Racisms, resistance and identity in local football in Leicestershire [presentation]

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Citation: BRADBURY, S. and KAY, T. 2007. Racisms, resistance and identity in local football in Leicestershire. Annual Conference of the International Sociology of Sport Association, Copenhagen, Denmark

Additional Information:

- This is a conference presentation.

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/24378

Version: Accepted version

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Research background

Background to study:
• FA funded evaluation of BME inclusion in local football in Leicestershire
• Focus on club development, player recruitment and equity issues

Phase One research
• Questionnaire based survey of 246 clubs: a 38% response rate

Phase Two research
• Follow-up interviews with ten case-study clubs, including five ‘Majority BME’ clubs

Methodological issues
• Research identity: issues of reflexivity, access, and discursive space
The study

Key areas of focus

• Contextualise the historical and ongoing development of Majority BME clubs
• Majority BME clubs as sites of active resistance to racism and the provision of positive multi-cultural spaces

Theoretical framework

• ‘Racialisation’ approach to understanding racism and identity formation
• Complexity of racisms: diverse expressions and experience
• Cultural identities: socially constructed and racialised
• How is ‘race’ and identity played out at the local level of football?
The social and cultural context of Leicester

2001 Census: population figures for ethnicity in Leicestershire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Leicester</th>
<th>Leicestershire</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual-heritage</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Majority BME clubs

Key facts:

• All clubs formed between 1968 and 1979 and Leicester-based
• Total of 231 BME male adult players and 448 BME male youth players
• Clubs account for 36% of all BME male adult and 41% of all BME male youth players in Leicestershire
• Between 72% and 88% of club players from BME backgrounds
• Strong cultural and religious club identities
• Club names represent dual local and cultural identity (e.g., Leicester Khalsa, Leicester Nirvana etc)
Historical development and barriers to access and inclusion

It was difficult for us to go and knock on [White] clubs doors and say ‘can we play?’ They would look at you and say ‘hang on, how can you play. You’re Asian’. That’s the reason why all of these [BME] clubs were set up in the first place. Because they couldn’t get into White teams (Vice-Chair, Majority BME Club)

‘Traditionally, there’s never been much access for Asian people getting into White teams. It limited a lot of players in terms of where they could play. But there was a firm interest in football amongst young people, attached to their sort of gangs, you know, or the Sikh temples and Hindu temples and so on. That’s how it all started’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME club)
Safeguards against racist abuse and harassment

‘I know last season there was this Asian boy playing for a White team. He was getting called racist names, not from his own players so much, but the opposition players and the parents and so on. Nothing was done about this and he’s left and he’s gone to [a Majority BME club]. That’s the reason why you get a lot of Asians who stay at the clubs where they feel comfortable and safe. If something ‘kicks off’, the whole club will stick up for you, so you’re not just on your own like you would be at a White club’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME club)
Incidence and experiences of racisms

“We’ve had a group of supporters behind the goal shouting “Get on with it, Nigger”; ‘You should stick to robbing cars’; ‘You fucking Paki’ and so on. It’s probably more of the spectators than players, parents as well as young people. It happens more when we’ve played out of town, even more abuse there than when you play in the White inner city areas’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME Club)

‘More recently, opposition players haven’t used a swear word, but they have been derogatory and flippant about people’s cultural background, about cultural modes of dress and behaviour patterns. Really demeaning and derogatory behaviour. I think there is a subtle line between that kind of behaviour and the out and out rudeness and bullishness that may take place between white players. When you have black players involved they [white players] have that condescending tone’ (Committee member, Majority BME club)
Familial, religious and cultural continuities

‘I mean, a lot of the players are second and third generation [club] players anyway. The club itself has been going for a long time and the people who have played for the club have got sons and grandsons and they want them to stay with the same club they played for. Because the first lot of players were Sikhs, the follow-up are Sikhs. It’s not intentional, it’s just how it has always been from the start’ (Committee Member, Majority BME club)

‘It’s the identity of those [Majority BME] clubs and the identity of the people. I mean, the reasons why they were set up in the first place was because they couldn’t get into White teams. So therefore they set themselves up to create their own identity to establish themselves as a force and to continue that sort of common purpose. ‘Black’ people need to have that identity, and all these clubs identify with a specific identity, you know, religious, cultural, a common identity for the community’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME club)
Integration, inclusiveness and positive multi-cultural spaces (1)

‘We’ve got no problems with kids from different ethnic backgrounds. We just want the kids to enjoy themselves and be part of the club. My teams have been predominantly Sikh. But I’ve also got 4 Muslim boys, and I’ve just signed a couple of English lads who want to play for me. I said ‘Yeah, come on, come and join the training’. We want anybody, there’s no prejudice from our point of view’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME club)

‘I think a lot of people like to play for [the club] because it gives them self worth. It’s not just about football, it’s about family, people unifying themselves, the different races, the different cultures. But that’s what we aim to do, give hope basically, you know, to people who may not be able to go to any other club and just walk in there, we develop the person and we give everybody an opportunity. We aren’t selective like other clubs’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME clubs)
Integration, inclusiveness and positive multi-cultural spaces (2)

‘There has always been a diverse mix of players, Asian, White, Black-Caribbean, Black-African and Eastern European players now. We have a rich culture within the club. For example, one of the big social gatherings at the club is around food. When you come to [the club] you’re not going to get burgers, or cheese and onion cobs, you’ll get cultural food and that forms the basis for socialising and talk. Players are at the club because of a sense of passion. We play the game in a certain way that evokes a feeling, particularly with black players, where away from football there are lots of temptations and lots of things in their lives, where they live bordering on the dark side. But when they come through the gates on a Saturday they know they can put that aside.’ (Committee Member, Majority BME club)
Concluding comments

Contextualising the development of Majority BME clubs

• Local cultural structure and the Leicester experience
• Historical and ongoing resistance to racisms
• Site for cultural continuities and identity construction
• Negative source, positive function: integration, inclusiveness and positive multi-cultural spaces
• Changing social landscapes, new multi-cultural spaces?
Residential dispersal, displaced communities and the new multi-cultural spaces?

‘The make-up of the community has changed and so has the club with it. We’ve had a lot of Somali refugees in the area and some of those lads are getting involved in the club. I think we’ve got more black children than Asians at the moment in the team. Kids love football and as I say it’s an open door policy, we just take it from there. I’ve seen the club change in the last few years, [the area] has kind of been settled with new communities from different nationalities, whatever you like, that’s basically what’s happened, it’s been a natural thing rather than a conscious effort’ (Chair-person, male youth club)