within the space of six weeks.
- ²⁷ The man believed to be responsible for orchestrating the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001, Osama bin Laden, wore a form of turban. A failure to distinguish between different South Asian groups by many people – both in Britain and the USA – meant that turban-wearing Sikhs were believed to be associated with bin Laden. On 13th September alone, there were sixteen reported incidents of British Sikhs being racially abused for this reason (Shah and Das Gupta 2001). In the aftermath of “September 11th”, the British media published a story stating that, during his period of residence in London in the 1980s, Osama bin Laden used to go to Highbury to watch Arsenal play. In an archetypal manifestation of the bizarre and irreverent nature of terrace banter and football chants (cf. Bulmer and Merrills 1992, Armstrong and Young 2000), bin Laden was eulogised in a chant by Arsenal supporters. Sung to the tune of *Volare* – originally an Italian Eurovision Song Contest entry but popularised in the 1950s by the American crooner Dean Martin – the lyrics to the song are “Osama, whoa/Osama, whoa/He’s in the Taliban/He is an Arsenal fan”.
- ²⁸ Two members of *Shere-e-Punjab*, Rajinder Singh and Ammo Singh, collaborated with the BNP on a CD called *Islam – A Threat To Us All*. Rajinder Singh also appeared in the BNP magazine *Identity*, congratulating the party for taking a stand against ‘Afghans and Bangladeshis clutching their copies of the Koran, fighting desperately to enter a totally unfamiliar country, settle down, produce children, establish mosques and Al-Qaeda cells and then begin all over with Holy Jihad in a few years’ time’ (cited in Kundnani 2002a: 73).
- ²⁹ This policy is also used in other leisure spheres. For example, the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, initiated a scheme that aimed to boost the number of minority ethnic people going to the theatre. Under the scheme, such individuals were able to buy tickets for West End shows for as little as five pounds.
- ³⁰ The Babri Masjid mosque – which dated back over five hundred years – was constructed on a site that many Hindus believe to be the birthplace of the god Lord Ram. On the 6th December 1992 it was attacked by tens of thousands of Hindu *Kar Sevaks* (holy workers) and the mosque was razed. In the subsequent riots, three thousand people – predominantly Muslims – were killed. In February 2002, fifty-nine Hindu activists died after the train bringing them home from a visit to Ayodhya was deliberately set alight by a group of Muslims. Over one thousand Muslims died in

the resulting riots and anti-Muslim pogroms, mainly in Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat. On 25th August 2003, the Archaeological Society of India supported claims that the Ayodhya site originally housed a Hindu temple. Later that day, fifty-two people were killed and over 150 were injured in bomb blasts in central Mumbai. As was the case with the bombs that killed 260 people in Mumbai in 1993, these attacks were believed to be carried out by Islamic extremists.

³¹ For example, the ninth grade history textbook in the state of Gujarat labelled Muslims, Christians and Parsis ‘foreigners’, whilst an examination question for schoolchildren in Uttar Pradesh asked, ‘If it takes four *sevaks* [Hindu religious workers] to demolish one mosque, how many does it take to demolish twenty?’. In February 2000, a teacher was attacked by right-wing Hindus of the Sangh Parivar (linked to the BJP) over a question he posed in a test regarding morals and India-Pakistan relations. The teacher had constructed a positive image of a Pakistani soldier and, as a punishment, he had his face painted black by the mob (Kumar 2002).

³² Hindu-Sikh tensions reached their nadir in 1984. Under *Operation Bluestar*, the Indian Army attempted to end the occupation of the Golden Temple at Amritsar by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his Sikh extremists. A huge number of Sikhs were massacred as the army stormed the temple, destroying the Akal Takhat (the throne of the Immortal God) – the most sacred section of the temple – and the library containing hand-written Sikh scriptures in the process. Four months later the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards and in the resulting communal violence, thousands of Sikhs were murdered by Hindu mobs.

³³ Divisions within the British Asian population are not simply based around issues of religion. For example, speaking to a youth worker in north London, it has become apparent that antagonisms exist between British Bangladeshis who have migrated from the capital, Dhaka, and those from the rural areas of Sylhet.

³⁴ I am grateful to Steve Bradbury of Loughborough University for this information.

³⁵ The winners were Le Camer, a Newcastle-based team of Cameroonians.

³⁶ The situation in France, for example, with regard to the way that tensions between disparate ethnic groups are articulated in football should be noted. In April 1999, the amateur football league in the Saint-Denis district of Paris was suspended for three weeks because of violence involving both players and spectators. In accounting for this, Mignon (2000: 254) states that ‘the

reasons are well known: poverty, low expectations, *racism, and the rise of communitarianism among football teams organized around ethnic origins*' [emphasis added].

Chapter 8

Keeping the customers satisfied? A critique of British Asian football schemes

Introduction

This chapter offers an in-depth critique of some of the contemporary policies and activities implemented by anti-racist football organisations with regard to increasing the participation of British Asians in professional football. Throughout this research, a number of weaknesses in, or problems with, the anti-racist football movement – particularly to do with interpretations of “Asianness” – have become apparent and these are explored in detail in this chapter. Some of the issues discussed emanate from personal observations, but most of the following discussion results from the comments made by the players involved in the research. It should be noted that the topics covered are intended to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive, of the issues facing British Asian footballers and the problems that they perceive to exist within the anti-racist football movement. This chapter will examine the following areas: the manner in which anti-racist football organisations and club-based schemes attempt to engage in “community consultation”; the significance of ethnicity in coach-player relations; the implications of collaboration with the police in anti-racist projects; the use of matches between British clubs and teams from the Indian subcontinent as anti-racist initiatives; the position of professional footballers as social and moral role models, and the problems that develop when they are involved in racist incidents; and the effects of media publicity on young British Asian professional players. As the methodology underpinning this thesis revolves around the use of oral testimonies and providing a “voice” for British Asian footballers, the issues addressed represent those that *they* perceive to be the most significant. This chapter is empirically based, utilising the ethnography and other qualitative methodologies employed within the research.

Anti-racism clearly represents the dominant contemporary anti-discrimination discourse in English football. Any individual who is perceived to be less than one hundred per cent behind the anti-racist football movement is considered *persona non grata* by the middle-class, “New Labourites” who govern, market and, indeed, study/write about the professional game in this country. Challenging anti-racism is believed to contravene the consensus of values established by middle-class

supporters during the late-twentieth century and endorsed by the game's "moral guardians", i.e. the FA, the government, anti-racist football organisations and the media. The pervasive nature of anti-racist discourses in English football means that critics are subjected to questions regarding their integrity, their credentials as "true" fans and, to some extent, their moral calibre. A self-implemented taboo has consequently developed amongst middle-class liberals on questioning, or even analysing, the work of individuals and organisations working under the broad spectrum of "anti-racism". However, as Cohen (1992: 62-3) argues:

It is often said that one of the problems with antiracism is that it knows what it is against, but not what it is for. But do we really know enough about the whys and wherefores of racism? If not, then perhaps the models of racism which are implicitly present in anti-racist policies and practices may be inhibiting the development of more positive and effective strategies?

This chapter, and indeed this thesis as a whole, argues that in order to develop more positive and effective strategies with regard to increasing the participation of British Asians in professional football, it is necessary to overcome the taboo concerning critiques of the anti-racist football movement.

Talk of the town: community representation and club-community dialogues

One of the major criticisms of professional football clubs, in terms of their relationships with local British Asian communities, has been their failure to initiate thorough dialogue with them. The problematic nature of this relationship was reflected in the work of the pioneering anti-racist football schemes and organisations, which were dominated by well-meaning, yet generally ill-informed, white, middle-class activists. Subsequently, many of the problems that characterise the nexus between British Asians and professional football (see e.g. Pinto et al 1997) have been misunderstood or ignored, both by those in the game and the associated organisations and agencies that work in this area. The co-ordinating committees and steering groups in the anti-racist football movement are still dominated by white, middle-class men but there is an increasing involvement of minority ethnic people, albeit not so much at management or decision-making levels¹. Furthermore, the

majority of anti-racist football organisations now appreciate that projects aimed at increasing the representation of British Asians in professional football are unlikely to achieve credibility unless they involve consultation with the local British Asian communities that they are targeting. Whether this is based on a genuine desire to initiate collaboration or merely a public relations exercise to achieve funding or publicity is difficult to gauge, but it is apparent that British Asians are gradually being given a voice through which they can contribute to initiatives that aim to overcome their under-representation as professional footballers. The following two statements are fairly representative of the type of collaboration that anti-racist football organisations have undertaken with British Asian communities:

One thing that we have done, and pioneered in [this town] in my time, was outreach work with the Bangladeshi community...I think one of the problems faced there was, initially, that if we'd just gone in and said we are [a professional] football club, I think we'd have had a very poor response. What we actually did was we advertised this [project] through the local mosque and community centre, on their letter-headed paper, making it clear to that community that the scheme had the full approval of their elders and the people to whom they looked up to for advice and guidance.

[Interview with ex-chairman of a club-based anti-racist scheme, 13th June 2002]

Specifically, in the community department, we work at the moment with [the] City Council Equal Opportunities [department], we work with the Race Equality Advisory Board, we work with lots and lots of local schools, we work with the Hindu Charitable Trust, the Sikh Temple, the Pakistani Centre, as well as lots and lots of other different ethnic minority groups.

[Interview with Community Affairs manager, Premier League club, 21st June 2002]

However, whilst the increasing tendency for anti-racist football organisations to consult and collaborate with British Asian communities is a positive development, the manner in which these co-operations are undertaken represents a source of concern.

As the above statements demonstrate, the work that anti-racist football organisations carry out with British Asians tends to focus on specific types of

institutions within these communities. The first example illustrates how the anti-racist scheme attempted to access members of the Bangladeshi community by using leaders from the local mosque and Islamic community centre as cultural intermediaries. The second testimony highlights the club's work with municipal anti-racist agencies and a variety of local religious and cultural institutions. There are a number of reasons why anti-racist football organisations choose to collaborate with dominant British Asian institutions. In many towns and cities, they are the most well-established and publicly-prominent British Asian organisations. Since their foundations during the early stages of migration from the subcontinent, these institutions have developed significant profiles in their respective localities, both within and outside British Asian communities. In the popular imagination, the lives of British Asians are still perceived to be strongly linked to religious practices and subcontinental cultures and traditions, and so institutions that invoke such connotations are seen to be the most representative of British Asian communities. The status of these institutions means that they are usually well-funded and able to provide a financial contribution to various projects, whilst their organisational structures mean that their management personnel are often experienced in participating in steering groups and committees. In this regard, they represent the most obvious and applicable source of collaboration for anti-racist football organisations.

The position of these institutions as representatives of their respective communities is increasingly being called into question though. For example, Baumann (1999) highlights the role of so-called Islamic "community leaders" or "representatives" of Britain's Muslim communities, arguing that they are often self-appointed and claim to speak for "*the* Muslim community" as a singular entity or, indeed, *for* Islam. He argues that this has significant implications for hegemonic representations of Muslims in Britain, in that:

First, whatever a spokesperson may say about the views or attitudes of the Muslims he claims to represent is stylized into "*the* attitude of *the* Muslim community", as if all Muslims thought and behaved in the same way. Second, all

those who disagree with the public representatives are ruled out of court as being “unrepresentative” Muslims, either bad because they are “sectarian” or bad because they are “secularized” (ibid.: 70).

By controlling the images and discourses that are articulated to outside groups, Islamic “community leaders” are able to influence the way that their communities are perceived in the wider society. This has ensured that these individuals and their institutions have been able to monopolise public representations of Islam and, by implication, “Asianness”.

However, self-appointed “community leaders” have become increasingly unable to represent the heterogeneity of the communities that they claim to speak for. In particular, they are unrepresentative of *young* British Asians. The correlation between generation and habitus amongst British Asians was discussed in Chapter Three. It was argued that the older generations are often out of touch with the sensibilities of being a young British Asian in twenty-first century, urban Britain. As “community leaders” are normally of an older generation – hence references to community *elders* – it is unsurprising that British Asian community leadership is, in many cases, failing to appreciate the issues facing young people. For example, with reference to the inquiries that were undertaken into the urban unrest of summer 2001, the Home Office (2001a: 14) states that:

All [reports] draw attention to the extent [to] which young people’s voices have been largely ignored by decision-makers in the areas where there were disturbances. Some young people complained that the older community and religious leaders who claimed to represent them failed to articulate the experiences of the young.

This situation has been accentuated by a tendency for British mosques to import *imams* (leaders of Islamic congregations) from nations such as Pakistan and Bangladesh (see e.g. Scantlebury 1995). Whilst the imams share similar habituses to the older generations of British Asians, their failure to speak English and their inexperience of life in Britain mean that they are often unable to connect with, and earn the respect of, young British Asians. This represents a problem as it is the younger sections of the British Asian population that are most likely to have an

appreciation of the issues facing British Asian footballers today. Conversely, many within the older generations have no interest in, or knowledge of, football and may even possess a negative opinion of the game. The absence of young people in prominent positions of community leadership means that many British Asian players are prevented from establishing contact and channels of dialogue with professional clubs and anti-racist football organisations. Anti-racist football organisations that adhere to a “hierarchy of the credible” (Becker 1967) and thus collaborate primarily, and often exclusively, with established “community leaders” and institutions might therefore be provided with an inaccurate portrait of the issues facing young British Asian footballers, and also risk alienating the specific people that they need to be working with.

Popular images of British Asians continue to link their lifestyles and identities to the subcontinent and fail to appreciate the influences of living in Britain. Consequently, there is an incorrect, and somewhat patronising, belief that the inclusion of British Asians in professional football can only be achieved by implementing different structures and policies from those used with other groups. This is highlighted by the Community Affairs manager at a Premier League club who describes the club’s work with British Asians, as follows:

What we’re doing at the moment is looking at ways that we can further attract Asian people onto our coaching programmes, by producing our literature in a range of languages, by delivering the coaching [programmes] more local to where they live so they don’t have travelling obstacles to overcome and by using key people in the communities who are already established there and working with them... We work with [British Asians] because we want to genuinely work with those people. And if they have an individual need, we will work with that. For example, if there’s a dinner going on or if there’s an awards ceremony and there’s food we’ll make sure that the food will be suitable for all tastes and maybe a vegetarian menu as opposed to a meat menu. If you’re looking at language barriers then again we will try and work around that in the best way we can. If you’re looking at uniform or suitable attire for people to play in, we will obviously operate with whatever religious constraints we have to work with.

[Interview, 21st June 2002]

Taking language as an example, it appears unlikely that young, urban British Asians would have trouble with this issue. As Modood (1997d: 60-1) points out, of British Asians aged between sixteen and twenty-four, 99% of those of Indian ethnicity, 99% of African Asians, 97% of Bangladeshis and 96% of Pakistanis speak English fluently. The participant cited above also suggests that young British Asian footballers have special dietary requirements (see below) and that their performances might be inhibited by their clothing. Such stereotypes show little appreciation of the sensibilities and consumption patterns of young, urban British Asian footballers. In Britain's inner-cities, young British Asians are as likely to be dressed in designer labels and expensive sportswear as whites or African-Caribbeans. Nevertheless, the popular "bhajis and bhangra"² approach receives widespread support, revolving around the idea that professional clubs can make themselves more welcoming – to both British Asian players and supporters – by celebrating ethnic diversity and offering items that are perceived to make British Asians feel more comfortable, such as subcontinental food and bhangra bands³.

These strategies utilise a stereotypical, outdated view of British Asians and highlight how out of touch some anti-racist football organisations are with their target audiences. Furthermore, this approach actually causes offence to many British Asian footballers. For example, one player states that:

You have no idea how much offence that sort of initiative causes to anybody who is of Asian origin. [British Asians] may play along with the game because that's what it happens to be at the time and because they need to achieve something but actually deep down inside they're actually greatly offended by initiatives like that.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 23rd April 2002]

These sentiments were echoed by other players, one of whom argues that:

I don't want to go to a football match for an onion bhaji; I want to go to a football match to see good football! I've been to games but I like to, you know, go for the atmosphere and the football and not [laughing] for an onion bhaji! Again, that's patronising because second and third generation Asian kids enjoy McDonald's [hamburgers] and other things. When you go to an Indian restaurant, what are the majority of the customers? Are they Asian?!

[Interview with member of a British Asian football federation, 25th April]

Another British Asian player suggests that:

What we're talking about here is tokenism...I mean, to be honest, what I would say is those clubs or those initiatives have really got to look at it and say, you know, where is their advice coming from? It's probably – and I'm not being disrespectful or being prejudiced here – but it's probably a white man behind a desk thinking, you know, we'll have a bhangra band and this is what we'll do.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 16th March 2002]

It may seem churlish to criticise anti-racist football organisations for misinterpreting the lifestyles of young British Asians. Most of them are in the early stages of initiating policies and strategies specifically aimed at British Asians, and their intentions are, for the most part, altruistic. However, some individuals within the anti-racist movement are unhesitatingly confident about their supposed understanding of "Asianness" and are openly resistant to critical and sensitive investigation, using phrases such as 'You don't necessarily need a lot of detailed research to know what your issues are' [co-ordinator of anti-racist football organisation, 28th June 2002]; 'We don't have to *research* them [local British Asian communities] because we *work* with them' [Community Affairs manager, Premier League club, 21st June 2002]; and 'We haven't done any specific research to find out what people think of the project' [co-ordinator of anti-racist football organisation, 19th June 2002]. Unsurprisingly a number of anti-racist football organisations are generally out of touch with the identities, attitudes and desires of young British Asian footballers. It is apparent that whilst these organisations might have, to some degree, consulted with local British Asian communities, they have failed to access the most relevant individuals, i.e. young, male footballers.

Colouring over the (touch) lines? Football coaching and ethnic absolutism

The employment of British Asians in non-playing roles in English football corresponds with their under-representation as players. For example, very few professional clubs employ British Asians as coaches or talent scouts (Independent Football Commission 2004)⁴. During the 1999/2000 season, a total of twenty-five

British Asian coaches and nineteen scouts were believed to be working in professional football, yet fourteen of these coaches were based at two specific clubs (Bradbury 2001b). Furthermore, none of the British Asians that are employed as coaches operate in “front-line” management, i.e. as team manager, assistant manager and first-team or reserve team coach. This is not entirely surprising as, in English professional football, a former professional player is far more likely to be employed as a manager or a coach than somebody who has not played at this level, even if the latter’s qualifications are superior⁵. Instead, those British Asians that are employed as coaches or scouts at professional clubs work exclusively within the youth academies or are involved in specific outreach projects with minority ethnic, particularly British Asian, communities.

One of the reasons for the employment of British Asians at youth level only is because it is believed that one of the most effective methods of increasing the participation of British Asians as professional *players* is to establish a system of British Asian coaches and scouts. It is assumed that British Asian coaches and scouts would have the appropriate contacts within British Asian communities and a suitable knowledge of local British Asian clubs and leagues (Football Association 1999). Proponents of this standpoint also assert that the employment of British Asians as coaches and scouts would act as a point of contact – literally a “friendly face” – to assist the inclusion of other British Asians within the ostensibly alien environment of a professional football club. For example, the Director of the Youth Academy at one Premier League club suggests that:

An Asian scout might be able to tap into the Asian community and get you decent players. I think it would be a good idea, yeah...An Asian person is going to have more success in recruiting Asians kids than a white person, generally speaking, I would say.

[Interview, 16th January 2002]

This notion has been strongly adhered to and implemented by the anti-racist football movement. For example, British Asian coaches have been used by organisations including Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD), the Leicester Asian Sports

Initiative (LASI) and Respect All Fans Football Initiative (RAFFI), as well as by schemes based at Leeds United, Northampton Town and West Ham United (Kick It Out 1998a, Football Unites Racism Divides 2001, Frampton et al 2001). Confirming the implementation of this philosophy, the ex-chairman of one club-based anti-racist scheme reported:

We got funding from [our] Borough Council – which was from the SRB [Single Regeneration Budget] funding – for a fifteen-month project, the objective of which was to train or get three adult [British Asian] coaches to get their FA coaching badges, so that they could legitimately help to train young Bangladeshi kids.

[Interview, 13th June 2002]

The importance of British Asians gaining coaching qualifications, in terms of the overall development of British Asian football, is not disputed. Improving the representation of British Asians as professional footballers requires the implementation of holistic structures that are able to facilitate the longitudinal development of British Asian players, from their early years through to adulthood. A widespread improvement of coaching standards and practices within British Asian amateur football would be integral to this process. Obtaining coaching qualifications will also provide club members with the expertise necessary for dealing with associated issues, such as the treatment of injuries, child protection, and fitness and diet.

Nevertheless, the contention that the employment of British Asian professional coaches is an effective means of recruiting British Asians into professional football *as players* still presents a problem. Basically, this is because it is believed that a coach's ethnicity is more important than his qualifications. The ideology underpinning this strategy is that British Asian players are most likely – or, indeed, only able – to relate to, and work with, coaches from a similar ethnic background. Significant numbers of British Asians have only started taking coaching qualifications in recent years though, the majority of whom are likely to hold only the most basic certificates. Consequently, those organisations and club-based schemes that insist on providing British Asian clubs exclusively with British Asian

coaches are, in most cases, offering only a rudimentary level and quality of coaching. Many British Asian players are critical of the fact that in striving for “political correctness”, many anti-racist football organisations and schemes are actually failing to meet their needs and desires. For example, one player reported his personal experiences of this phenomenon:

My nephew would come home [from school] and say, “Oh, we had this coach come and [teach] football”. [One day] I went down there to pick him up and I saw my goalkeeper from my Sunday league side. I said to him, “What are you doing here?”. I know he does coaching for [a professional club] but [he only holds] the prelim [FA preliminary] badge. What is that, yeah?! The credentials on that, anyone can do that!...He goes, “I coach here” and I thought to myself, “Hang on a minute, [this professional club] is offering these inner city kids the lowest end of their coaches and they call this an improvement, or trying to develop these kids into playing football!” Why didn’t they send their best lot? Why are they giving a coach who plays in a Sunday league youth side, a goalkeeper, who’s only learnt the basics and he’s come out and he’s teaching them. Because they’re Asian kids – the majority in that school – are they supposed to, all of a sudden, look up and relate to him because he’s Asian also? Do they not think they’ll relate to a white coach in the same way?

[Interview with ‘Asian’ ex-professional player, 20th February 2002]

The ethnic absolutism that characterises the “British Asian coaches for British Asian players” approach homogenises British Asians as a social group and fails to recognise the ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic divisions that exist between them. It assumes that the common status of “Asianness” is the most important factor in establishing a working relationship between a coach and his players. In some cases British Asian coaches might be able to develop specific relationships with, or gain certain types of access to, British Asian communities but, as one Sikh amateur player suggested, if an organisation offered his club a *Bengali* coach, his players would be no more likely to identify with him than with a white or African-Caribbean coach. In order to ensure that British Asian players reach the standards achieved by players of other backgrounds, they must be given the best coaching possible, irrespective of the ethnicity of the person(s) providing it. For example, one ‘Asian’ amateur player argues that:

There is a belief amongst some football authorities that actually Asians are only understood by Asians or that Asians want to see more Asians in football coaching and that, culturally, it is only Asian coaches that can understand them...I think what people want is the very best for their personal development, regardless of whether that individual's from the same race as them or from the same culture or even from the same caste. I think, you know, it simply is sort of a misconception to think that actually only Asians can coach Asians and therefore what you need to do is bring more Asian coaches in. What you need is the *very best* coaches, coaching all the players and then identify Asians as a group that might need additional help to get them up to the same level as everybody else.

[Interview, 23rd April 2002]

Another player echoes these sentiments:

When [my British Asian club] were first formed, in the first year or two, our coach was a white chap. He'd been involved with our local football for a number of years, so we knew him prior to him being the coach of [my club]. I think it is a sort of narrow-minded view to think that Asians can only relate to Asians because in some ways I've felt, and I've seen, that actually Asian kids probably relate or have more respect for *non-Asian* coaches. For example, in our area, on a lot of occasions you tend to get [British Asian] coaches who try to coach but they're not getting the respect because [players] feel that it's just one of us, nothing special...I think it doesn't really matter what colour a coach is. It's got to be the best coaches available.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player/member of a British Asian football federation, 25th April 2002]

A failure to receive the best coaching possible regardless of ethnic background is perceived to inhibit the development of football within British Asian communities. This parallels the concerns raised by British Asian players in Chapter Four regarding the failure of many British Asians to play against players of other ethnicities. Participating in coaching and training sessions that only involve other members of their communities means that British Asian footballers continue to operate in the "comfort zone" that many participants spoke about. At present, British Asian coaches possess neither the status nor contacts within the professional game that white or African-Caribbean coaches do and so British Asian players are more likely to play to their full potentials when trying to impress a coach from outside rather than within their communities. In order to facilitate their inclusion in professional football it is crucial that British Asian players access contact networks outside their

own communities (see Chapter Five), and involvement with white and African-Caribbean coaches is one way of achieving this.

It is also possible that British Asian coaches might inhibit players' involvement in coaching projects, because of the sense that their presence may limit the extent to which playing football is free from the constraints of school or home. Speaking to white youth workers based at exclusively Bengali, male youth clubs in north London, a similar situation was often discussed. The youth workers described how the local borough council had attempted to increase the number of Bengali youth workers in these youth clubs. However, this policy has been widely resisted by the young club members. They believe that local Bengali youth workers would probably know their parents and so they would be unable to swear in Bengali or talk about any criminal, sexual or drug-related issues.

The belief that British Asian professional coaches are needed to facilitate the transition of British Asian players from amateur to professional level also causes offence to many players. Firstly, it implies that they are unable or unwilling to work with non-British Asian coaches. Secondly, it gives the impression that clubs and organisations do not take British Asian players seriously enough to justify providing “mainstream” coaches, and that they require a different approach from that used with other ethnic groups. Thirdly, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of critiques of British Asian socio-cultural spheres that are ethnically segregated. British Muslims, for example, are often castigated for their perceived self-imposed separatism, and campaigns to establish state-funded Islamic schools are widely opposed outside Muslim communities for contributing to “educational apartheid”⁶. However, British Asian footballers being coached exclusively by other British Asians only accentuates the cultural distance that exists between British Asian and “mainstream” amateur football. On one hand, British Asians are admonished for the fact that many players and teams compete in all-Asian leagues but, on the other hand, they are often denied the opportunity to engage in coaching projects with coaches and players of other ethnicities.

Footing the Bill: the police and anti-racism in football

The majority of anti-racist football organisations recognise that the issues and problems they encounter are linked to wider social phenomena and that adopting a multi-agency/partnership approach with other groups is therefore important. External agencies also play a fundamental role in providing financial assistance to many anti-racist football organisations, particularly those that are independent or autonomous, i.e. not linked to specific clubs⁷. The steering groups and funding committees for many initiatives consist of, or involve collaboration with, a number of disparate agencies, within both the public and private sectors. For example, a club-based initiative might include members of the local council, school teachers or university lecturers, representatives from (minority ethnic) community groups, and employees from local businesses. In particular, different police forces throughout the country have played a significant role in many anti-racist football organisations, through the formation of partnerships and through funding. For example, Kick It Out has received funding and expertise from the Metropolitan Police (Kick It Out 1998a); Football Unites Racism Divides has received funding from South Yorkshire Police (Football Unites Racism Divides 2001); and both Middlesbrough and Northumbria Police forces are among the sponsors of Show Racism The Red Card (Show Racism The Red Card 2000). The Metropolitan Police, in particular, have been involved in further projects, such as distributing free match tickets to Kosovan refugees on behalf of Millwall FC (Back et al 2001b) and, starting in 2002, using its Positive Action Team to sponsor the Asian Champions Cup, a British Asian 5-A-side football tournament (*Eastern Eye* 2002a).

There are a number of possible motives behind collaborations between anti-racist football organisations and the police. It is perhaps the case that the police are seeking some sort of damage limitation or image reconstruction in the wake of the accusations of institutional racism that were levelled in the 'Macpherson Report' (Macpherson 1999). It is also possible that they are seeking a credible channel through which to establish good relations with minority ethnic communities, and the current popularity in using football to achieve political agendas means that the game

is an ideal medium. Football is an activity in which many British Asian and black people participate, plus there is a well-established and high-profile anti-racist football movement for the police to “piggyback” on. Basically, their continual funding of the anti-racist football movement allows the police to reaffirm their public commitment to fighting racism and to shift attention away from accusations of racism within their own institution to issues of racism in football. However, the relationship is symbiotic and funding from the police is very attractive to anti-racist football organisations. Not only are the police able to provide much needed financial input, but they also represent a *reliable* source of funding. In many ways, anti-racist football organisations have the police “over a barrel” with regard to funding because in the current political climate, it is extremely difficult for the police to reject requests for funding anti-racism. Ironically, the funding provided by the police to anti-racist organisations is still minimal compared to the compensation that various forces have recently had to pay out for racial discrimination or improper conduct against a number of minority ethnic individuals⁸, including some of their own officers⁹.

The police clearly have an important part to play in the anti-racist football movement. Primarily, their role is based around issues with which they have direct responsibility or expertise. Specifically, to prosecute supporters who are found guilty of racist abuse at professional grounds¹⁰ or players who have committed racially aggravated assaults in amateur football. They are also able to advise crowd stewards about how to deal with racist incidents and to provide feedback to anti-racist organisations regarding specific problems. In recent years, the police have broadened the scope of their involvement in anti-racism and football and have started to collaborate with anti-racist football organisations and club-based schemes on their outreach project work with young, urban British Asians. If implemented appropriately, schemes of this type can forge a crucial link between professional clubs and their local British Asian communities, providing a channel for recruiting talented players. As a result of dominant political discourses of social inclusion, this “hands on” community-based work is currently highly favoured by many

organisations. The wider socio-political connotations of such projects – i.e. social cohesion between various ethnic groups – mean that such initiatives are attractive to the police. For example, the Community Affairs manager at one club stated that:

We've got a project at the moment whereby we're linking up with the police community workers who work out in these local Asian communities...For example, we will give out x number of free tickets to the police and they will use them to break down their barriers in their local community.

[Interview, 21st June 2002].

However, by aligning themselves with the police, anti-racist football organisations might be inhibiting the extent to which they are able to forge positive relations with local, urban, British Asian youths. In light of the urban unrest of summer 2001, it could be argued that the relationship between the police and young, urban British Asian men has deteriorated badly in the early twenty-first century (Oldham Independent Review 2001, Kalra 2003). Although most sociological and political debates regarding 'race' and policing have focused on the nexus between the police and young, inner-city, *African-Caribbean* men¹¹, there is increasing evidence of antagonisms between the police and young *British Asian* men (Webster 1997). For example, an inquiry into the urban unrest by British Asians in Manningham, Bradford in 1995 stated that, 'It is impossible to overstate the mistrust with which younger members of the community viewed the police' (cited in Macey 2002: 36). In the summer of 2001, young British Asian men were involved in violent clashes with police officers in Bradford, Burnley, Oldham, Stoke-on-Trent, the St. Mary's district of Southampton and Harehills in Leeds¹². In fact, it was the arrest of a resident, Hossein Miah, that is believed to have instigated the unrest in this latter area and, particularly, the violence against the police¹³ (*Guardian* 2002). In Oldham, perceived police inaction over racial harassment and assaults has been cited as a major factor in the urban unrest that occurred in the town (Jenkins and Kennedy 2001). Similarly, Virdee (1997: 280) states that fifty per cent of British Asians between the ages of sixteen and thirty-four either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that they could rely on the police to protect them from racial harassment. There has

also been widespread criticism of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) by British Asians due to the severity of the sentences awarded to many of the men convicted for involvement in the urban unrest of 2001¹⁴. Furthermore, between 2001 and 2002, the overall number of British Asians stopped and searched by the police increased by sixteen per cent, with the figures for the Metropolitan police revealing a forty per cent increase (Dodd 2003b). The image of the police force within British Asian communities was again damaged in October 2003, when a BBC television investigation uncovered racism and anti-Asian prejudices amongst a number of police officers in north-west England¹⁵ (BBC TV 2003e).

It is clear that relations between young, inner-city British Asian men and the police can be problematic. It is necessary, therefore, to recognise that anti-racist football schemes that collaborate with the police might be sending out ambiguous signals to minority ethnic communities. These schemes may be met with negativity and suspicion – if not outright resistance – from young, urban British Asian footballers. In locations where there have been tensions between young men and police officers, the presence of an agency that is seen to represent the oppression and disaffection that they experience is likely to cause offence. Football initiatives that involve the police may be viewed as guilty by association. A number of people within the anti-racist football movement acknowledge this, but the potential problems are not universally recognised. For example, the Community Affairs manager at one club – based in an area that had recently witnessed antagonisms between local British Asians and police officers – was incredulous about this idea:

I haven't seen [a problem]. I can't comment on that...I'm not from [this town] so I'm still getting to know the territory, the areas and the different groups out there and really what the local perception is. What I will say is, having met the community police officers who work specifically in areas of high ethnicity, there isn't that perception as far as I can see. There isn't that tension. The police actually have a very good relationship.

[Interview, 21st June 2002]

This is the testimony of somebody who has responsibility for co-ordinating the club's activities with local British Asian communities, yet who appears to be

unfamiliar with the sensitivities and histories of British Asian groups, particularly with regard to issues of 'race' and policing in these areas. It is young, working-class, male British Asians with whom anti-racist football organisations need to work most closely and it is important that these agencies recognise the sometimes antagonistic and alienating relationship that these young men have with the police.

(Im)perfect match? Subcontinental football tours to Britain

In recent years, a number of English professional clubs have played friendly matches against international teams representing countries with significant diasporic populations in Britain. On some occasions, English clubs have simply taken on the role of hosts and allowed their stadiums to be used for matches between international teams¹⁶. Since the start of the twenty-first century, a number of national teams, for example Jamaica and Nigeria, have visited Britain, but the main source of opposition has come from the Indian subcontinent. Brentford, Fulham, Leyton Orient, Nottingham Forest, Walsall and West Bromwich Albion have played matches against India, whilst Bury and Coventry City have entertained Pakistan. Subcontinental clubs, such as Abahani FC and Mohammedan FC of Bangladesh, have also played matches against British Asian amateur sides. These matches have been organised and funded by commercial companies and anti-racist football organisations, in collaboration with professional clubs. The official reason given by the All India Football Federation (AIFF)¹⁷ for the national team's visit to Britain in 2000 – their first since 1948 – was that it would help players to prepare for the forthcoming World Cup qualifying matches (Kapadia 2001). According to Dimeo (2002b), the organisers and promoters of these tours have cited three further reasons why they were undertaken. Firstly, to give Indian players experience of playing against European professional teams. Secondly, to establish subcontinent-diaspora links that might result in coaching exchanges and, eventually, the selection of diasporic players for the national side. Thirdly, to promote anti-racism and increase the representation of British Asians in professional football. It is the final reason that is of relevance to the present analysis.

The hosts, organisers and funders of these events have received considerable commendation, both within the game and in the media for their perceived role in promoting anti-racism and extending links with British Asian communities. However, the positive feedback that these events have received is not universally endorsed. Three main criticisms were expressed by British Asian players (the second and third points relate predominantly to the matches between club sides from the subcontinent and British Asian amateur teams). Firstly, despite their publicised aim, these matches do little to increase the inclusion of *British* Asian footballers in the professional game. Nevertheless, they can operate as a smokescreen and provide a false idea about the extent to which measures are being implemented. Secondly, these matches have no significant long-term benefits for the development of British Asian football. Thirdly, the tendency for these matches to involve adult rather than young players limits their capacity to act as a “shop window” for professional clubs to identify and recruit talented players. These issues are discussed fully below.

Effectiveness of the measures

Friendly matches against subcontinental teams represent an opportunity for English professional clubs to publicly express an anti-racist stance and to affirm their commitment to increasing the representation of British Asians in professional football. These matches invariably attract a few hundred British Asian supporters and thus represent a significant means of gaining publicity for a club. A photograph or television footage of British Asian supporters sitting in a club’s stadium, replete with obligatory drums, horns and flags, and, more often than not, conveniently situated behind a hoarding expressing the club’s commitment to “kicking out racism” is of considerable marketing value. It provides positive media exposure and adds a “caring, community angle” to a club’s promotional material. Matches against subcontinental teams are a deliberately ostentatious attempt to celebrate multiculturalism and this ensures that such events serve the needs of groups with a vested interest, namely clubs, anti-racist football organisations, funders/sponsors and tour organisers. Most importantly, these events give the *impression* that these

agencies are actively working towards overcoming the barriers faced by British Asians in professional football, irrespective of whether this is actually the case. An old cliché states that “A picture paints a thousand words” and images of South Asian players and their diasporic supporters in an English football ground can generate greater kudos and public impact than a club’s involvement in a less high-profile activity, such as grassroots coaching with British Asian children. However, although they are related, the factors underpinning the under-representation of British Asians as players and as supporters are clearly different. The involvement of subcontinental players and diasporic supporters in these matches has little effect on increasing the participation of *British Asian players* in the game¹⁸. As one Asian’ amateur player states:

I think all these events like, you know, these sort of celebrity matches or show matches against national teams from India and Pakistan, they’re great as one off events. But they are essentially, if you like, tokenism in that they are just a publicity issue. What grows from those matches is not sustainable. It doesn’t result in any long-lasting benefit to Asians in football. It’s just a great event, a *circus* almost, around publicity. That will not do. They do nothing to build a foundation for promoting Asians into football in this country.

[Interview, 23rd April 2002]

Indeed, many British Asian footballers believe that publicity and profit, rather than increasing their representation as professional players, are actually the most important criteria for the organisers of these friendly matches. For example, one ‘Asian’ amateur player states that:

People say, “We’ll bring a team over, you know, for a couple of weeks”. It’s all about PR [public relations]. You are getting organisations and initiatives just going after the PR job really, which is a bit of a shame for me.

[Interview, 16th March 2002]

Another player focused on the financial implications:

The people who are really behind it are just there for the quick buck and they just use ‘Kick Out Racism’ [sic] and all these other things because obviously they’re going to back that, aren’t they? And they know that West Brom[wich Albion]

would give them the backing of the ground to use because, if they don't, people will say, "Why not?". The real problem lies with the people organising it. They're really behind it. Not the clubs, not 'Kick Out Racism'. Are they in it for the football or for the money?

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 16th April 2002]

Making money is undoubtedly an important – if not the main – consideration for some of the agencies involved in organising these matches. For professional clubs, pre-season friendlies are usually poorly supported in comparison to competitive matches and British Asians represent a potential means of increasing gate receipts. Whilst the number of British Asians who start regularly attending their local ground after attending an international friendly is negligible, clubs are aware that British Asian supporters represent a large, untapped market¹⁹. Dimeo (2002b) claims that, taking into account the match admission prices²⁰, financial gain was a significant criterion for Sapphire Enterprises²¹, the company that organised the Indian tours. Furthermore, Raj Prohit of Sapphire Enterprises is also the agent of Baichung Bhutia, an Indian international who joined Bury in 1999²². At the same time that Prohit was facilitating Bhutia's transfer, Sapphire were organising the Indian tours to Britain (Dimeo 2001a). This suggests that the objective was to provide a "showcase" of Indian players to generate other sales to British clubs. This sheds further doubt on the publicised aim of these matches to increase the inclusion of *British* Asians as professional footballers

Long-term benefits

The second criticism of matches between professional/British Asian clubs and subcontinental teams is that they are simply one-off events that have no long-term benefits for the development of British Asian football and its links with the professional game. This position was highlighted by a number of British Asian players, one of whom recalls his own personal experiences:

Against [the club visiting from Bangladesh] I was actually playing, I was in the team that night. It was a very good occasion. I mean, again, I look at it from a selfish point of view as a player and it was brilliant, tremendous. But even then I

thought – and I still think it even more now in my role as chairperson of [a British Asian football federation] and in an administrative capacity – there’s no real long-term benefit from these friendlies. I mean, the guys from Bangladesh enjoyed themselves; they got a free ticket to the UK. We enjoyed it because that’s probably the highest level we’ve played and we measured ourselves against the top players in Bangladesh. It was a good occasion but there’s no long-term benefit.

[Interview with ‘Asian’ amateur player/member of a British Asian football federation, 25th April 2002]

These matches fail to contribute to the long-term development of British Asian football because they only involve South Asian – subcontinental and diasporic – players. Chapter Four highlighted the belief amongst many British Asian players that the tendency for some British Asian players to compete in all-Asian leagues is detrimental to player development and limits their potential to become professionals. One ‘Asian’ amateur player argued that these friendly matches accentuate the inclination for British Asians to play only within their own ethnic groups. He claims that whilst these games provide opportunities to demonstrate the standard of British Asian football, very few, if any, non-British Asian people are present to witness these events:

Most of the games [involve] just Asian communities. Where’s the mixture in that? It’s Asian teams coming from Bangladesh and playing a [British] Asian team. Who else knows about it? What about the [talent] scouts? What about the professional clubs? Do they know this game’s going on? It’s just a one-off game amongst your community, nothing else. It’s not a development; it’s just publicity stuff, that’s all it is.

[Interview with ‘Asian’ semi-pro player, 11th May 2002]

The perception is that if British Asian clubs are to play in such showcase matches, it is more productive for them to play against *English* professional opposition. In recent years, a UK Asian XI have played against Bradford City, Sporting Bengal United of east London have played Leyton Orient and a representative team from the Sikh-based Khalsa Football Federation (KFF) have competed against Millwall. The long-term benefits of these games are also limited (see below), but at least they ensure that the best British Asian players are given an opportunity to perform in an

environment where professional clubs, and not just other members of their communities, are able to observe their talents²³.

Emphasis on adult players

A third area of criticism is that, although matches between Millwall and the KFF, for example, have been preceded by games featuring their respective youth teams, the majority of matches against subcontinental teams – plus other competitions, such as the UK Asian Football Championships – only involve adult players. The involvement of adult rather than youth players reduces the capacity for these occasions to operate as a “shop window” of British Asian talent for professional clubs. The professional coaching staff in this research all strongly suggested that, in order to maximise their chance of making the grade, it is highly advantageous for a player to be registered with a professional club well before his teenage years²⁴. It is unlikely, therefore, that professional clubs would currently be interested in watching a match between a British Asian team and a professional club – either from England or from the subcontinent – because most of the players would be too old to stand a chance of making it as professionals. For example, one ‘Asian’ semi-pro player states that:

Here in east London, there’s Bengali teams coming from Bangladesh. I mean that’s just one day, two hours, when everyone’s going to watch this game. But what about the development of the young kids, you know? Most of them playing [in these matches] are [aged] twenty-five/thirty anyway, so what’s the benefit in that? I don’t know.

[Interview, 11th May 2002]

Another player remarked that:

I have flyers – because I’m on the [club’s] management committee now – and invitations come in to me saying, “We’re organising this big tournament, twenty-four teams, you know, for Asians. Oh, we’re going to have a couple of the Asian digital channels [filming it], you know, and we’ll have some scouts from the professional clubs as well”. And I’m saying, “Hold on, what’s the point in bringing scouts to this tournament when most people – ninety-nine per cent of the players – would actually be at an age where scouts just aren’t interested?”.

[Interview with ‘Asian’ amateur player, 16th March 2002]

There are wider issues related to age and participation as well. A number of British Asian players believe that because they lack the specific cultural capital needed for involvement in professional football (see Chapter Five), many British Asians do not recognise the importance of a player getting involved in organised football before he reaches his teenage years. For example, one 'Asian' ex-professional player stated that:

I wouldn't say it's totally the system's fault. It's [a case of] supporting ourselves – Asians – as well, you know. We look at a sixteen year-old and we want to put him in there [professional football]. Forget all that. Let's go and put him there when he's *seven* or *eight* years old. Let's teach him the way the system teaches the white lads and the black lads in their football. Let's teach him how it's done. So when they get to about fourteen/fifteen, they're ready, they're tuned to go out there and give it a go.

[Interview, 20th February 2002]

Within the structures of British Asian football, whilst the men's game has burgeoned in recent years, the youth game remains significantly under-developed in comparison. Whilst some clubs do have teams representing a range of age groups, the majority revolve around adult sides, and many leagues and tournaments have a specific focus on adult football. Generally, many British Asians are unaware of the importance of setting up structures for the younger age groups. A further problem appears to be educating young British Asian players themselves of the importance of playing *organised* football from an early age. One 'Asian' amateur player reported the problems his club has had in running youth sides:

You won't find too many Asian youth teams. I mean if you want to go into a club, wherever they're based – even like if you've done in your study down in the Asian leagues – and you ask how many youth teams they have in their club, I'd be surprised if you find many clubs down there that have got one or two youth teams. I know that we've tried it at [my club] and we've found it difficult. We were hoping to roll on a youth team each year. We started one at under-10s. We were hoping that the following year, okay, they'll move up to under-11s and we'll start another one [under-10 side]. And it hasn't quite worked. It's just been difficult. We had an under-14 side last year and the team were unbeaten. They were unbeaten in the [town] league, they won all three cups and they were moving up to this year's under-15s. But we had to fold the side. We had to pull it out, because about five of the boys decided that they didn't want to play any more.

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

This player elaborated on the reasons for dropping out and described how, in particular, the club had been affected by the opening of a new local shopping centre. He pointed out that a number of players believed that it was more beneficial for them to spend their weekends earning money as shop assistants than playing football. Whilst measures are being undertaken by individual clubs and British Asian football federations to address this “drop-out” problem, in the meantime, it remains the case that the majority of British Asians currently playing organised football are adults. Focusing on *young* British Asian players and involving them in “showcase” friendly matches could encourage other young British Asian players to play regular, organised football and, relatedly, increase the degree to which professional clubs view these games as potential recruiting grounds.

Despite the criticisms raised above, matches against subcontinental teams remain popular events for clubs, anti-racist organisations and commercial companies. Whilst many British Asian players believe that establishing “grassroots” coaching programmes, improving facilities, or initiating partnerships with professional clubs would be more productive in terms of the long-term development of British Asian football, high profile, one-off fixtures enable certain groups to achieve their short-term agendas. One ‘Asian’ amateur player sums up the dialectic between the short-term and long-term development of British Asian football, as follows:

[The individuals involved] want the high-profile events that get them the publicity. I think this is where really, Dan, we get down to what is the most effective way of promoting Asians into football. I think you have choices. You either go for the high profile, one-off events which attract a great deal of publicity in the media, even coverage on TV but do nothing in the long-term in terms of helping grassroots football. Or you go for the other alternative which is to say actually, the national bodies like the Football Association, like the Premier League, like the Football League and even lottery giving bodies, they have to start putting more money into saying how do we support better coaching facilities at grassroots level, how do we provide better facilities so that actually *all* footballers, *all* young people can participate in football and within that, how can we target Asians because they are a group that is under-represented?

[Interview, 23rd April 2002]

As this section demonstrates, in the current climate, the “high profile/one-off” approach is often adopted by clubs and anti-racist football organisations. One of the reasons for this is the influence of funders in organising these “show” matches. Chapter Six demonstrates the current desire for commercial companies to be associated with football and anti-racism in a holistic, publicity-oriented sense. As long as they perceive that they are receiving sufficient credibility and publicity, and feedback about how their money has been spent, the long-term effects of the projects that they have contributed towards are usually of little relevance. On the highly competitive funding circuit, in order to meet the criteria laid down by funders, anti-racist football organisations are under considerable pressure to demonstrate their achievements. Under such demand, a one-off friendly match featuring British Asian or subcontinental teams represents an immediately visible and quantifiable achievement. It is far more difficult to measure the success of a long-term coaching programme and so, whilst it would be more beneficial for the development of British Asian football, it does not offer the financial and publicity-oriented benefits of one-off events.

Heroes and villains: “Bowyergate” and the position of professional footballers as anti-racist role models

The increasingly positive public image surrounding English football during the late twentieth century has led to the re-elevation of professional footballers into educational and social role models²⁵. Players are now believed to be both capable of, and responsible for, upholding the positive social image of the game and, in the last few years, professional footballers have been used in a wide variety of campaigns related to issues including anti-racism, health, homelessness, literacy and sensible alcohol consumption²⁶. However, it is increasingly evident that the implications of positioning these players as role models can be potentially damaging. In particular, following the assault of Sarfraz Najeib, a young British Asian man, by a group of men that included professional footballers from Leeds United, the position of professional footballers as *anti-racist* role models has become especially ambiguous.

This situation has significant consequences for British Asians and their involvement in English professional football.

In January 2000 Najeib, a student from Rotherham, was attacked after he left the Majestyk nightclub in Leeds. He suffered a broken nose, cheekbone and leg. His assailants included white Leeds United star players Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate, and reserve team player Tony Hackworth. Despite the victim's claim that the assault was racially motivated, the prosecution insisted that this was not the case and declined to seek such a conviction (see Campaign Against Racism and Fascism 2002). In December 2001, in a retrial of the original case²⁷, Woodgate was convicted of affray and sentenced to one hundred hours community service, whilst Bowyer and Hackworth were acquitted of all charges²⁸. Their black team-mate, Michael Duberry, who had previously been acquitted of his alleged role in helping to conceal evidence, actually became a prosecution witness in the retrial. In the aftermath of the verdict, the Najeib family announced their intention to bring a civil action against Leeds United, claiming that the club covered up vital evidence, and they are also taking out private prosecutions against the defendants. In January 2003, Bowyer joined West Ham United for £100,000 and Woodgate joined Newcastle United for £9 million. The players were reunited when Newcastle signed Bowyer on a free transfer in May 2003. Bowyer made his first public comments on the incident in August 2003. He stated that:

I'm no racist. I have never been and I never will be...I was brought up in a mixed community in London and all my friends and schoolboy pals were of different nationalities...I have always supported Keep Racism out of Football [sic] when I was at Charlton with my pal Carl Leaburn and at Leeds with Lucas Radebe. It's something I've always supported – but people seem to forget that these days (cited in Oliver 2003).

Nevertheless, the assault on Sarfraz Najeib has had severe repercussions – for the players involved, the clubs that they have represented, and the way that these players and clubs are viewed by British Asian communities.

Issues of 'race' and racism have been prominent in the city of Leeds for over thirty years. In 1969, David Oluwale, a Nigerian vagrant, was murdered by two Leeds policemen, who disposed of his body in the River Aire, whilst, in the early 1980s, African-Caribbean residents were involved in serious urban unrest in the Chapeltown district (Phillips 2002). This was also a period in which the National Front (NF) received considerable support in Leeds. Twenty years later, in 2001, British Asians were involved in clashes with police officers in the Harehills district. The city's only professional football club, Leeds United, has also experienced a number of problems regarding racism amongst sections of its supporters (Younge 2002, Phillips 2002). In recent years, the club has attempted to forge links with its local British Asian and black communities, but the presence of Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate at the club is likely to have undermined any work that the club has undertaken in this capacity. By continuing to select players that have been involved in an assault with racist undertones, it is conceivable that the club's anti-racist stance has been interpreted by local minority ethnic communities as equivocal, at best. This was belatedly acknowledged by a senior figure in the club when he referred to the transfer of Bowyer to West Ham, as follows, 'Is there relief at Leeds to see Lee Bowyer go? Yes, of course. Does it make it easier for Leeds to extend its work in the community? Yes, of course' (cited in Walker 2003b)²⁹. Ironically, in the years succeeding the assault, one of the most promising young British Asian players, Harpal Singh, came through Leeds United's youth ranks and signed as a professional. It is difficult to gauge how the involvement of three of his team-mates in the assault of a young British Asian man has affected Singh's position at the club. For his part, the player states that, '(I) blocked the whole thing about Bowyer out of my mind' (cited in Bhatia 2003b). Whether British Asian supporters and other young players have been able to do the same is questionable, and Singh's potential to enhance the club's profile within British Asian communities has arguably decreased as a result of this episode³⁰. Furthermore, a number of Leeds United supporters have publicly eulogised Bowyer and Woodgate in their football chants. For example, travelling home from a match in December 2001, in the immediate

aftermath of the retrial, they were heard to sing, “Jingle bells, Sarfraz smells, Woody got affray, Oh what fun it is to see Bowyer get away” (Observer 2002).

Bowyer and Woodgate both left Leeds United in January 2003, but the controversy surrounding them continued. When Woodgate joined Newcastle United, the club was ‘inundated with hostile e-mails and telephone calls’ (*Guardian* 2003c) from supporters who were angry that they had signed a player with a criminal (and allegedly *racist*) background. The focus on Woodgate was dwarfed, however, by the furore surrounding Bowyer’s transfer to West Ham United. This represents an interesting paradox for, unlike his team-mate, Bowyer was acquitted of all charges. Nevertheless, he appears to have “carried the can” for both players and most of the backlash from British Asian communities has been directed towards him. This is predominantly a consequence of Bowyer’s previous off-field misdemeanours, which include testing positive for cannabis use and being charged with affray after abusing British Asian staff at a McDonald’s restaurant in east London. Gloucester MP, Parmjit Dhanda, has argued that the selection of Lee Bowyer for England would alienate British Asians who follow the national team (Blake 2002) and this standpoint was widely reiterated when the player joined West Ham. Not only were some supporters angry that the club had signed a player whom they believed to be morally deficient but they were also concerned about the message that this would send out to the local community. According to the Office for National Statistics, over 60% of people in the borough of Newham, in which the club is situated, are either British Asian or black (Carvel 2003). Although few attend West Ham matches, the club has undertaken substantial work with its local minority ethnic communities, most notably Mick King’s pioneering *Asians in Football* scheme. West Ham United has also been one of the more progressive clubs in terms of recruiting British Asian players – Anwar Uddin (now of Bristol Rovers) captained the club’s successful youth team in the late 1990s and other British Asians, such as Bobby Singh, are currently in the youth ranks.

A number of British Asian West Ham United supporters publicly denounced the signing of Bowyer, arguing that it contradicted the anti-racist stance taken by the club. Journalist and season ticket holder Shekhar Bhatia (Bhatia 2003a) argued that, 'West Ham will risk consigning years of good work in furthering relations with Newham's Asian community to the dustbin'. Suresh Grover, chairman of the National Civil Rights Movement, added that:

Over the past few years West Ham United Football Club has done much to distance itself from racism. It has also worked with local partnerships and secured funding to involve both the local Asian and black communities and young people. However, all its good work will now be undermined by securing Lee Bowyer as one of its players (cited in Brodtkin 2003c).

Film director and West Ham fan Suri Krishnamma claimed that he was 'outraged at hearing of the signing of Bowyer...It is probably the lowest moment in recent West Ham football history. It is worse than the prospect of relegation' (cited in Kaur Grewal 2003a). Another British Asian season ticket holder stated that, 'I can't believe they've done it. I really don't know what my reaction will be when I see him in the claret and blue. I certainly won't cheer when he scores – and that'll be a first for me' (cited in Chadband and Low 2003). However, not all British Asian West Ham supporters were against the transfer. For example, one fan stated that:

Well, he [Bowyer] wasn't found guilty was he? Jonathan Woodgate was found guilty. If the court system found him not guilty why are people turning around and saying there's a problem? He may be a thug, but he's also a footballer. He's not coming here for his lifestyle. I won't be joining in the protests (cited in Kaur Grewal 2003b).

On the day of Bowyer's debut, in January 2003, a protest was staged by the West Ham Fans United Against Racism group outside the club's Upton Park ground. A small number of demonstrators distributed leaflets stating that they were 'appalled' by the signing and calling for the club to 'reaffirm its total commitment to anti-racism' (Brodtkin 2003a). Some white West Ham supporters spat at and abused the protesters, labelled them "white Pakis" and tore down their banners (Kaur Grewal 2003b). Significantly, this demonstration was reflective of the wider anti-racist football movement in that a minority of protesters were British Asians and the most

vehement British Asian voices were those of middle-class activists. It is too early to assess the extent to which the signing of Bowyer has affected relations between West Ham United and its local British Asian communities. The player was injured for the latter part of his brief period at the club and media attention surrounding his presence was soon eclipsed by the club's unsuccessful fight to stay in the Premier League and the brain tumour suffered by manager Glenn Roeder. Perhaps the brevity of Bowyer's tenure will mean that there will be no long-term damage to West Ham United's image in the local British Asian communities, even though, in the eyes of many British Asians, his presence was perceived as having negative repercussions for the club's future anti-racist work.

Due to the contemporary prominence of anti-racism in English football and, reciprocally, football as a tool for anti-racist education, it is unsurprising that players have been positioned as role models in various anti-racist campaigns. The work of Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC), for example, involves educating schoolchildren by using videos of professional footballers denouncing racism. SRTRC (1998: 8) states that:

The position of professional footballers as role models for young people has been seized upon by the marketing people to sell a whole range of products from shampoo to cars. We have managed to harness these role models for the important role of combating racism.

The organisation adds that, 'Today's professional footballers are role models for young people and we felt that young people would listen and learn from footballers talking about racism and how to fight it' (ibid.: 5). This standpoint is also acknowledged by the FA who, in June 2003, took the unprecedented step of using England captain David Beckham to publicly denounce – through a pre-recorded television broadcast screened before the friendly against Serbia and Montenegro – the racist and Islamophobic abuse meted out by England supporters during the match against Turkey, two months previously³¹ (see Chapter Seven).

Professional footballers can have a tremendous influence on young people and can play an important role in their education. Nevertheless, one has to question the degree to which professional footballers can be – or, indeed, should be – expected to act as figureheads for such a wide variety of campaigns. Traditionally, a significant component in the attraction of professional footballers as role models for young people has been the fact that, although they are clearly popular icons, they are not necessarily perceived as authority figures. Footballers have been idolised because of their playing abilities rather than their moral or social standpoints – we liked them because they were different, not only from ourselves but also from the majority of other people we encounter in our everyday lives. Furthermore, young people have not always unconditionally imitated the actions of their idols. For example, the expected spate of playground kung-fu kicks in the aftermath of Eric Cantona’s famous aberration³² was strikingly absent. However, as part of the changes that English football has undergone in the last fifteen years (see Chapter Six), the game’s “moral guardians” have elevated professional footballers into positions of social responsibility and moral leadership. Professional footballers are now situated on a par with teachers, social workers and police officers, in that they are seen to be moral proselytisers. Increasingly, youngsters are strongly encouraged to abide by their every word and action. A culture has emerged in which professional footballers are being afforded an increasing monopoly with regard to authenticity or “truth”, and an action is arguably legitimated when it is performed by a professional footballer. The problem with this development is that not all players are reliable “moral guardians”.

The elevation of footballers to *social* and *moral* role models *par excellence* can therefore result in serious problems, particularly with regard to issues of ‘race’. As well as the situation with Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate, whilst a number of players have openly backed anti-racist causes, a number of other players have been involved in ‘race’-related controversies. In Britain, prominent players, such as Lorenzo Amoruso, Duncan Ferguson, Steve Harkness and Peter Schmeichel, have all been accused of racially abusing opposition black players in recent years (Ross

1998, Football Unites Racism Divides 2000, Fifield and Brodtkin 2004). In January 2003, Reading defender John Mackie was charged with misconduct by the FA after he racially abused Carl Asaba of Sheffield United³³ (Brodtkin 2003b). In terms of off-field incidents, Kidderminster Harriers' Neil McKenzie and Newcastle United's Craig Bellamy have both faced court cases over incidents of alleged racism³⁴ (FARE monthly e-mail bulletin, March 2001; Taylor and Lloyd 2003). Most people do not unconditionally copy the actions of their idols yet, in the current climate, racism by professional players – both on and off the field – can incite and condone racism among supporters and in the wider society. Whilst many young people want to “be like Beckham” it is credible that those who are already racist want to “be like Bowyer”. Furthermore, the status of professional footballers means that their involvement in racist incidents can undermine public interpretations of the work being undertaken by anti-racist organisations and club-based schemes, and negatively affect the way in which particular clubs are perceived by British Asians.

Don't believe the hype? The effects of media publicity on young, British Asian professional players

The under-representation of British Asians in professional football first began to receive public recognition during the mid-1990s and, since then, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the issue. At the current time, it constitutes a primary focus within the anti-racist football movement. Kick It Out, for example, has published documents explicitly focusing on British Asian players (e.g. Kick It Out 1998b, 2000a). Further coverage has been provided by a variety of media, such as newspapers, magazines, television and the internet. When the issue first came to public attention, media features and articles tended to focus on the statistical under-representation of British Asians at professional level and often included testimonies of players who believed that their ethnicity was the primary factor in their failure to make the grade (e.g. Chaudhary 1996, Freeman 1996). Since then, it has been typical for media articles to provide biographical profiles of the small number of British Asian professional (or Academy-registered) players, e.g. Michael Chopra (Campbell 2001b, Hussain 2001b, D. Harrison 2003), Harpal Singh (Lindsey 1999, Bhatia

2003b, 2003c), Anwar Uddin (Herman 2001), Zesh Rehman (Hussain 2001a), Bobby Singh (Licudi 2003), and Nevin Saroya and Neerav Patel (*Brentford, Chiswick & Isleworth Times* 1995). These profiles offer an opportunity to gather information about British Asians currently attached to professional clubs and they enable young players to identify role models. However, the manner in which this coverage is undertaken raises a number of problems.

Publicity and intrusive media attention are an inevitable part of being a professional footballer, even for those players who have just started their careers. This has been recognised by the FA and commencing with the 2002-03 season, players between the ages of sixteen and eighteen at the twenty Premiership academies have been given citizenship classes to help them cope with the pressures of being a professional footballer. Three specific concerns were raised by the British Asian participants in this research regarding the publicity given to young British Asian professional players: the descriptions and assessments of these players misrepresent their actual stages of development and thus mislead the public; comparisons between these young players and established international players are unjustified and put an unfair level of expectation on them; and singling players out for attention because of their ethnicities is not beneficial to their long-term development.

In the vast majority of cases, the British Asian players that have been profiled by anti-racist organisations and the media have been aged in their mid-to-late teens and have made few, if any, first-team appearances. Nevertheless, instead of being described in terms of their modest achievements, these players have been awarded a series of over-zealous tributes that exceed their stage of development. In the late 1990s, most attention featured on Amrit Sidhu at Derby County and Nevin Saroya at Brentford. For example, in one of their promotional pamphlets, *Kick It Out* (1999: 8) claimed that, 'Amrit Sidhu's goals have attracted the attention of Jim Smith the Derby manager', and that 'Nevin's progress has been such that [Brentford] manager Ron Noades is almost certain to throw him into first team action later this season'.

However, Amrit Sidhu never played for the Derby County first-team and left the professional game shortly after the statement cited above was made. Nevin Saroya made one first-team appearance for Brentford but is now playing only semi-professionally in the Ryman League. A number of British Asian players believe that such profiles distort the standard of the players, often falsely implying that they are on the verge of playing first-team football. For example, one amateur 'Asian' player states that:

I hear about these players and you tend to look at the teamsheets but you never see their names on the teamsheets. So if they're doing *that* well, why aren't they on the teamsheet, you know, not even amongst the subs? I've never seen Harpal [Singh] turn out for the first-team at Leeds, I've never seen Anwar Uddin. I don't know why Sheffield Wednesday bought him but I've never seen him, and I do try to look out for him.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 25th April 2002]

Another player argues that organisations, such as Kick It Out, further misrepresent the situation by failing to report those British Asian players who have been unsuccessful:

By the time they've released those [brochures], [the players] have probably been released. But that doesn't get followed up, that they've been released. They don't say that, "Oh, he's actually been released now and he's training with [a] non-league [team]". Its just, "Right, forget about him, who's the next one coming through? Find him, get a photo of him and stick him in".

[Interview with 'Asian' ex-professional player, 11th March 2002]

This process of over-building players' reputations operates in other ways as well – for example, when young British Asian players are compared to established international stars. In 1999, Kick It Out (1999: 8) labelled Newcastle United's Michael Chopra – then aged only fifteen – a 'wonderkid'. A more recent profile of Chopra cited the claims of his club coach, Peter Beardsley, that he was potentially a better player than his team-mate – and former England captain – Alan Shearer (cited in Campbell 2001b). Les Reed, FA Director of Technical Development, was also quoted as stating that, 'The way he [Chopra] dribbles the ball and gets behind

defenders reminds me of Michael Owen' (ibid.). Kick It Out (1998b) also published an interview with Harpal Singh of Leeds United that cited a claim made by Singh's former manager, George Graham, that 'Liverpool may have Michael Owen but we have Harpal Singh' (cited in ibid.: 4). Alan Hill, the club's Academy Director was reported as claiming that Singh would be 'the first Asian to play for England' (ibid.). Michael Chopra made his first Premier League appearance for Newcastle United at the beginning on the 2003-04 season, having been loaned to Watford during the previous campaign. He was then loaned to Nottingham Forest in February 2004. Harpal Singh is yet to play for the Leeds United first-team but made loan appearances for Bradford City, Bristol City and Bury between 2001 and 2003.

The perception amongst British Asian players is that it is unfair to compare a young player – of any ethnicity – to an established international player. With regard to the current crop of British Asian professional players, it is felt that these comparisons are completely unjustified, as Chopra and Singh had not even played first-team football when these comparisons were made. Some of the participants in this research are suspicious of the rationale behind these comparisons. For example, one 'Asian' amateur believes not only that Harpal Singh has been over-hyped, but that there is a "hidden agenda". He argues that:

These guys that are saying that he's the next best thing to Michael Owen – on what basis have they compared that? If you look on ability, you know, Harpal Singh hasn't even played for Leeds yet, Michael Owen is European player of the year! How can you compare the two, right, unless there's something else behind it? Obviously, you know, its agents and managers and businesses. I think there is a hidden agenda. I can't compare the two. I can't compare Harpal Singh with Michael Owen.

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

Another player suggests that Singh has been used by Leeds United as part of a public relations exercise, in light of the problems they have experienced with Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate:

I think there are agendas being pursued which have got nothing to do with Harpal Singh as a footballer...I think Leeds United have got problems of their own in

terms of the way that their public image is portrayed and so on, and I think it's really, really regrettable that Harpal Singh is being hyped up to such an extent that I wonder if he will ever deliver what people's expectations of him are. But if he was left alone, as Harpal Singh playing for Leeds United, he may well be the first *Harpal Singh* to play for England. And then we might say, "By the way, he's of Asian origin as well". That's the way round it ought to be.

[Interview with 'Asian' amateur player, 23rd April 2002]

(Over-)hyping the reputations of British Asian players is more newsworthy and more beneficial to anti-racist agendas than stating that a player has, for example, made one reserve team appearance for a Third Division club. As one 'Asian' amateur player explains:

Let's face it, if those stories were portrayed [as an accurate reflection of players' development], who would give the funding to a national organisation to continue with their work? And this is where, you know, my point about well, what agendas are we following comes in, because if the agenda was really about saying, you know, "We're all in this business to promote footballers at a young age and Asians in particular, to try and get them more into the game", then we wouldn't be hyping them up. They [organisations] are desperate for role models. Anything will do. And I think they're doing an injustice and a disservice to Asian footballers because no sooner than a kid's able to kick the ball ten yards straight, then he's hyped up and then, you know, a big fall comes.

[Interview, 23rd April 2002]

Talented young professional players of *all* ethnicities are subjected to an incredible amount of media attention. Recent examples of young white players who have received massive (arguably excessive) media acclaim are Joe Cole (then of West Ham United) and Everton's current *wunderkind* Wayne Rooney. However, the media coverage that young, white players have received is a result of their indisputably prodigious abilities rather than their ethnicities. Conversely, British Asians are singled out for attention primarily because of their "Asianness". In most instances, their achievements are rather modest and it is unlikely that white or black players at similar levels of development would receive such coverage³⁵. However, anti-racist football organisations need to provide evidence that they are achieving their objectives – both to justify their existence and to continue receiving funding –

and so they need to give the impression that, as a result of their activities, British Asians have started to progressing into professional football. As one 'Indian' amateur player states:

I can see the [view of] 'Kick Racism Out' [sic] and all these other media-related organisations who have obviously been pursuing this issue. They need to see the first Asian make it to meet their goals, to say that since we've been fighting this campaign, you know, now we've suddenly got an Asian who's on the scene. Whereas from the individual's point of view, you don't want any limelight do you? It's hard enough as it is without someone saying, "Well, you've only fucking made it because you're Asian". Do you know what I mean?

[Interview, 5th February 2002]

Chapter Five demonstrates that most British Asian professional players consciously choose to under-emphasise their ethnic identities and prefer to be judged on their footballing abilities. Many players resent being expected to flaunt their ethnicities simply to serve the needs of various agencies and organisations. By focusing on the ethnicities of British Asian players, Kick It Out, for example, are not only contravening the wishes of these players, but they have also blatantly contradicted their earlier approach to anti-racism in football. For example, in the mid-1990s, the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign appropriated a Nike television advertisement for use in its publicity material (see e.g. Commission for Racial Equality 1995). The advertisement – which originally took the form of a duologue involving Les Ferdinand and Eric Cantona – stated, 'What do you see? A black man, a Frenchman or a footballer? Why argue about differences? I'd rather play football'. The underlying sentiments were ability first, ethnicity second. However, in 2003, Kick It Out co-ordinator, Piara Powar, argued that players' ethnicities remain extremely salient. In response to Michael Chopra's statement that he does not wish to be held up as a figurehead for British Asian communities, Powar stated that:

Maybe he [Chopra] doesn't want that pressure of being a standard-bearer, but, nevertheless, the cultural politics of football and race in this country are quite rich. In that context alone people will attribute a status to him, whether he likes it or not. Michael's known as somebody who has a dual heritage, and people look at that as a signifier of diversity (cited in Turnbull 2003).

British Asian footballers therefore represent an exception to Kick It Out's earlier mantra. In the eyes of this organisation, these players are clearly British Asian first, footballers second.

The issues highlighted in this chapter demonstrate the complex and contradictory nature of the politics of anti-racism in English football. It is evident that, despite their altruistic intentions, a number of anti-racist football organisations and initiatives are failing to meet the needs and desires of young British Asian footballers. At the beginning of this chapter, Cohen (1992: 62-3) suggested that, 'Perhaps the models of racism which are implicitly present in anti-racist policies and practices may be inhibiting the development of more positive and effective strategies?'. It appears that this is the case with the anti-racist football movement, where strategies are often underpinned by inappropriate models and theories of 'race', racism and "Asianness". Consequently, many of the policies and activities initiated by anti-racist football organisations, in terms of increasing the representation of British Asians in professional football, are incongruent – if not conflicting – with the identities, lifestyles and aspirations of young, working-class British Asians.

Notes

- ¹ An obvious exception is Kick It Out, whose co-ordinator, Piara Powar, is British Asian.
- ² Bhangra is a hugely popular form of Indian folk music, originating in the Punjab. A bhaji is a savoury Indian snack, usually consisting of chopped onions (but alternatively other vegetables) which are coated in a spicy batter and deep fried.
- ³ This tendency to prioritise what is effectively a form of multiculturalism is present within a number of anti-racist football organisations/club-based schemes. For example, at their community/anti-racist “fun days”, Charlton Athletic, Preston North End and Sheffield United have all hosted minority ethnic musical groups (e.g. samba bands and gospel choirs) and sold Caribbean and South Asian food (Charlton Athletic Race Equality 2000, Respect All Fans Football Initiative 2000, Football Unites Racism Divides 2001).
- ⁴ In terms of African-Caribbeans, Bradbury (2001b) states that there are fifty-seven black coaches and fifty-five black scouts currently employed in professional football. Whilst black coaches/scouts are not nearly as prevalent as black players in English professional football, it appears that, contrary to popular opinion, they are well-represented in proportion to the overall population (where they represent about one per cent). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that coaching and management recruitment procedures are characterised by institutional racism. For example, former professional player Chris Ramsey is the most qualified black football coach in Britain – he possesses the UEFA ‘A’ coaching licence and diploma – and holds the honour of being the first black England football manager (of the under-20 side). However, since leaving this position, he has been unable to find employment in Britain. Ramsey has argued that this is due to ‘institutional racism’ in professional football (Conn 2001). In 2001 he became coach of American A-League side Charleston Battery. Claims that professional football is characterised by institutional racism have also been made by other black players, such as Aston Villa’s Dion Dublin (BBC TV 2003d) and Paul Davis, a former Arsenal player who resigned as coach of the club’s under-15 side in September 2003, claiming that he was overlooked for promotion because he is black (Chaudhary 2003b). This belief is not universally endorsed though. For example, Chris Kamara, one of the few black players to have progressed into management – taking charge of Bradford City between 1995 and 1998 and Stoke City in 1998 – argues that the main issue is not racism, but a lack of coaching qualifications amongst black players (Kamara 2003). In October 2003, the CRE announced that it will be investigating what it believes to be a failure by professional clubs to recruit non-white staff in coaching and administrative positions.

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- ⁵ England is the only major European footballing nation where an individual can become a professional football manager without possessing a single coaching qualification. Consequently, undertaking a career in football coaching or management is a viable option for many professional players when they retire. The close network of contacts that exists in professional football (see Chapter Five) means that managers often recruit former team-mates onto their coaching staff. It is very difficult, therefore, for “outsiders” to gain employment. For example, in 2003, Stephen Constantine, an English coach, was manager of the Indian national team. Constantine possesses far superior qualifications than the majority of managers in the English professional game but, because he did not play at a high level in Britain, he has failed to get a job with an English club. He claims that, ‘I’m not one of the boys. I was on an FA coaching course with a player who was at Man[chester] United at the time. He was absolutely crap but he got his badge. I asked the assessor, “How come?”, and he told me, “We want top pros to get their licences and stay in the game because they bring kids into the game”’ (cited in *Four Four Two* 2001: 7).
- ⁶ For example, in February 2001, plans to turn the Al Hijrah school in Bordesley Green, Birmingham into Britain’s first state-funded Islamic secondary school were labelled ‘a question of apartheid in education’ by Conservative councillor James Hutchings (Smithers 2001).
- ⁷ The FA gives Kick It Out £70,000 per year. The Premier League and the Professional Footballers’ Association each provide £110,000 per year.
- ⁸ Together with Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghıp, Winston Silcott was part of the ‘Broadwater Three’, the men convicted for the death of PC Keith Blakelock during riots at Broadwater Farm, north London in 1985. Silcott was sentenced in 1987 but after a lengthy campaign his conviction was overturned in 1993. He was awarded £50,000 for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution although he remained in prison for the murder of Anthony Smith in 1984. In October 2003, Silcott was freed on licence from Blantyre House Open Prison in Kent. In 2000, the Metropolitan Police paid the family of Stephen Lawrence £320,000 compensation for its failures during and after the investigation into the death of their son. In 2001, Darren Hoole was awarded compensation after being racially abused and assaulted by police officers in south Wales. In 2003, Sylbert Farquharson was awarded £243,488 compensation for assault, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution after he was arrested by police officers in Stockwell, south London in 1995. Also that year, Francisco Borg was awarded £40,000 damages for false imprisonment after being arrested by police officers in Cardiff in 1997. The Metropolitan Police are also facing lawsuits from Delroy Lindo and Duwayne Brooks. Lindo, a friend of Winston Silcott, was stopped by police thirty-seven times during an eight-year period and was the victim of three unlawful arrests. Brooks was with his friend, Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in Eltham, south-east London

in 1993. He claims that, despite being the main witness to – and also a victim in – the attack, he was not given sufficient care and protection by the Metropolitan Police (see Brooks with Hattenstone 2003). In September 2003, an inquest into the death of Roger Sylvester – a black man suffering from mental health problems who slipped into a coma after being restrained by police officers in north London in 1999 – delivered a verdict of ‘unlawful killing’. This is the seventh verdict of ‘unlawful killing’ regarding the death of a black man in police custody since 1980 (see Athwal 2003).

⁹ The Metropolitan Police, in particular, have also faced law suits from a number of their own minority ethnic officers. In 2002, the force awarded Sergeant Gurpal Viridi approximately £300,000 for racial discrimination, loss of career and injury of feelings. He had been wrongly sacked in 1998 after being accused of fabricating the racist hate mail that he had received and, indeed, sending it to other colleagues. In September 2003, Inspector Dal Babu won a landmark case against the Metropolitan Police at an employment tribunal after he claimed that he was subjected to discrimination because he was a Muslim. In November 2003, the Metropolitan Police agreed to pay damages of over £100,000 to Chief Inspector Leroy Logan, who was wrongly accused of corruption. In September 2003, the organisation for which Logan is chairman, the Metropolitan Black Police Association (MBPA), publicly stated that they would discourage minority ethnic people from joining the force until an inquiry is held into the case of Superintendent Ali Dizaei. Dizaei was subject to a four-year investigation over allegations that he endangered national security and used drugs and prostitutes. He was suspended in January 2001 but acquitted of all charges in September 2003.

¹⁰ In March 2001, four Manchester City fans were charged with shouting racist abuse at a match. It is believed that this is the first conviction of its type under the Football Disorder Act (2000) (*Guardian* 2001b). In September 2001, two Burnley supporters – out of a group of approximately 1500 fans cited as chanting racist abuse during a match at Bradford City – were banned from attending all football matches for three years (FARE Monthly Bulletin September/October 2001). In January 2003, a Birmingham City supporter was sentenced to 180 hours community service and banned from attending all matches for three years after racially abusing a British Asian police officer outside a football ground (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism 2003). Three months later, a man was jailed for fifteen months after committing the same offence at Exeter City (*Guardian* 2003b). The number of arrests for racist chanting increased from forty-seven during the 2001-02 season to seventy-four in the following campaign (Chaudhary 2003c).

¹¹ In particular, attention has been focused on police harassment, perceptions of black men as muggers, and the implications of the “sus” law and “stop and search” policies (see e.g. Hall et al

1978, Solomos 1988, Phillips and Phillips 1999). The “sus” law refers to Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act (1824). Under this law ‘people can be arrested on suspicion that an offence is likely to be committed’ (cited in Bloom 2003: 440). It was replaced in August 1981 by the Criminal Attempts Act.

- ¹² In the unrest in Bradford, 326 police officers were injured in two days. Eighty-three officers were injured in the disturbances in Burnley and two in Oldham. A total of 395 arrests were made in conjunction with the disorder (Home Office 2001a).
- ¹³ In April 2002, the CPS decided not to charge the police officer whose arrest of Hossein Miah in June 2001 is believed to have caused the disturbances in Harehills.
- ¹⁴ After their pictures were distributed by the police, a large number of British Asians who were involved in the urban unrest in Bradford during the summer of 2001 voluntarily gave themselves up. Many of them had no previous convictions and provided good character references in court, yet were sentenced to prison terms of between four and six years (Travis 2002a). In a court of appeal verdict in January 2003, Michael Mansfield QC decreed that the sentencing of these men was ‘manifestly excessive’ and claimed that the original trial judge had ignored the ‘matrix of fear’ present amongst British Asians in the city (Dodd 2003a). A number of sentences have since been reduced.
- ¹⁵ The BBC investigation aimed to expose racism in the police force and involved uncover journalist Mark Daly enrolling at the police training school in Bruche, near Warrington. Daly actually completed his training and served as a police officer for a number of months before his true identity was discovered. The documentary, which was recorded on hidden cameras, showed young, white policemen making overt racist comments and admitting to treating white and British Asian citizens differently during the course of their duties. In particular, one officer was filmed imitating a member of the Ku Klux Klan (by wearing a pillow case over his head) and simulating beating the sole British Asian recruit at the college. The white officer was also heard fantasising about killing the British Asian man. By December 2003, nine of the officers “named and shamed” in the investigation had resigned.
- ¹⁶ As part of their tours to England, as well as playing professional club sides, India have also played other nations. In 2000, India played Bangladesh at Leicester City’s Filbert Street whilst, in 2002, they played Jamaica at Vicarage Road (Watford) and Molineux (Wolverhampton Wanderers). Similarly, in 2001, Southampton’s St. Mary’s Stadium hosted a match between Japan and Nigeria and in 2003, Venezuela played Nigeria at Watford.

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- ¹⁷ The AIFF is the national governing body for football in India.
- ¹⁸ The contention that forging links with football clubs in India can help English professional teams improve relations with their local British Asian communities was the rationale between the partnership formed by Leicester City FC, East Bengal FC (from Calcutta) and the All India Football Federation (AIFF) in February 2004. According to Leicester City, the partnership will involve the exchange of players, coaches, and marketing and commercial staff (Leicester City FC 2004a). Steve White of Foxes Against Racism (FAR) states that, 'I hope this initiative will animate clubs and players in our community to become involved with Leicester City. I know it will help nurture and identify talent right on our doorstep. This is a creative and imaginative way of linking the club and the local community' (cited in Leicester City FC 2004b). Similarly, Cllr Roger Blackmore, leader of Leicester City Council, argued that, 'By signing these agreements, Leicester City has shown that it's keen to forge closer links with the Indian community in Leicester' (ibid.). Whilst Leicester City's recognition of the city's large Indian community is undoubtedly a positive development, it would be fair to suggest that the degree to which a partnership involving a club situated thousands of miles away will benefit young, second and third generation British Asian footballers in inner-city Leicester is highly debatable.
- ¹⁹ By way of comparison, as a result of recruiting Chinese internationals Li Tie and Li Weifeng for the 2002-03 season, Everton significantly improved their profile and commercial activities in China and its British diaspora (Fifield 2002). Fulham and Portsmouth have gained similar advantages by signing players from Japan.
- ²⁰ Tickets for the matches between India and Jamaica in 2002 were priced £20 for adults and £10 for children. It is not necessarily the case that British Asians cannot afford these prices (see Chapter Seven). Rather, the issue is whether supporters in general would wish to spend that amount of money on tickets for purely a friendly match.
- ²¹ In an advertisement in the programme for the match between Fulham and India (22nd July 2000), Sapphire listed their activities as: event management, player management, promotion, hospitality, consultancy, production, sponsorship, advertising and merchandising.
- ²² Before signing for Bury, Bhutia had been offered to Aston Villa and Fulham for trials.
- ²³ For example, in 1998, as a consequence of their matches against the KFF, Millwall signed goalkeeper Amritpal Sidhu on schoolboy forms.

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- ²⁴ There are occasional exceptions of players being signed by professional clubs directly from amateur football at a later age, for example, Kevin Phillips (signed from Baldock Town), Lee Trundle (Rhyl) and Ian Wright (Greenwich Borough).
- ²⁵ Professional footballers have always been examples for boys and young men in terms of their playing abilities, and to wider sections of the population through their position as iconic figures within the local area or community (Giulianotti and Gerrard 2001, Whannel 2001). In the first half of the twentieth century, many players undertook military service, were married with “nuclear” families, and were regarded as exhibiting the demeanour and behaviour of “gentlemen”. In many ways they were seen to espouse the desired values of conservative British society and were identified as figures that young men should aspire to imitate. Professional players became “working-class heroes” (see e.g. BBC TV 2003b). In contrast, the so-called “permissive society” of the 1960s coincided with an increase in media attention given to professional footballers and, for the first time, the public became aware of the “extra curricular” activities of rich, famous players (Steen 1994). Since this period, players have been guilty of domestic violence, assault, drink-driving, match-fixing, taking “bungs” (illegal payments), drug dealing and involvement with counterfeit money. Others have admitted addiction to alcohol, drugs and/or gambling (Williams 1996). Whilst they continued to be revered by supporters – indeed the status of some players was more a result of their notoriety for off-field exploits than their playing performances – the positive image of footballers as appropriate role models started to diminish. However, as a result of the changing social status of football, since the 1990s, players have again been attributed with social and moral respectability.
- ²⁶ For example, in 2002, England captain David Beckham and Manchester City’s England international Robbie Fowler spoke out, on behalf of the Blood Pressure Association, to encourage people – especially British Asians, who are particularly at risk – to regularly check their blood pressure (*Eastern Eye* 2002b). Liverpool and England player Steven Gerrard was involved in a campaign for the homelessness charity, Shelter (Cope 2002). Former Arsenal and England captain Tony Adams has been used by the Army in campaigns encouraging sensible consumption of alcohol, whilst Chelsea’s Graeme Le Saux has acted as a figurehead for the Portland Group (the educational section of the alcohol industry) to discourage drink driving (Collins and Vamplew 2002). Most recently, in 2003, the FA Premier League, together with the National Literacy Trust, launched the *Reading the Game* initiative. Under the scheme, each club nominates a player to be a “reading champion”, who then chooses a selection of adults’ and children’s books to be purchased and distributed to a local library.

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- ²⁷ The original trial was halted after ten weeks of proceedings when, on the 8th April 2001, the *Sunday Mirror* published an article that was considered prejudicial against the defendants. The newspaper cited the claims of Sarfraz Najeib's father that racism was intrinsic in the assault. The lawyer for Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate successfully argued that the publicity from this article would prevent his clients receiving a fair trial by jury.
- ²⁸ Paul Clifford and Neale Caveney, friends of Jonathan Woodgate from his home town of Middlesbrough, were sentenced to six years imprisonment for GBH (grievous bodily harm) with intent and affray, and 100 hours community service for affray, respectively.
- ²⁹ Leeds United's image was further damaged by an incident that occurred during a social function held at their Elland Road ground in May 2002. Liverpool-born "comedian" Stan Boardman was the main act and during his performance, he referred to the Najeib assault. Boardman portrayed a fictional scenario in which Bowyer and Woodgate leave a nightclub and, in discussing where to go for some food, one says to the other, 'I could murder an Indian'. A British Asian guest – and a well-known Leeds United supporter of many years – called Boardman a 'disgrace'. Boardman replied, 'Fucking hell, I'm being heckled by Pakis now! Why don't you go back to your curry house or shop in Bradford? Your elephant's waiting outside' (cited in *Eastern Eye* 2002c). This is not the first occasion that the entertainment at a social function has caused problems for professional clubs and, in particular, their relationship with local British Asian communities. For example, in February 1997, Wolverhampton Wanderers booked notoriously racist "comedian" Bernard Manning to appear at a club event. This not only alienated local minority ethnic groups but was also perceived as compromising the club's commitment to anti-racism (Garland & Rowe 1999).
- ³⁰ One can draw direct parallels between the situation at Leeds United and that at Yorkshire County Cricket Club. In January 2003, Yorkshire's Australian international Darren Lehmann became the first player to be charged under cricket's new racism code. After being run out whilst playing for Australia against Sri Lanka, Lehmann entered the dressing room and, according to the Sri Lankan reserve players and management, shouted, "Cunts, cunts, fucking black cunts" (cited in Hopps 2003). The Australian Cricket Board instructed Lehmann to undergo immediate racism counselling, whilst the International Cricket Council (ICC) awarded the maximum penalty, banning him for four Test Matches and eight One-Day Internationals. Whilst Yorkshire have fielded Indian internationals Sachin Tendulkar and Yuvraj Singh, they have been strongly criticised for their failure to recruit players from the large local British Asian populations (see Williams 2001). As is the case at Leeds United, the behaviour of Lehmann and the club's attempts

to play down the issue (English 2003) are likely to have significant implications in terms of the club's work with British Asians.

³¹ Beckham stated that, 'Respect has got to be shown to the opposition, especially with the national anthem. Booming a national anthem before the game is disrespectful. Racism, violence and people running onto the pitch has got to be put out of our game. It is going to get us into a lot of trouble' (cited in Taylor and Kelso 2003b). The FA also took the unique step of releasing "mug shots" of twenty-nine supporters who invaded the pitch at the Turkey match in an appeal to the public to identify the perpetrators.

³² Cantona was sent off whilst playing for Manchester United against Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in January 1995. As Cantona made his way along the touch-line to the dressing rooms he was abused by Matthew Simmons, a Crystal Palace supporter (aged in his early thirties) who had run down to the front of the stand from his seat. After a verbal exchange, Cantona launched a two-footed kick at Simmons over the advertising hoardings and the two were involved in a scuffle. Cantona was sentenced to 120 hours community service and banned by the FA from playing for eight months (see Wilkie with Miller 2003).

³³ Mackie received a three-match ban plus a further suspended five-match ban.

³⁴ McKenzie faced a court trial for calling a taxi driver a "Paki". Bellamy was charged with racially abusing a man in a Cardiff nightclub (see Chapter Six).

³⁵ An exception is Jermaine Pennant, a "mixed-race" player at Arsenal. Arsenal signed Pennant for two million pounds from Notts County in January 1999, a week before the player's sixteenth birthday. He had only made two appearances for the Notts County first-team. Pennant has failed to live up to the considerable hype he received in his teenage years. By the end of the 2002-03 season, he had made only six starts (in all competitions) for Arsenal. He has spent two periods on loan at Watford and joined Leeds United on loan for the 2003-04 season.

Chapter 9

Full Time: Concluding thoughts on football, anti-racism and young, male, British Asian identities

Introduction

Football is undeniably the most researched and written about sport in Britain, yet British Asian players have systematically been excluded from contributing to analyses of the game. Most significantly, *their* accounts of British Asian under-representation in professional football have not been listened to or integrated into official reports or academic publications. It is hoped that this thesis has gone some way to addressing this problem.

The inquiry has been wide-ranging. The primary research question, ‘Why are British Asians under-represented as professional footballers?’ has involved an investigation into how young, male, British Asian footballers explain their under-representation in the professional game, and an analysis of the strategies and policies employed by the anti-racist football movement to overcome this phenomenon. This thesis has shown that not only is football a popular leisure activity amongst young British Asian men, but also that it represents a substantial component in the construction of specifically *British* Asian lifestyles and identities. However, the work undertaken by anti-racist football organisations is often in direct conflict with the attitudes and aspirations of British Asian players, thus inhibiting the ability of these agencies to overcome the under-representation of British Asians as professional footballers.

A major component of the significance and originality of this research is the large amount of rich, detailed ethnographic material provided – in particular, the depth and quality of the oral testimonies articulated by British Asian players. The insights that have been generated through dialogues with these players highlight the implications of their previous “silencing”. Rather than presenting them as the *objects* of the inquiry, in this project their voices have been central to the analysis of exclusion, signalling the importance of giving British Asian players an active role in future research and in the construction and implementation of policies. However, the “silencing” of British Asians is present not only in sport, but also in other political and popular spheres. It is a consequence of wider dramas of ‘race’, culture and

power enacted in Britain – and its Empire – over the last three hundred years. It is not something that can, or will, be rectified overnight.

This research has demonstrated that any investigation into the lives of young, British Asian men – whether in football or in other social spheres – cannot be undertaken with any degree of authenticity without ascertaining the views of British Asians themselves. British Asian players do not need someone to speak *for* them. As their oral testimonies highlight, they are more than capable of constructing their own arguments. What has been lacking is an intermediary or facilitator to provide a forum for them and, in the absence of direct channels of dialogue, to represent their interests and aspirations to a variety of institutions and agencies, such as the football authorities, the anti-racist football movement, the media and the academic community. This research has gone some way to overcoming the “silencing” of British Asian footballers. It is hoped that this will lead to a greater acknowledgement of their position as authoritative voices in the field and result in greater levels of understanding, empathy and constructive dialogue.

During both the formal interviews and the informal *ad hoc* conversations held with British Asian players, there was overwhelming evidence of a deep and sensitive appreciation of the factors underpinning their under-representation as professional footballers. Although various organisations and agencies – and, indeed, academics – have only relatively recently begun seriously to focus on this topic, the issues raised in this research were clearly not new to British Asian players themselves. Their participation in football is of great importance to them and they perceive their under-representation at professional level to be a significant problem. Whilst middle-class British Asians may be well-represented in high-profile, high-salary professions, for example, as doctors and lawyers (see e.g. BBC TV 2003a), young working-class British Asians are, by comparison, poorly represented in professional football. This is in spite of the fact that football culture comprises a significant feature of their lifestyles and identities, and achieving inclusion in professional football has become hugely important to them.

The players appreciated the complexities and sensitivities of their positions and they were able to locate the significance of their own achievements within the “bigger picture”. They were aware that their generation is currently challenging traditional notions of “Asianness”, particularly norms, values and structures related to the family, religion, financial prudence, attire, leisure activities and career aspirations. British Asian players displayed few inhibitions with regard to contradicting dominant representations and propositions, and actively eschewed adherence to ‘political correctness’. They had also clearly previously thought through the linkages between their under-representation as professionals and a range of wider socio-political phenomena. Participants coherently articulated their attitudes towards, and interpretations of, a variety of subjects including ‘race’ and racism, nationhood, the politics of identity and representation, governmental policies and strategies, and controversial social occurrences, such as the urban unrest of summer 2001. Many of these issues were raised by participants themselves and logical linkages between different areas of inquiry were often identified without prompting. Basically, the players that were interviewed *wanted* to talk. It was rarely necessary to probe deeply to encourage dialogue and players were admirably open about a number of personal, emotive and contentious matters.

Towards an understanding of football and young, male, British Asian lifestyles and identities

In seeking to understand the contemporary position of young British Asian footballers it is necessary to examine both the *structural* constraints that these players endure and their role as *agents* in developing their own careers (cf. Giddens 1984). There is a need to focus on the effects of racism in society and the structures of professional football, together with players’ abilities to actively create and modify their own identities in a manner that they perceive will facilitate their success in the game and their inclusion as “one of the lads”. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that British Asian players who exhibit or promote the Anglo- or Anglicised components of their identities have been able to reduce the degree to which their cultural difference has been apparent or problematic, and thus have achieved greater

inclusion and success within the professional game than those who are more “traditional” in their “Asianness”. This research has demonstrated that British Asians who play for professional clubs have lifestyles that are similar in many ways to those of their team-mates of different ethnicities, including whites and African-Caribbeans. In other words, they share with them a sporting or a cultural habitus.

British Asian players that have reached the professional level do not display outward symbols of their “Asianness”. They do not, for example, play matches wearing turbans or report for training dressed in *shalwar kameez*¹. This might mean that British Asian players are less likely to be recruited from what might be described as distinct or “traditional” British Asian communities, such as those in the northern mill towns or areas of London such as Newham, Southall and Tower Hamlets. It might also be perceived that players from particular British Asian religious and cultural backgrounds might be more able, or willing, than others to make the necessary sacrifices involved in becoming “one of the lads”. This latter argument is proposed by football coach Jimmy Khan, who has identified the prominence of Sikhs amongst those British Asians who have been, or are currently, involved in professional football. According to Khan (2001), this is due to the fact that ‘their families have perhaps exempted them from religious activities. There is Harpal Singh at Leeds who does not wear a turban’. This supposition was also identified in this research where, with reference to a discussion on *gurdwara* (Sikh temple) attendance, one (Sikh) ‘Asian’ ex-professional/current semi-professional player commented that, ‘I don’t even go there myself much. I haven’t been for years’ [Interview, 28th January 2002]. A predictable extension to this line of thinking is that British Muslims, who arguably adhere to their cultural and religious traditions more strongly than other British Asian groups (Statham 1999), are less likely to possess the necessary cultural capital to play professional football. Whilst there is a degree of plausibility in both arguments, empirical evidence suggests that, in reality, they are far from accurate. Some of the current cohort of young, British Asian professional players reside in predominantly “white” areas whilst others come from distinct British Asian communities in Tower Hamlets and West Yorkshire.

Similarly, over half of the players directly cited in this research – both participants and other players – are Muslims. However, it is not simply a case of young British Asian players modifying their identities in *response* to the dominant player cultures of professional football. Instead, the increasing similarities between the lifestyles and identities of British Asian and white/African-Caribbean footballers are clearly related to transformations in contemporary articulations of both “Asianness” and wider issues of ‘race’, ethnicity and identity.

The early twenty-first century is witnessing a generation of young British Asian men resisting stereotypical conceptions of “Asianness” and what it means to be young, male and of South Asian heritage in contemporary Britain. Their definitions, articulations, experiences and expectations of being British Asian in the contemporary epoch are clearly different from – although not necessarily a source of conflict with – those of previous generations. They are promoting a sense of “Asianness” no longer defined predominantly by ethnic identity, religious attendance, language or subcontinental cultures but with increasing reference to other globally-mediated spheres such as sport, music, fashion, style and consumption, combined with a localism based in their personal and urban landscapes (cf. Robertson 1995). As Mason (2003a: 15) points out, it is important to recognise that ‘ethnicity is not the only – nor even necessarily the most important – component of people’s identities’. British Asian footballers possess a multitude of identities that shift in importance relative to the life-cycle, particular contexts and situations. Certainly, in football their ethnic identities are often deprioritised behind their status as *players*. As current professional footballer Anwar Uddin succinctly recalls, ‘To be honest, *I wasn’t conscious of the fact that I was Asian*. I just wanted to become a football player and I didn’t want anything to get in the way of that’ (cited in BBC TV 2003c). Equally importantly, young British Asians, and particularly footballers, are generating resistance to processes of labelling, stereotyping and being channelled towards “traditional” paths with regard to leisure and employment. There is thus a need to move away from outdated sociological frameworks that interpret the lives of young British Asians predominantly in the context of the cultures and religions of

the subcontinent, and that situate them within processes of generational contestation and conflict and spatial dislocation in a global consumer culture.

In recent years, increasing recognition has been given to the fact that British Asians operate in spheres grounded in both the cultural traditions of the subcontinent *and* the social practices of Britain and beyond. Traditionally, this has tended to lead to the dichotomisation of practices and subsequently, young British Asians are popularly seen as being “caught between two cultures” (e.g. Anwar 1976, Watson 1977, Anwar 1998). In other words, they are seen to operate within a cultural “no man’s land” whereby their attempts to integrate into “mainstream” British society are constrained by the influence of their parents and repelled by discriminatory social practices. For example, reiterating the theories of 1930s American sociologists such as Stonequist (1937), Ghuman (1999: 11) has gone as far as to suggest that, as a result of their “marginality”, British Asian adolescents face an ‘identity crisis’. He argues that they ‘are likely to find identity exploration and formation a real challenge because of dual socialization and racial prejudice’ (Ghuman 2003: 35-6). However, as Ramji (2003: 229) argues, ‘By framing questions of culture as dichotomous and oppositional, traditional or Western, the clash of culture thesis fails to come to grips with the complex realities of South Asian [people’s] everyday lives’. In the last decade, authors such as Kathleen Hall (1995) have argued that notions of “biculturalism” and “cultural conflict” have become increasingly inadequate in understanding the lives of British Asians. She posits that the way young British Asians shift between cultural spheres represents the possession of a ‘fragmented consciousness’ and, in her ethnography of Sikh school children in Leeds, argues that the dominant perception amongst these youngsters is that there is ‘a time to act Indian [home] and a time to act English [at school and in town]’ (ibid.: 254). Nevertheless, whilst Hall suggests that young Sikhs possess the agency to switch between cultures at will and without confusion – thus echoing Park’s (1928) *positive* interpretation of the “marginal man” – she actually implies an essentialist and dichotomous model of “Indian” and “British” cultures. Therefore, both interpretations – that of cultural conflict and the post-modern notion of cultural

fragmentation – are problematic in their representations of British Asian lifestyles and identities. The former polarises subcontinental and British “cultures” as mutually exclusive entities, whilst the latter suggests that young British Asians literally “pick-and-mix” a variety of elements to form a cultural *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962, Hebdige 1979) of separate, distinct South Asian and British elements. These approaches fail to appreciate the possibility for fusions or “creolisations” of subcontinental and British cultural forms.

Whilst recognition of, and adherence to, the religions and traditional practices of the subcontinent remain intrinsic elements in the identities and lifestyles of many British Asians, divisions between these and what might loosely be labelled “western” practices are becoming increasingly blurred. In many cases, the lifestyles and identities of young British Asians are being articulated in relation to the sensibilities of urban, twenty-first century Britain and consequently new identities and ethnicities (Hall 1996) are being actively created. For many young British Asian footballers, these processes are undertaken with reference to their lives in Rusholme, Southall or Stepney rather than, in the case of previous generations, to the “imagined” lives of friends and relations in Rawalpindi, Srinagar or Sylhet. Synthesising the cultures of their own ethnic communities with elements of local or (inter-) national popular culture, these players are able to form identities that are specifically *British Asian* (see e.g. Gillespie 1995). In other words, it is crucial to acknowledge that being British Asian is not the same as being Asian in Britain. The hybridisation of British and South Asian identities thus represents a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1990) from which new forms and articulations of British “Asianness” develop². Football is a key site for the construction and emergence of new British Asian identities. However, these articulations of “Asianness” have not been fully recognised by many in the anti-racist football movement.

Reflections on the anti-racist football movement

In the field of football and anti-racism and, in particular, in projects aimed at British Asians, it is clear that, by failing to engage in appropriate consultation, decision-

makers have not taken on board sufficiently the interests and sensitivities of the people that they are targeting in their work. This thesis has highlighted that, by consulting with British Asian footballers, extensive and detailed insights into their identities, lifestyles, attitudes and aspirations can be uncovered. Excluding them from the analysis means that one cannot possibly gain an adequate appreciation of such issues. The failure of the anti-racist football movement to implement appropriate channels of communication with young British Asian footballers has meant that many organisations do not possess a reality-congruent understanding of young British Asians. Many anti-racist football organisations misconceive and misinterpret the issues facing these players. This lack of awareness and understanding of the complexities of British Asian lifestyles and identities raises doubts about the efficacy of political or pressure group initiatives working in this area.

This analysis has highlighted that there is often a conflict of interests between anti-racist football organisations, professional clubs, funders/sponsors and other related agencies. A number of ideologies and practices are clearly contradictory, for example, encouraging ethnic *integration* in amateur football and then promoting ethnic *segregation* in coaching programmes. Further, the involvement in anti-racist football projects of agencies that prioritise publicity and profit compromises the long-term development of British Asian football. Whilst some anti-racist football organisations appear to appreciate the necessity of consulting and collaborating with British Asian communities, they do not always engage with the most appropriate sections, i.e. young, working-class men. In many instances the strategies that they employ actually alienate young British Asian footballers, whether it be through collaborating exclusively with established “community leaders” or with external agencies, such as the police. In all cases, it is evident that many anti-racist football organisations are inadvertently marginalising young British Asians and excluding them from vital discussions and decision-making processes regarding their inclusion in professional football.

As their oral testimonies demonstrate, there is clearly a degree of criticism amongst British Asian footballers regarding the rationales, manifestations and achievements of anti-racist football organisations. There is also a perception that British Asian football projects are the result of a contemporary fascination with the nexus between ‘race’ and football within the game itself, the government and commercial business. As a result, a number of players are concerned that the current anti-racist focus on British Asian footballers is simply an ephemeral – politically astute but superficial – development and subject to the whims of politicians and football’s “equality warriors”. They believe that the attention given to British Asian footballers will simply evanesce when another “ism” becomes fashionable. By way of conclusion, the thoughts of one ‘Asian’ ex-professional/current semi-pro player are worth quoting at length:

I sat on a couple of meetings [with an anti-racist football organisation]. I’ll not say the name of the meeting that I was sat on for obvious reasons. There’s one or two people involved with this set-up and I sat back and looked over the last few years. They’re local people and I think, “What are they trying to achieve?”. And I sat back and thought, “Right, obviously they care about Asians in football. [Yet] two years have gone by and they’re still doing the same job”. I’m thinking, “Is there something in it for them?”. I’ve seen these people walking round [this city] eating in restaurants and doing whatever. I’m thinking, “Right, so they’re getting funded for doing this, what do they want to get out of it?” Or are they just jumping on the bandwagon, doing things for the sake of doing them and not really achieving anything?...People see it, “Asian football’s a problem, I’m going to jump on the bandwagon and have a piece of this pie”...I just think people are in it for themselves. They see it, you know, “I’ll jump on this because it can help me gain publicity and keep me in a job for a few years”. I think people do that and I think it’s wrong because it happens all over the country, you know. It’s just a craze at the moment, isn’t it? Oh, *Asian* football, *Asian* this, *Asian* that.

[Interview, 5th March 2002]

This research will hopefully make a contribution not only to the academic fields of ‘race’ and ethnicity, youth and sport but also to the construction of more appropriate anti-racist policies in football. It is equally important that this inquiry becomes accessible to British Asian players themselves. Many of the players involved in the research did not want just to participate in it – they wanted to read

the finished product. During the research, one ex-professional British Asian player offered some precious photographs of himself playing for his professional club. When I asked him why he was prepared to part with such special items, his response was, “Because *you* can tell our story, Dan”. His sentiments embody the feelings of all the players involved in the project, who clearly felt that they have been denied the opportunity to speak out in the past. This research provides an opportunity for them to express their frustrations, feelings, hopes and desires. All the British Asian players, without exception, understood that they did not possess the power to change their circumstances on their own and wanted, at the very least, for their voices to be heard. Their story may not be the whole story but it certainly represents a more substantial chapter than has hitherto been written.

Notes

- ¹ *Shalwar kameez* are the traditional loose shirt and trousers worn many South Asians, particularly Muslims.
- ² In August 2003, a groundbreaking photography exhibition provided a hitherto ignored exposition of young, British Asian identities and subcultural practices during the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries. *Changing Faces*, held in London, included images of British Asian Punks, Teddy Boys, Ravers and B-Boys, and British Asians playing sport and socialising in pubs and clubs.

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