For final published and citable version please go to:

https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13096

Citation:

Michael Collins, 'Cricket, Englishness and Racial Thinking', *The Political Quarterly*,

December (2021)

Abstract

During 2021, long-standing concerns about racism in English cricket rose to the surface to become very public, political questions. For the purposes of clarity, this article begins by drawing a distinction between racism on the one hand and 'racial thinking' on the other. It suggests that racial thinking is related to, but analytically distinct from, and in fact prior to racism. It then goes on to develop a wider analysis of the historical connections between cricket, Englishness and racial thinking. With this in mind, the final section of the article draws on the preceding historical analysis to explore some of the more recent examples of racial thinking in cricket, and their implications for how we might approach the problem of racism in English cricket today.

Pre-publication text – do not cite

> The vocabulary of cricket is a standard pool of stock images for Tory statesmen. No better symbol of English culture could be found.
>
> Orlando Patterson, 'The ritual of cricket', 1969

> In the streets of South Lambeth they have been playing a new and gruesome variation of the game, with bricks for balls and plastic police shields for bats.
>
> Gordon Brook-Shepherd, 'Where the blame for Brixton lies', 1981

During 2021, long-standing concerns about racism in English cricket rose to the surface to become very public, political questions. The murder of George Floyd in the United States on 25 May, 2020 prompted many people across the globe to bring forth new evidence of experiences of racism and discrimination. This event also brought the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign, which had been active since 2013, into newfound prominence. Cricket was not immune to these developments. On 8 July 2020, the England men's cricket team was supposed to be playing the West Indies at Southampton, but wet weather had prevented the game from starting. The retired West Indian cricketer Michael Holding, commentating at the time for Sky Sports television, made an impromptu, impassioned intervention, linking the death of George Floyd to a long history of the 'de-humanisation of black people', which in turn permitted specific acts of racism to occur. With Ebony Rainford-Brent – the first black female cricketer to play for England – Holding made further contributions about racism in cricket, which ignited a wider conversation within the sport including its governing body, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). In March 2021, the ECB announced its intention to create an Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC), to conduct research into racism as well as class and gender-based discrimination within the game. In June 2021,

Holding published a book - *Why We Kneel, How We Rise* - which raised difficult questions about racism for a new audience.[1] Simultaneously, an investigation was underway regarding a specific, historical case of racial discrimination at Yorkshire County Cricket Club involving Azeem Rafiq, a Yorkshire cricketer of Muslim Pakistani heritage. By November 2021, a UK parliamentary select committee heard details of the discrimination Rafiq had experienced, putting this case on the front-page of newspapers in the United Kingdom and around the world.

One of the many virtues of Michael Holding's recent book is the attention he gives to the underlying structures of thinking that enable acts of racism to occur. This reminds us that debates about racism are often confused and inhibited by a key simplification. Typically, those who wish to play down the significance of racism imagine that it involves only *overt* acts, perhaps aggressive or violent ones, or obvious racial slurs. The identification of racism with this kind of conduct can then lead to feelings of offence and even outrage when organisations, groups or society at large are accused of being 'racist' or 'institutionally racist.' Academics and others seeking to intervene in policy debates about racism should be mindful of the way in which terms are used in everyday language.

For the purposes of clarity, this article draws a distinction between racism on the one hand and 'racial thinking' on the other. Racial thinking is related to but analytically distinct from, and in fact prior to racism. Racial thinking is expressed in ideas and language about the identity of humans, suggesting that they can be divided into racial groups, that these groups have inherent characteristics, and that these groups exist in some form of value hierarchy. Racial thinking therefore creates, organises and sustains unequal power relationships between human groups along racial lines. Often, racial thinking includes reference to the term 'culture' and uses this as a proxy for an older, cruder biological term: 'race'. For my purposes, racism is then defined as a term that designates behaviours and actions that express, make real and reinforce racial thinking. Acts of racism can be crude, overt, and violent, but they are also frequently subtle and insidious. Crucially, racism is enabled by and secondary to racial thinking. A racial slur has no meaning without the deeper framework of racial thinking that provides its linguistic context.

It is important to clarify the meaning of these terms, as considerations of racism are rarely productive when misunderstanding about terminologies occur.[2] To identify, account for and illuminate structures of racial thinking is not the same thing as making an accusation of racism. For the avoidance of doubt, to suggest that cricket's cultures, vocabularies and stereotypes are imbricated with a long history of racial thinking is emphatically not to say something as simplistic as 'cricket is racist'. However, if racial thinking develops and sustains the language and thought processes that enable racism, in order to explain how and why racism occurs – and hence how to be anti-racist – we need to understand the wider context of racial thinking. It is not enough to 'call out' acts of racism. With the difference between racism and racial thinking in mind, this article aims to make a positive contribution that adds nuance and historical depth to the contemporary debate about racism in English cricket. It is often suggested that racism within sport reflects racism within wider society. Whilst this may be true, cricket's complex relationship with Englishness and its history of racial thinking presents the sport with particular problems.

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[1] Michael Holding, *Why We Kneel How We Rise* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2021).
[2] Stuart Hall, 'A Question of Identity', *The Guardian* (London), 15 October 2000

The research component of this article begins by analysing a 1981 opinion piece in *The Sunday Telegraph* - 'Where the Blame for Brixton Lies'- authored by the conservative opinion former Gordon Brook-Shepherd. Brook-Shepherd uses cricket as the central metaphor to explain the riots, helping him to develop a historical framework of failed assimilation and cultural irreconcilability. The article proceeds by using Brook-Shepherd's intervention as a point of departure for a wider analysis of the intimate historical connections between cricket, racial thinking and Englishness. I argue that during the colonial period, cricket was a game that England's many non-white, colonised 'others' could adopt, partake in, even excel at, but always within a framework of power in which the figure of the white Englishman remained superior, with the non-white, colonised subject remaining subordinate. Cricket functioned as 'the imperial game' and as such was embraced by a wide and diverse range of populations across the globe; but England and Englishness were always at its core, the originator of the game and the standard by which all others would be judged. The examples discussed in this article suggest that this power structure operated until roughly the mid-1960s, but was then disrupted by decolonisation and immigration. By the 1970s, cricket was increasingly being used to express forms of cultural Englishness that recreated earlier colonial juxtapositions of 'civilisation' and 'barbarism'. As we shall see, cricket was used to re-articulate Englishness as culturally distinct and unobtainable to the immigrant and the formerly colonised subject; where they had previously been *évoluées* – learning to be civilised – black subjects were now repositioned as violent, aggressive and unassimilable. With these arguments in mind, the final section of this article suggests that cricket's racialised cultural conflicts continued to shape the game in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and indeed help us to understand the more recent case brought to light by Azeem Rafiq.

'A new and gruesome variation of the game'

2021 marks the fortieth anniversary of the Brixton riots or uprisings, a year when violence broke out across a number of English cities.[3] Socio-economic factors featured in many attempts to explain the riots, including the November 1981 report by Lord Scarman, who had been appointed by the Thatcher government to lead a commission of enquiry. Whilst pointing to the causal role of 'insecure social and economic conditions in an impoverished physical environment,' Scarman was careful to avoid overt criticism of the Metropolitan Police and shared a prominent view at the time emphasising the criminal nature of the riots, downplaying their political dimensions and the role of racism and discrimination in their genesis. Scarman also made reference to alleged failures of West Indian parents to control their children, implying that the riots were in part caused by shortcomings within immigrant communities themselves: 'In raising their children, the older generation of black people had to do without the support of the extended network of kin which is a feature of traditional West Indian society.' [4] Although phrased moderately by Scarman, this line of thinking was part of a wider postwar discourse that asserted the cultural incompatibility of immigrants with British society.[5] In this sense, the riots seemingly provided evidence to support Enoch Powell's prophecies of the inevitable disorder produced by 'multiracial' societies.

An example of this line of thinking and language can be seen in a 1981 opinion piece in *The Sunday Telegraph* - 'Where the Blame for Brixton Lies'- by Gordon Brook-Shepherd. Brook-

[3] S. Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
[4] L. G. S. Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April 1981 : Report of an Inquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986). pp. 28, 25
[5] Martin Barker, *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (London: Junction Books, 1981).

Shepherd – an exceptionally well-connected conservative opinion former – had exchanged direct correspondence with Margaret Thatcher from at least 1977, and as chief assistant editor of *The Sunday Telegraph*, was able to secure one-to-one interviews, both off and on the record, in 1981, 1982 and 1984.[6] In this piece, cricket is the central metaphor used to explain the riots, and I use it as an example of the rhetorical power of cricket to communicate ideas about race and identity. Cricket enables the author to make an argument about the cultural irreconcilability of black West Indians in England, but it also, crucially, provides him with a historical argument about what had changed over time. The problem of Brixton, as Brook-Shepherd saw it, demonstrated that the relationship between different racial groups had shifted with the transition that brought non-white immigration into the core society of the imperial structure, i.e. England. Brook-Shepherd's central thesis was that the Brixton riots of 1981 demonstrated the failure of assimilation. The 'West Indians,' he mused, were 'proving the most indigestible of all those ethnic lumps of Empire, which Mother England agreed to bring home and swallow.'[7]

For Brook-Shepherd, the experiment of immigration had actually provided grounds for optimism in its early phase. Initial post-war 'black newcomers' were 'indispensable on the trains and buses.' In a highly revealing turn of phrase, he claimed that the arrival of Caribbean migrants in the 1950s and 1960s could be viewed as 'still the plantation relationship, under more equitable conditions.' Moving seamlessly from plantation slavery to postwar cricket, he suggested that 'for a while, cricket preserved the illusion that only the pitch had been moved.' Waxing nostalgic about the good old days, he told his readers how 'we tend to forget now those legendary West Indian teams of the 1950s with their three great W's (Weekes, Walcott and Worrell) and the little spinners Ramadin [sic] and Valentine, who went on spinning with their Calypso on the turntables long after they had finished with the English batsmen.' Just as early postwar Caribbean workers could be useful, invited to perform a particular function within the economy, so black cricketers could be entertainers, safely admired and even lauded so long as the power dynamics of the 'plantation relationship' still pertained. By implication, these black migrants – workers and cricketers alike – could in theory become *dispensable*, if they were deemed by the receiving society to no longer perform the function for which they were invited. They were *sojourners*, not citizens, and from this perspective they occupied a clear position within the racial framework of the Empire-Commonwealth; they belonged to the colonial world, not the metropolitan.

Many English observers were happy to extol the virtues of early post-war West Indian cricketers, who provided 'colour', gaiety, and entertainment in abundance, but did not – even if they were able to win the odd game here and there – seriously threaten the ascendancy of the English cricketer or indeed Englishness. E. W. Swanton – a notable sports journalist with the *Daily Telegraph* and the cricket bible, *Wisden*, as well as the distinctively upper class voice of BBC radio *Test Match Special* – was known to have had a 'love affair with the islands of the West Indies'. During the English winter of 1948, Swanton was on tour in Barbados watching the first test match between England and the West Indies, marvelling at the batting of Clyde Walcott and Everton Weekes, which was, he wrote sagely, 'in the best traditions of the colony.' Following the West Indies' first test match victory against England at Lord's in 1950, there was a great deal of public celebration amongst the small but vocal group of West Indian supporters, many of whom had recently migrated and made London

[6] The Thatcher Papers, Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge. Reference Code: GBR/0014/THCR 2/6/1/200

[7] Gordon Brook-Shepherd, 'Where the blame for Brixton lies', *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), 19 April 1981, p. 16. All subsequent references to Brook-Shepherd are from the same article and page number.

their home. Swanton commented, in the genial and generous spirit afforded by his privileged position in the colonial order, that 'we could well have borne another calypso, and a few hand springs, for it was a victory handsomely and sportingly earned.'[8]

Brook-Shepherd's references to iconic 'calypso' cricketers – immortalised as 'those little friends of mine, Ramadin and Valentine' in Lord Kitchener's 1950 'Cricket, Lovely Cricket' – thus painted a picture of a more convivial era. But the apotheosis of this postwar moment – with Brook-Shepherd's encoded message about the virtues of the colonial order in which heroic, manly Englishness stood at its core – was still to be revealed. 'Can any Englishman forget that day in June, 1963,' Brook-Shepherd continued, 'when, with two balls to go in a Lord's test match, and either a win or tie possible, [Colin] Cowdrey [an 'empire man' through and through, born in 1932 on his father's tea plantation in Ooty, north India] stepped from the pavilion with his broken arm in plaster to save England from defeat?' It is possible, of course, that many 'Englishmen' had forgotten, or perhaps not even noticed at the time. But like Swanton, Brook-Shepherd spoke from a position of cultural authority, implying that an authentic Englishman would remember this moment with pride and affection.

The key element of this cultural spectacle was to be found not simply in the stage – the game of cricket itself – but the gaze of the audience from across the wider social structure. As Brook-Shepherd put it, the whole country, and by implication the wider, cricket-loving Empire-Commonwealth, 'white, black and brown' seemed to be 'doing nothing but hang on to transistor radios for the commentary. The mix, for one magic moment, seemed *harmonious and complete* [my emphasis].' The postwar calypso cricketer, perhaps up to the early 1960s, still operated within this racialised colonial structure: with the heroic Englishman venerated, order was preserved, so long as the black man knew his place within the 'plantation relationship'. Sometime in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, coterminous with the collapse of empire and the emergence of an often febrile and unsatisfactory Commonwealth, the position of the black cricketer in the eyes of white English observers shifted.

It should be said that the underlying fear of black power had been clearly decipherable in commentaries on even the most feted of black West Indian cricketers from an earlier age. The English critic Neville Cardus – the 'standard by which all cricket writers are judged' – typically lionised the pre-war West Indian batsman and postwar Labour Party peer Learie Constantine in animalistic terms. The physical vantage point of the press box, from where he 'looked down on the fury of primitive onslaught, beautiful if savage and violently destructive', positioned Cardus as a kind of ethnographic observer, using all the rhetorical and stylistic devices of the imperial travel writer.[9] 'I was,' Cardus wrote, 'really scared at the power and velocity of Constantine's strokes':

> scared that someone in the field might not merely be hurt – that was to be expected – but perhaps killed. Yet there was no excess of muscular effort in Constantine's swift plunderings. It was the attack and savagings of a panther on the kill, sinuous, stealthy, strong but unburdened. The batsmanship of the jungle, beautiful, ravaging.[10]

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[8] Stephen Fay and David Kynaston, *Arlott, Swanton and the Soul of English Cricket* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018). 67, 93. Cf. Stephen Wagg, 'Towards a Safer Past: Thoughts on the Invocation of English Cricket's Soul', *Sport in Society*, 24/8 (2021), 1455-71.

[9] Anthony Bateman, 'Performing Imperial Masculinities: The Discourse and Practice of Cricket', in R. Emig and A. Rowland (eds.), *Performing Masculinity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010), 78-94. p. 92

[10] Neville Cardus, *The Playfair Cardus* (London: Dickens Press, 1963), p. 98, quoted in ibid. p. 92

If admiration combined here with a powerfully evident fear of black physicality, Cardus could be more openly disdainful. Constantine's game was obviously 'racial', Cardus wrote in the foreword to Constantine's own memoir, *Cricket and I* (1933) and grew from 'impulses born in the sun.' During the summer of that year, Cardus suggested it would 'be a pity if Constantine allows his crowd to endow him with the irresponsibility of a "Jazz" coon cricketer.'[11] By the 1970s, pre-war 'jazz' and postwar 'calypso' cricketers had given way to 'Whispering Death': the nickname given to the aforementioned Michael Holding, at that time a particularly fast and effective West Indian bowler. In other words, by the mid-1970s the latent threat, menace and disorder of black power had become manifest in the field of play. The British press portrayed this turn of events – specifically the West Indies tour of England in 1976 – on a spectrum of 'unsporting' to 'savage', conjuring colonial imagery of embattled whites and unruly natives that mirrored reporting on the Notting Hill carnival disturbances of the same decade.[12]

To emphasise the message about a transition from an earlier, more acceptable phase of 'race relations', Brook-Shepherd was keen to stress that it was within black youth – the 'second generation', coming to prominence in the 1970s – that things had gone wrong. Pre-empting Scarman, he claimed that Brixton showed that 'the young blacks … have slipped completely from the control of their parents.' This generational shift enabled his reader to pause and reflect on the failings of immigration as assimilation, and to consider what might have changed over time. If in 1963, the 'whole country' seemed 'harmonious and complete', Brixton in 1981 constituted a moment of forceful, violent black resistance to white authority. Whereas black *sojourners* to the metropole previously knew their place, respected the authority of the Englishman, and maintained their position as colonial subjects now, in Brook-Shepherd's evocative depiction, on 'the streets of South Lambeth they [the children of these 'calypso' cricketers] have been playing a new and gruesome variation of the game, with bricks for balls and plastic police shields for bats.' In this way, cricket's racial thinking contributed to a growing racism within metropolitan white society: despite the best efforts of a liberal empire, once uncoupled from the colonial social order, black people would revert to violence and barbarism, on and off the field.

The 1976 West Indies tour of England had begun with the South African-born England captain Tony Greig telling the media that he intended to make the West Indies team 'grovel'. West Indian players from that year have indicated that to a considerable extent this kind of language acted as an incentive.[13] Yet the iconic moment of the 1976 tour arguably did not involve Greig, but an aging English batsman who had not played test match cricket for nine years. In the third test at Old Trafford, 45-year-old Brian Close, stood up – literally – to the West Indies fast bowling of Michael Holding and his teammates in what is often cited as one of the bravest innings cricket has seen. In technical terms, Close's cricketing abilities were by now on the wane (he managed scores of two in the first innings and twenty in the second). His outstanding quality was to put his large bodily frame in front of the ball and be courageous enough, some might say foolish enough, to take the blow. Subsequently, images of Close's bruised and battered torso, being inspected by a doctor, were widely circulated in the media.

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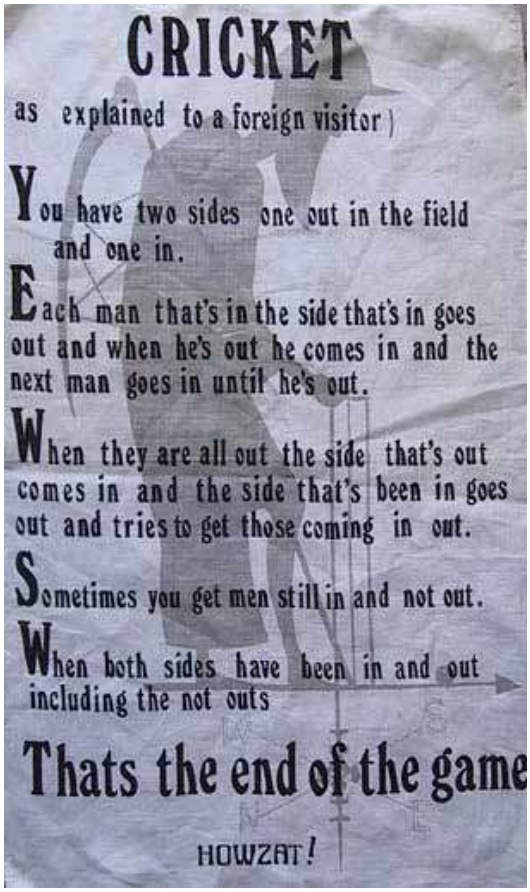
[11] Quoted in Duncan Hamilton, *The Great Romantic: Cricket and the Golden Age of Neville Cardus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019). p. 144

[12] Stephen Wagg, 'Calypso Kings, Dark Destroyers: England–West Indies Test Cricket and the English Press, 1950–1984', *Cricket and National Identity in the Postcolonial Age* (Routledge, 2005), 197-219. p. 171

[13] Simon Lister, *Fire in Babylon: How the West Indies Cricket Team Brought a People to Its Feet* (London: Random House, 2016). p. 57

However, as with Cowdrey's performative Englishness in 1963, the meaning of Close's efforts were not to be found in the numbers on the scorecard, but rather in the manner and style with which he carried himself, something widely celebrated in the English press. This kind of bravery celebrated personal virtues that were understood to be at the core of national identity and encapsulated in 'that most English of English words: pluck.' It was not about achieving as such, 'it was about *being* … stoical, cool, resilient, uncomplaining, able to endure everything that nature *or barbaric peoples could inflict* [my emphasis].'[14] Here, in the mid-1970s, cricket provided a worthy re-enactment of the colonial encounter, juxtaposing the honour and dignity of the white Englishman with the ready brutality of the black subject. Whatever the odds, whatever the dangers, Cowdrey, Close and co. answered the call to selfless duty – "Play up! Play up! And play the Game!" – that had stirred the hearts and stiffened the spines of English schoolboys since Henry Newbolt penned his famous poem *Vitai Lampada* ('The Torch of Life') in 1892. The symbiosis of a virtuous Englishness and its violent, unruly other – unleashed in the post-imperial age – seemed to be perfectly encapsulated by such sporting dramas.

The importance of being English



Writing in 1969, the Jamaican historical and cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson was explicit – almost indignantly so – about the connections between cricket and Englishness. 'Need one spell it out?' he asked. 'Cricket is the Englishman's game par excellence. The very term "cricket" has become a byword for all that is most English in the British way of life. The vocabulary of cricket is a standard pool of stock images for Tory statesmen. No better symbol of English culture could be found.'[15] Patterson's attentiveness to the British/English distinction ('all that is *most English* in the British way of life'), helpfully points us towards an appreciation of cricket as historically connected to a particular manifestation of an English national identity, which has important implications for our present times.

A key element of cricket's connection to England and Englishness lies in the game's historical pedigree. Cricket's origins as a late medieval 'stick and ball' game, played by shepherds in the open pastures of southern England, provides fertile ground for an imagined national community of considerable vintage.[16] The longevity of the game also speaks to the particularity of Englishness. Step inside any village cricket pavilion across

[14] F. O'toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018).
[15] O. Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). p. 247
[16] Anthony Bateman, 'Cricket Pastoral and Englishness', in Anthony Bateman and Jeffrey Hill (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Cricket* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11-25.

England, and you are quite likely to come across a framed poster - or possibly even a 'tea towel' - that purports to explain the game of cricket to a 'foreigner'. Arising, perhaps not coincidentally in the 1970s, the purpose of this object is of course not to explain but to obfuscate, to reinforce the idea that there is something very different and particular about England, Englishness and its pursuit of this antique leisure activity, unintelligible to the outsider.

Historically, the spread of cricket within the Empire did not undermine but in fact strengthened England's sense of ownership over it. Even if the British Empire became a vehicle for the cultural imperialism of cricket, the game operated to reinforce the empire's racialised power dynamics. More often than not, cricket has furnished the Anglophone world with a series of racialised cultural stereotypes about wily, deceptive spin bowlers from India, or aggressive, menacing Caribbean fast bowlers which, as we have seen, consistently 'othered' non-whites and re-inscribed the separateness and un-reachability of Englishness. Win or lose, the English would ultimately be the arbiters of taste, of fashion, of fair play and indeed the very rules of the game. Today's global cricket governing body – The International Cricket Council (ICC) – began its life in 1909 as the Imperial Cricket Conference. Formed at Lord's cricket ground in north-west London – the 'home of cricket' – it was not renamed until 1964 and until 1989 it maintained a tradition of having the president of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) – also of Lord's – as automatic president of the ICC too. The MCC continues to be the ultimate source of cricket's rulebook for what is now a global game.

The evidence of consistent recycling of an exclusive and racialised form of Englishness - in which cricket still constitutes 'a historical presence and continuing legacy as the quintessential English game'[17] – suggests that this problem does not lie somewhere in a safely distant past. In 1990, to take one prominent example, Norman Tebbit proffered his infamous 'cricket test', which questioned the loyalties of non-white immigrants, asking who they cheered for when England played cricket against former colonies. Tebbit later explained that his remarks were not aimed at 'all immigrants', but particularly those 'second-generation British-Blacks' who had 'split loyalties', perhaps precisely those who had been playing their gruesome game in the streets of Brixton in 1981. In 1995, *Wisden*, the publication of record within the cricket world, was engulfed in controversy when it published an article entitled 'Is it in the blood?', which questioned the commitment of some of the England team's black players on account of the fact that they could not be seen as 'unequivocal Englishmen.'[18]

Following the media's profoundly racialised portrayal of the successful West Indies teams of the 1970s and 1980s – just as English cricketers headed off on 'rebel tours' of apartheid South Africa – the 1990s saw musical instruments, drums, horns and the like banned from test matches venues in England. This very obviously affected, and was perceived to be targeted at Caribbean cricket supporters. Whether or not with intended irony, in 2004 the MCC published its first anthology of cricket poetry, entitled *A Breathless Hush*, in which the editors included the following verses from *Lovely Cricket*, a poem written in 1999 by John Groves:

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[17] Dominic Malcolm and Philippa Velija, 'Cricket: The Quintessential English Game?', in Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm (eds.), *Sport and English National Identity in a 'Disunited Kingdom'* (London: Routledge, 2017), 19-33. p. 30

[18] Mike Marqusee, 'In Search of the Unequivocal Englishman: The Conundrum of Race and Nation in English Cricket', in Ben Carrington and Ian Mcdonald (eds.), *'Race', Sport and British Society* (London: Routledge, 2001), 121-32.

> Cricket is an English game…
> It is not suited to hot-blooded races,
> Although we export it to other places…
> True cricket is a game
> Of gentle English scenes,
> For poets dozing on quaint village greens
> And not the same
> As cricket where there's so much dash and din
> And people play it so they can win.[19]

Beginning in the 1980s, South Asian cricketers increasingly began to bear the brunt of overt racism, and took on a more prominent role in terms of the development of racial thinking within the framework of English cricket. When asked in the late 1980s why no black players had appeared for Yorkshire, Joe Lister, then the county secretary, explained: 'I'm told there is an Indian League, a Pakistan League and a West Indian League in Yorkshire and that they tend to keep to themselves.' Besides: 'The bulk of the West Indian supporters who come to a Leeds Test come from Birmingham and London. The local Indians or Pakistanis don't come at all.' As Marqusee has put it, 'Lister's comments only proved how spectacularly ill-informed he was about the people he lived among.' But his reasoning – according to Marqusee – was 'not nearly so tortuous, or belligerent, as that offered by Brian Close,' the hero of Old Trafford 1976, and by 1984 Chairman of Yorkshire's Cricket Committee:

> Did you know that over in Pakistan and India the poorer people didn't know cricket existed? There's a hundred years of bloody tradition in Yorkshire lads. As soon as a male's born, bloody hell, the fellow says, 'Good, I'm glad he's born in Yorkshire.' By the time he's toddling he's got a bat in his hand. Bloody Pakistanis didn't know the damn thing existed.[20]

Throughout the 1990s, there were a series of highly confrontational matches played between England and Pakistan, with Pakistani bowlers widely being accused of cheating in order to win cricket matches against England. In December 1987, the England captain Mike Gatting had infamously confronted the Pakistani umpire Shakoor Rana on the field of play in Faisalabad, swearing at him and accusing him of foul play.

In the year 2005, the England cricket team regained 'the Ashes', something they had failed to do for 19 years. Victory in this famous and historic series of matches, played between England and Australia since 1882, produced an outpouring of English patriotic fervour and a certain 'carnival' atmosphere, which prompted astute observers and sociologists of sport to wonder whether Englishness might be entering a more benign phase, leaving the overt racism of the earlier period behind.[21] The captain of the England cricket team in that year was a man called Michael Vaughan, who in recent years has been afforded a prominent role on the BBC's flagship cricket radio programme, *Test Match Special*. As noted earlier, during 2021, the cricket world and the broader public has heard the evidence of cricketer Azeem Rafiq, who experienced various forms of racial discrimination throughout his time playing cricket at Yorkshire County Cricket club. In his evidence to the Yorkshire inquiry, Rafiq specifically named Michael Vaughan, claiming that as he took to the field of play before a game in 2009,

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[19] D.R. Allen and H. Doggart, *A Breathless Hush: The Mcc Anthology of Cricket Verse* (London: Methuen, 2004). 207
[20] M. Marqusee, *Anyone but England: Cricket, Race and Class* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016). p. 153
[21] Malcolm and Velija, 'Cricket: The Quintessential English Game?'. p. 28

Vaughan – his team captain – told him and three other players of Pakistani origin that there were 'too many of you lot; we need to do something about it.' Vaughan has vigorously denied the allegation, whilst two of the three other players who were there at the time have since corroborated it.

Rafiq's wider testimony refers to a culture of racism – clearly post-dating the heady summer of 2005 – that meant he was routinely referred to by the racist slur 'Paki'. Rafiq also cited an incident at Barnsley cricket club in Yorkshire when he was 15 years old, which saw him pinned down by teammates and forced to drink alcohol against his will and the stipulations of his Muslim faith. Rafiq's stand against such overt racism within Yorkshire cricket has brought forth a much broader range of evidence, which suggests that racism against non-white minorities in English cricket – fuelled by the spread of Islamophobia since the 1990s – is still a widespread problem. Whether or not the former England and Yorkshire captain Michael Vaughan referred to a group of non-white cricketers as 'you lot' – a problem, about which 'we' need to 'do something' – is unlikely to be proved one way or the other. What is more important is that there is a very long history of racial thinking that has constructed black and Asian cricketers in England as 'other' and as problematic: aggressive, untrustworthy, 'un-English'.

The historical sociologist Dominic Malcolm has argued that 'the romanticised stereotype of English village cricket' is part of a problem of 'closure' and 'exclusion' in the game of cricket. What he referred to then – back in 2002 – as 'equal opportunities' would be 'unobtainable if the central tenet in the reproduction of Englishness is allowed to remain uncontested'.[22] It is far from clear that this problem has been overcome. The origins of English cricket in the late-medieval age speak of a unique longevity of England's cultural connection to the sport. Its origins as a rural game enable cricket to stand for a purer, pre-modern, and quite obviously *white* national community, with the aesthetics of English cricket's pastoral origins standing in contradistinction to post-war England's 'multiracial' inner cities. Englishness itself can thus easily be framed as an 'originary' position from which the value and legitimacy of others can be judged. As we have seen, cricket has historically, and perhaps continues to be, a powerful vehicle for communicating this English cultural identity and the racial thinking that often underpins it. As such, interpersonal and intra-group dynamics within the game of cricket today are shaped by deep layers of history.

To reiterate, *racial thinking* is not the same as *racism*. Nevertheless, as Michael Holding's recent intervention suggests, racism does not just spring from nowhere: racial thinking authorises and provides the foundation for racism. Those who wish to imagine the problem of racism as manifesting itself only in crude and vulgar insults or acts of violence misunderstand the problem. Racial thinking is complex, structural and historical: it is a language and set underlying assumptions that still views the social world through 'in-groups' and 'out-groups', whose boundaries are marked by race and culture. In this respect, racial thinking could be seen as being as much a part of cricket's traditions as tea and cucumber sandwiches.

Today, the non-white population of England no longer looks on in awe at the heroic Englishman and will not be 'digested by mother England', to recall Brook-Shepherd's redolent phrase. Cricket venerates both its history and its literary culture. It would therefore be naïve, or disingenuous, for English cricket to trade on its past, on nostalgic visions of

[22] Dominic Malcolm, "Clean Bowled?' Cricket, Racism and Equal Opportunities', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28/2 (2002), 307-25. p. 322

Lords as the ‘home of cricket’ and the MCC as the originator and arbiter of the game’s rules for a global community, and simultaneously imagine that deep layers of racialised identity construction have simply evaporated. To overcome English cricket’s many challenges, carefully thought through and targeted policy interventions will be absolutely necessary, but arguably not sufficient. Progress will also require a recognition and reckoning with cricket’s palimpsest of racial thinking over time.