

# HYBRID IDENTITIES AND INTERCONNECTED SPATIALITIES: THE ROLE OF CRICKET IN THE SETTLEMENT OF SRI LANKAN MIGRANTS IN NEW ZEALAND

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*This article explores the ways in which Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand establish a sense of continuity between the host nation and country of origin by forging interconnected spatialities. Particular attention is paid to the complex and fluid cultural identities of migrants, evident in their negotiations of place through material social practices. Drawing insights from postcolonial, Indigenous and social practice scholarship, we focus on cricket as a social practice that has become entangled within the settlement experiences of our participants who have moved from one postcolonial nation to another. This research foregrounds the agency and resilience of migrants, and acknowledges the complexities of postcolonial identities in the context of migration.*

**Keywords:** migration, hybrid identities, interconnected spatialities, re-membering, postcolonial, Sri Lanka

## 1. Introduction

Immigration involves leaving one space in which a person or group's felt identities have been cultivated, and coming to a new space where these identities are recrafted (Deaux, 2000). As such, migration often results in new forms of identities which go beyond notions of nationalism. According to Castles (1993), it is part of the migration condition to develop multi-layered transcultural identities, linked to both the culture of settlement as well as the culture of origin. Here, cultures and identities are perceived as mutually constituting elements of everyday life, which involve shared understandings of what it means to be 'us', and associated place affiliations, material practices and ways of being (Hodgetts et al., 2010; Valsiner, 2009). Hence, human selves are approached as dynamic life-long projects of becoming, which take form and are played out psychologically, materially and relationally across various times and places.

The idea of a fully unified, static, coherent and complete identity is illusory (Burdsey, 2006; Said, 1993). Even core cultural identities are mutable, and are reshaped by a myriad of social, cultural, political and historical events, practices and narratives. In the context of migration in particular, people's identities are an amalgam reflecting both the countries of origin and host societies (Fine, 2015). Research on hyphenated identities (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine, & Sirin,

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2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007) demonstrates how, for example, young Muslim-American migrants overcome apparent cultural differences by drawing on “complementary currents”, each posing their own opportunities and challenges (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 159). Such groups demonstrate considerable agency in cultivating hyphenated knowledge of themselves and where they belong by connecting conflicting spheres of their various life-worlds into seemingly coherent selves (Katsiaficas et al., 2011). This settling hybridity appears to enable migrants to invent new, layered ways of being in the world, which draw on distributed fragments of culture, media, politics and desire, where both their country of origin and destination comprise important parts of their overall sense of identity (Katsiaficas et al., 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007). These migrants do more than belong in-between these national contexts, they can belong in both places and create new identity formations that reflect this dynamism.

The construction of new hyphenated and dynamic selves is not devoid of societal, political and historical contexts (Baldassar & Raffaeta, 2018; Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Bhabha, 1994; Fine, 2015; Spivak, 1993). Fragments of such histories travel with migrants across borders, and are instrumental in shaping their responses to issues of power, race and identity (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Accordingly, there is a need in migration research, to consider complex historical processes such as colonization, when exploring the movement of people from one postcolonial nation to another. This focus is particularly relevant given that colonization is simultaneously about the expansion of colonial territories and networked encounters. As such, one of its legacies has been a postcolonial world of interconnected identities and spatialities characterized by stretched and hybrid cultures, imprecise borders and spatial modes for global culture (Jazeel, 2012).

If we perceive the notion of space as a multi-faceted process, defined by the people inhabiting it as well as the practices enacted within it (Cresswell, 2006) then, the significance of specific places is not only embedded in the local, but also in social relations that reach out beyond particular locales and from the present into the past. Despite achieving independence from Britain decades ago, countries such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand are linked together by colonial and historical resemblances that can be traced back to the former British Empire. Moreover, in both Sri Lanka and New Zealand, these colonial footprints have resulted in reshaping local cultures over time, and have become part of the cultural identities of inhabitants.

As used in this article, the affix *post* in *postcolonial* does not mean that there was a neat separation between the former European colonial powers and their colonized subjects, or that the consequences and processes of colonisation merely exist in the past. As Bhatia and Ram (2001) argue, the influence of the European nations did not cease when their flags came down and the flags of the newly independent nations went up. Instead, the colonial past is still visible in the postcolonial present, albeit in different forms (Mangan, 2010). Overlapping colonial histories continue to be instrumental in shaping the identities of people within countries as well as those who move between them.

As a focal point for exploring some of these complexities evident in the expressed cultural identities of Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand, this article focuses on the game of cricket, and in particular, the context of the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup. We draw on conceptual work on the dialectics of self to document how common cultural threads from shared British colonial histories manifest in interconnected spatialities. We demonstrate that for Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand, interconnected spatialities, such as those created through the once imperial game of cricket, can provide a common ground that enables migrants to enact aspects of Sri Lankan culture and belonging in New Zealand.

This article draws on the literature on global community psychology that advances de-territorialised understandings of migration, identity and culture in community settings across postcolonial spaces (e.g. Fine, 2015; Tartaglia & Rossi, 2015). As such, we demonstrate how engaging in the game of cricket and associated practices can provide a space for the enactment

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of hybrid migrant identities, linking the country of origin and the host nation. The article also broadly connects to research into sport, migration and identities (e.g. Baker, 2017; Lawrence, 2016; Mee, 2017) by portraying that cricketing loyalties and fandom allow migrants to establish and maintain a sense of belonging to both their countries of origin and to their new homes in the host nation.

## **2. The relevance of cricket in two postcolonial nations: Issues of social practice, place and identity**

Sport can be perceived as a dialectical social practice formation within which significance is attributed to the actions and interactions of both the players, and the audience witnessing the game (Walle, 2013). As an ‘imperial game’, introduced throughout the colonies, cricket is a social practice with an added dimension of importance for understanding postcolonial identities. Cricket was initially introduced to perform an educative function within the British Empire, to promote team work, obedience and respect for fair play (Malcolm, 2013; Fletcher, 2015). The underlying assumption of this form of “colonial tutelage” (Carrington, 2010, p. 42) over Indigenous peoples, was that white populations were more advanced, civilized and rational than the Indigenous peoples within the colonies (Fletcher, 2015; Carrington, 2010; Mangan, 2010).

The adoption of cricket throughout the British Empire was not simply a symbol of colonial triumph. While cricket was widely adopted as a national sport, the meanings attached to the game were creatively appropriated (Fletcher, 2015). The cricket cultures of the world are a product of both imported imperial practices and Indigenous responses to them (Wagg, 2005). Processes of cultural appropriation became central to resistance and Indigenous self-determination within colonial settings. Amongst postcolonial communities, the love for cricket means more than just a love for the sport where runs are scored, wickets are taken and winners and losers are created (Fletcher, 2015). Rather, cricket, as a social practice, became a means to engage in struggles for power and representation (Ratna, 2014; James, 1963/2005). In a number of nations, the cricket stadium provided an alternative venue for challenging the distribution of power and capital, and to contest European domination and assumptions of superiority (Roberts, 2005; Burdsey, 2006; Little, 2012). Sri Lanka and New Zealand were two nations within the British Empire where the sports introduced by the colonisers are now entrenched as a part of contemporary culture. In both nations, cricket has been established since the 1830s, and has undergone a process of appropriation over time, by local groups (Little, 2012; Neely, 2016).

In New Zealand, the game of cricket has been predominantly associated with social hierarchy and class consciousness. Here, for instance, cricket remained a largely middle-class game, dominated by New Zealanders of European descent (Neely, 2016; Ryan, 2004). There were few, if any Māori players. Moreover, the national cricket team of this nation once inspired sentiments of colonial inferiority, rather than a sense of national pride (Ryan, 2004). For instance, in the 1930s the New Zealand cricketing ‘elite’ were referring to themselves as “transplanted Britishers” (Ryan, 2004, p. 219), despite a century of playing the game. Such rhetoric epitomised an element of the New Zealand psyche at the time that sought to maintain close ties with Britain, rather than as a statement of distinct New Zealand identity. Over time however, following various victories on a global stage, cricket has now come to represent a sense of New Zealand national identity and pride for the people of this nation.

In contrast, focusing on Sri Lanka, the game was initially restricted to European settlers (Little, 2012), but was later disseminated as an institutionalized pastime for local boys and men who attended elite schools and colleges. Cricket became a vehicle for the adoption of an *Anglo-colonial habitus* (cf. Bourdieu, 1989), where the enactment of European life-ways through

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norms, values, beliefs and attire were seen as a way of climbing the social ladder (Roberts, 2007). Sri Lankans on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy perceived this new way of being as a means by which they could obtain better lives.

During the late 1880s, the game took on an added significance. In 1887, an annual Europeans versus Ceylonese test match was established, where the Ceylonese team comprised members of the Indigenous populations as well as a few Burghers (Sri Lanka's mixed-race Eurasian population). By adopting the label *Ceylonese*, the members of this team were identifying with a long established legacy of anti-colonial sentiment; one that transcended the segregated identities amongst the local residents (Roberts, 2007; Little, 2012). Such cricket matches conveyed important political overtones, and were seen as acts of *sports nationalism* (Roberts, 2007; Little, 2012). Reflecting similar processes in other nations, cricket was appropriated as a defining feature of resistance to colonial rule, as a means of subversion (Barthes, 1972/2000), and for fostering Sri Lankan (post)colonial identities (Fletcher, 2015; Raman, 2015; Wagg, 2005). Participation in cricket offered public success in direct competition with 'the British', and reflects ongoing processes of cultural reformulation and the local development of social capital (Barthes, 1972/2000; Hogan, Rentel, & Schwerter, 2014). Today, the role of cricket as a significant social practice, at home and abroad, continues to evolve.

### 3. The present study

Our research approach involved ethnographic elements, where participatory (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Pe-Pua, 2006) and practice-oriented (Reckwitz, 2002) techniques were used to gain insights into participant experiences of migration, resettlement and relations with host communities. This strategy was designed to be responsive to the spatial and material elements of lived migration experiences (Cassim, Hodgetts, & Stolte, 2015). The study involved the first author (Shemana) actively engaging in the *doing* of various social practices with participants, including going to World Cup cricket matches (Cassim et al., 2015).

Social Practice Theory (Dreier, 2009) offered a means of exploring migrant identities as being more than personality traits located within individuals' minds. From a social practice perspective, identities manifest in daily actions and through participation in shared events. Correspondingly, the focus is on documenting and unpacking the dialectics of everyday emplaced and material practices as a means of exploring ways of being in particular communities. The approach emphasizes how by actively engaging in everyday practices, individuals and communities come to understand the world around them, develop a sense of self, interact with people, things and places, and conduct their lives (*cf.* Warde, 2005). This stance supports the notion that people are material and social beings, who think alongside, and interact with, places and objects that construct their identities (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Eight Sri Lankan households were recruited for this study via the first author's social networks in Auckland and Wellington (New Zealand). Participating households were originally from Colombo (Sri Lanka) and had voluntarily settled in either Auckland or Wellington between 1989-2003. Their decisions to migrate were the result of the 25-year conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Each household consisted of up to six family members. Shemana, who resides in the city of Hamilton, was invited to stay overnight at the participants' homes and interacted with family members as a guest, for up to three days. This enabled Shemana to enter, observe and partake in the everyday lifeworlds and practices of the participants, rather than just being present during the interviews. Two to three people from each household also took part in formal interviews, resulting in a total of 17 participants (aged 40-70 years). Interviews were enhanced through the use of photo-elicitation (participants taking and discussing photographs of their everyday lives), and material object-

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related methods (showing and discussing key objects of significance to them and their sense of self). Repeat encounters, go-along interviews (Kusenbach, 2003) and discussions about everyday material practices helped draw out the enactment of Sri Lankan ways of being that had been transplanted from Sri Lanka to New Zealand by participants. In several of the participating households, cricket arose as an emergent category of investigation through the empirical engagements, which Shemana followed up by attending matches with some householders.

The research was reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, at the University of Waikato. Accordingly, key ethical considerations in this research include protecting the welfare and dignity of research participants, informed consent, cultural responsiveness and ensuring that the research methods minimise the risk of harm to participants. As such, pseudonyms were used to maintain the privacy of all participants. Photographs were taken only with participants' consent. Participants were given the opportunity to choose what they wished to photograph. Further, any individuals appearing in photographs that were subsequently used in this publication were anonymised. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide feedback on summaries of their interviews and have had the possibility to withdraw information at any point.

Analysis of participant interviews, photographs, selected objects, and researcher field-notes from engagements with the households served to uncover the dynamics of participants' re-placed identities as Sri Lankan New Zealanders. The notion of the researcher as bricoleur (Kincheloe, 2005) was central to the analysis of this rich research corpus. Acting as a bricoleur, we operated inter-disciplinarily by combining theory, observations, and participant accounts eclectically to develop an interpretation of participants' self-making practices in the context of their migration from one former British colony to another. Overall, the analysis involved a 'text in context' approach. Here, we employed an iterative and interpretive process, by engaging with participant accounts, field notes and photographs, to unpack the various meanings behind the mundane, taken-for-granted everyday practices of the participants.

#### **4. The significance of cricket as a practice of re-membering**

In this section, we demonstrate how engaging in cricket fandom is a way of re-membering people and lives lived in Sri Lanka. Practices of re-membering do not simply involve personal level experiences or tidy cultural categories. For example, aspects of colonial history have become central to experiences of Sri Lankan culture and identities today. Despite being a sport that was initially introduced by the British, in contemporary Sri Lanka the game of cricket has come to refract the complexities of a post-colonial national identity (Fletcher, 2015; James, 1963/2005; Ratna, 2014; Hartmann, 2003). For cricket fans, the game and its players have come to embody specific Sri Lankan social groupings and cultural values. Supporting players and identifying with them sustains a person's own, often implicit, place in society (Hartmann, 2003; Ratna, 2014). This study explores how this strong sense of Sri Lankanness has been transported to New Zealand.

Nihal from the Soysa household is a Sinhalese Buddhist male in his 40s, who has been living in New Zealand with his wife and two sons for seventeen years. For Sri Lankans like Nihal whose childhood featured frequent games of cricket, the practices of playing and watching cricket conjures up memories of his past and his sense of self as a Sri Lankan. According to Nihal:

Cricket is something that we not only watch and support. At home, we grew up playing cricket in school, or on the road in the evenings with the kids in the neighbourhood, or when we went on trips. It's a part of our childhood.

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Engaging with cricket is raised by this participant as a kind of conduit for re-membering his childhood and upbringing. As an immigrant living away from Sri Lanka, the practice of cricket, associated fandom, and simply being at the cricket stadium invokes images of his life before migration and a sense of continuity. Nihal associates the game with where he came from; with memories of that place, and his sense of home. Similarly, cricket has also provided Sidath with a sense of familiarity and continuity. Sidath is a member of the Ranatunga household, who is in his 40s, identifies as a Sinhalese Buddhist, and has lived in New Zealand for almost twenty years. Sidath reflects:

...we played lots of cricket when we first came [to New Zealand]. So a few of us [work colleagues] came here [to New Zealand] together, and the [Sri Lankan] community got us involved in all these cricket things, games and all.... So it kind of made me feel more at home I guess here.

For our participants, the cricket stadium has become a touchstone of continuity for enacting a sense of *Sri Lankan-ness* somewhere new. It is a place in which they feel at home almost as if they were in Sri Lanka. However, Sri Lanka's recent turbulent history of civil war means that feelings of national sentiment are not as easily articulated by all Sri Lankans living overseas. For example, Shanthi and Siva are members of the Raj household. Shanthi is a Tamil Christian female in her 50s, who has been living in New Zealand with her husband and three daughters for twenty six years. Siva (Shanthi's father) is a Tamil Hindu male in his 70s, and has been living with Shanthi and her family in New Zealand for twenty three years. The conflicting feelings of national identity and pride were evident amongst members of this household in reference to the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup. The following account about participation in cricket provides an example for some of the complexities that hyphenated migrant identity work brings:

Shanthi: ...I mean, practically, at the end of the day you live in this country. You carry a New Zealand passport. When you get sick, the New Zealand tax-payer pays for it. You should be supporting New Zealand irrespective of whether Sri Lanka is playing or not. That should be the bottom line. I will quote [name of a Sri Lankan Tamil friend]: "they hammered you out of Sri Lanka, you'll come here and still support Sri Lanka? What is this!" [laughs].

Shemana: [to Siva] And what about you uncle? Who do you support?

Siva: I support Sri Lanka. All the way through [laughs].

Shemana: Despite everything?

Siva: Despite everything. [Smiles and nods] It's still Sri Lanka.

The Raj household moved to New Zealand as a direct result of Sri Lanka's civil war, primarily due to multiple attacks to their home, carried out by the Sri Lankan army. Such traumatic memories can understandably leave a conflicted sense of national identity. While Shanthi listed logical reasons why they should not be supporting Sri Lankan cricket, the seemingly insignificant statement: "it's still Sri Lanka", is revealing. Despite everything, Sri Lanka is still the place where Siva and his family grew up, it was their home for most of their lives. Sri Lanka was where Siva went to school, where he worked, where his parents lived and worked, where his brothers ran tea plantations, where he and his late wife got married and raised Shanthi.

For both Nihal and Siva, supporting the Sri Lankan cricket team was not only about the team or game, but was also about acknowledging their heritage. Similarly, a number of Sri Lankan Tamils such as Siva still hold on to their identities as Sri Lankans; supporting the Sri Lankan

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cricket team “all the way through”, irrespective of their memories of the country’s history, or the fact that they have lived away from the island for over twenty years. For migrants like Siva, their loyalty to Sri Lankan national and cultural identities transcends the years of ethnic conflict and the distance from their homeland. However, as is the case for other participants, their identity work as expressed through cricket also demonstrates how they negotiate hybrid identities that span the *here* (host nation) and *there* (country of origin) and the past and present. The differences in statements by Siva and Nihal further highlight that despite coming from the same country, not all Sri Lankan migrants come from the same context. As such, the memories and connections to home that such migrants maintain or seek to maintain, may be quite different. Thus, the collective memories linked to the game of cricket are not restricted to a single narrative of Sri Lankan experience. Rather, they bring together the totality of these experiences on a shared terrain of connected, but not necessarily corresponding, memories (*cf.* Jenks, 2008; Nora, 1989).

Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand are a culturally diverse group. Yet, the Sri Lankan cricket team functions as a consolidating home team or base from which migrants flirt with supporting other teams such as those of the host societies. As Madan (2000) points out, through times of uncertainty and ethnic struggle, a single element of their identities can galvanize estranged migrants and provide a focus for their identification with home. This measure of loyalty to Sri Lanka reflects the influence of racism and discrimination, Sri Lanka’s cricketing success, and also the diversity of Sri Lankan cricket players (Roberts, 2009). Accordingly, cricket, fandom, and the cricket stadium serve as a site for socio-cultural practices through which migrants who are located outside the national sphere can reaffirm their sense of identity. In the case of the Sri Lankan migrants now living in New Zealand, cricket can even create new bonds across cultural divides that may have marred their lives in their war-torn past.

## **5. Cricket fandom as an expression of Sri Lankan culture and national identities**

Ironically, cricket also serves as a conduit for contested collective memories of the colonial legacy, as it once provided the British colonial settlers with symbolic links to *their* home; transcending and counteracting their own physical remoteness and social isolation (Stephen, 2015). Today, however, cricket links together the various colonial subjects through interconnected spatialities, connecting migrants living in New Zealand to their homes in Sri Lanka. For a vast majority of Sri Lankans living overseas, supporting the Sri Lankan cricket team can forge a symbolic link with their country of origin, enabling the celebration of tradition, feelings of belonging, memory and identity.

The symbolism possessed by sporting teams can be so powerful that they often serve as outlets for popular articulations of patriotic sentiment, where crowds of people portray high emotionality in support of their national team (Burdsey, 2006). Thus, for Sri Lankan cricket fans, the World Cup games represent an important cultural space in which to celebrate both their love of cricket and distinctive elements of their national identities (Crabbe & Wagg, 2000; Joseph, 2014), as apparent in figure 1.

We draw attention to the landscape forged by migrants, involving key spaces in which particular material practices are enacted, in the sociocultural typography of the new country, whilst also linking back to the home country. Such cultural spaces become particularly significant as they connect migrants to their families, friends and lives back in the country of origin, and allow for the (re)enactment of various cultural ways of being. In this increasingly interconnected world, places can no longer be regarded as separate and bounded entities, but need to be perceived as open and interlinked (Massey, 1994).



Figure 1. Sidath's family supporting Sri Lanka at a World Cup match.

In the particular context of migration, people occupy a broad landscape that spans both their country of origin, as well as various key locales in the host nation. Migrants live their lives across this landscape, where their social relations are not simply experienced within the spaces in which they are corporeally located. Instead, places and spaces filled with social meaning allow migrants to retain a sense of connection to their country of origin (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011). Migrants are thereby able to experience several places and/or spaces simultaneously. Such perceptions of migrant mobility, settlement and adaptation allow for a focus on space as embodied encounters between people, and the norms, knowledge and practices that shape those encounters. Thus, by extending beyond the dominant notions of stability in a particular place, we seek to perceive space as relational; a social phenomenon that is not static, but dynamic (Massey, 1994). Consequently, spaces such as the cricket stadium, take shape through the participants' efforts to forge a new life and place for themselves that is an extension of, rather than an abrupt break from their previous lives and ways of being.

Further, international cricket matches such as those comprising the Cricket World Cup have enabled migrants living overseas to celebrate the games on their own terms, by recreating more *traditional* forms of fandom involving parades, chants, flags and musical instruments, as was the case in the present study (Burdsey, 2006; 2007; Fletcher, 2011; Joseph, 2014). Figure 2 depicts how Sri Lankan fans including the participants of the present study practiced this notion of *traditional fandom*, comprising a public street parade featuring traditional cultural dancers in costumes carrying instruments and props.

For migrants living abroad, through listening to, watching and even participating in cricket fandom the *Sri Lankan way*, *Sri Lankan-ness* is reconfigured and embodied across time and space (*cf.* Fletcher, 2015; Joseph, 2014). It creates a notion of familiarity, through the crowd, the parade and the traditional fandom in general. For migrants like Sidath and Nihal's families, such practices of traditional fandom, through adorning costumes and participating in the parade, or wearing official 'Sri Lanka Cricket' T-shirts, cheering and waving Sri Lankan flags, enable them to identify with and celebrate a space that nominally represents notions of nationhood, home and homeland (Fletcher, 2015). Such practices are not only instrumental in creating interconnected spatialities linking Sri Lanka to New Zealand, they also create instances where home comes *here*, or rather the *there* becomes present in the *here*.



Figure 2. Nihal's children (left) and Sidath's daughter (bottom right) in a street parade of Sri Lankan cricket fans.

This was one of the rare occasions where, despite living away from Sri Lanka, Nihal and Sidath's families were able to actually cheer for the Sri Lankan cricket team who were present in person, surrounded by other fellow Sri Lankans. Occasions such as these turn the tables around on the dynamic of *here* versus *there*, and Sri Lankan migrant versus Sri Lankan resident. In this instance, the general population of Sri Lanka – living back *there* – were the ones following the game at a distance through various media sources. Spaces of traditional fandom such as this create a local reality in a non-local place (Madan, 2000; Mee, 2017). This practice of national sentiment extends beyond these participants' identities as Sri Lankan, to also incorporate their identities as New Zealanders.

## 6. Cricket fandom, contact zones and hybrid identities

The game of cricket and cricket fandom can afford a familiar means for migrants to cultivate a sense of self as a New Zealander. For instance, the Ranatunga household comprises Sidath and his wife Nirmala, who is in her 40s, identifies as a Sinhalese Buddhist, and has also lived in New Zealand for almost twenty years. Sidath and Nirmala explain how they supported both the Sri Lankan and New Zealand cricket teams in the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup:

Sidath: In the World Cup I will definitely support Sri Lanka.

Shemana: Even though you've lived here [in New Zealand] for that many years?

Sidath: Yes. I don't think it will change...

Nirmala: But if Sri Lanka played New Zealand he supports Sri Lanka obviously. But if New Zealand played any other country he always supports New Zealand.

Sidath: Definitely.

Shemana: So New Zealand is the number two choice.

Sidath: Number two choice. Yes. Sri Lanka is always number one.

Nirmala: If Sri Lanka lost to New Zealand... how would you feel...?

Sidath: Erm... I feel sad. The Sri Lankan cricket team is.... The Sri Lankan cricket team, you know..? It's our team. We're good. We have won the World Cup before, we have beaten all the other big teams...

Nirmala: For me.. It's like if Sri Lanka lost to New Zealand... I don't feel bad for Sri Lanka, but I feel proud that New Zealand won... but now today, if Sri Lanka lost, I would

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have felt a big loss [referring to the Sri Lanka versus Afghanistan ICC World Cup match that they were watching on TV during the interview]

Sidath: Yeah, I would feel like.... how do I show my face at work tomorrow. [laughs].

This conversation with Nirmala and Sidath indicates the complexities of their identities as Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand, as highlighted through their cricketing loyalties. For Sri Lankans, cricket has given the nation international status and national pride. Cricket serves as a material statement of the self-confidence of this nation (Mangan, 2010). Sidath's admission that he would not be able to show his face at work if Sri Lanka were to lose reflects how significant cricket is to a Sri Lankan sense of self. Being a small nation, Sri Lanka's cricketing prowess puts Sri Lanka on an equal playing field with the other larger and more powerful nations of the world. As it did so many years ago during British rule, cricket still remains a means through which Sri Lankans can "show their worth" (Little, 2012, p. 436). Further, Sidath and Nirmala indicate that Sri Lanka will "always" remain their "number one choice". This loyalty towards Sri Lanka remains despite living in New Zealand for almost twenty years. While Sidath and Nirmala admitted that the Sri Lankan team was their number one choice, they also stated that New Zealand was their second choice. Moreover, in a hypothetical cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka, Sidath admitted to supporting Sri Lanka. Yet, Nirmala stated that if Sri Lanka lost, she would still feel proud that New Zealand won. However, if New Zealand were to play any other country, they would "always support New Zealand".

Overall, these participant statements demonstrate the complex reasoning that migrants like Sidath, Nirmala and Siva engage in to determine their cricketing loyalties, and thus their sense of national identity. Particularly in the case of Sidath and Nirmala, this reasoning process goes beyond a simple dichotomy between their felt national identities as Sri Lankans or New Zealanders. Rather, it indicates that their sense of identity rests on a context-based continuum that represents different levels of being a Sri Lankan New Zealander.

Similar feelings were expressed by other participants of the present study. For example, members of the Perera household, Kamal (male) and Udeni (female) are both in their 50s, identify as Sinhalese Buddhist, and have lived in New Zealand with their two sons for sixteen years. Members of this household cheered for New Zealand in a semi-final match of this particular Cricket World Cup against South Africa. Figure 3 depicts images of this game, to which Shemana was also invited to accompany Kamal and Udeni's family. In preparation for the match, the Perera household members were equipped with multiple New Zealand flags (which they already possessed, stored in their cupboard for such an occasion), and adorned predominantly black clothing in support of the New Zealand cricket team. They also graciously ensured that Shemana was wearing black clothes, and provided her with two flags, prior to leaving the house. The atmosphere at the match was exhilarating, where the Perera household and Shemana were in sync with the other 'New Zealand supporters', where they cheered on their feet when New Zealand scored runs (see images at the top left of figure 3), and were immensely disappointed when a New Zealand cricketer got out, or when South Africa scored runs. The level of emotion and enthusiasm portrayed by the members of this household (as well as Shemana) during the match between New Zealand and South Africa, was as fervent as that for a Sri Lankan team. Within this encounter space, migrants such as Shemana and the participants cheered for, and alongside the people of the host nation. Here, albeit for a brief period of time, the sense of distance between the participants and the people of the host nation was reduced. During that match, these migrants were one of *them*, collectively cheering for a country that is now home. When the match concluded with New Zealand winning, these migrants felt a sense of national pride for New Zealand's victory. The images at the top right and bottom of figure 3 were taken following this victory.



**Figure 3. The Perera household and Shemana, cheering for New Zealand at a World Cup semi-final match.**

The accounts discussed above, portray that the national loyalty felt by Sri Lankan migrants like the Ranatunga and Perera households additionally extends towards their new home, New Zealand. These migrants' support for New Zealand cricket may be perceived as a situational strategy; a means of expressing their attachment to their new home. For Sri Lankans like Sidath, aside from creating interconnected spatialities linking Sri Lanka and New Zealand, the passion and fervent fandom shared by both countries for this sport made New Zealand feel a little more like home. Thus, these migrants' cricketing loyalties can represent the permanence of their settlement in their new home, along with the associated implications for the construction of hyphenated or hybrid identities (Burdsey, 2006; Katsiaficas et al., 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007). Sports initially introduced by the British, have subsequently come to play a significant role in how both New Zealand and Sri Lanka portray their postcolonial national identities. The familiarity of cricket has made the transition from their old home to new, somewhat easier for our research participants.

Accordingly, migrant identities do not simply revolve around either the replication of existing cultures within new settings, or the adoption of new ones. Rather, migrant identities should be viewed as fluid, dynamic and hybrid (Burdsey, 2006; Fletcher, 2015; 2011; Hall, 1994; Sirin & Fine, 2007). The fact that migrants, such as the participants of the present study, support both the team from their old home and that of their new home reflects the complexity of contemporary migrant identities. Migrants are able to negotiate multiple identities by prioritising different aspects of identity at different times, in relation to various situational contexts (Madan, 2000; Mee, 2017). International cricket is one such situational context where these hybrid migrant identities are articulated. Moreover, rather than being conflicting and thus problematic, these varying aspects of migrant identities are negotiated in a way that forms a coherent and unified sense of self (Katsiaficas et al., 2011).

In sum, there is a considerable body of research discussing the importance of cricket to migrant identities. While some scholars highlight how cricket can link migrants back to their countries of origin (e.g. Joseph, 2014), many studies tend to mainly focus on the fandom of South Asian (particularly Indian and Pakistani) migrants in Britain (e.g. Fletcher, 2015; 2011; Ratna, 2014; Burdsey, 2006; 2007; Raman, 2015). This latter focus may be in response to the recurrent questioning of the loyalty and citizenship of British Asians, such as Norman Tebbit's 'cricket test' or controversial statements made by the former English cricket captain Nasser Hussain (Fletcher, 2011; Ratna, 2014). In essence, such examples reflect a hegemonic norm that to live in Britain, migrant communities should assimilate to the British way of life, which includes severing ties completely with their country of origin. Exclusively supporting the British

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national team in any given sporting context is consequently seen as evidence of ‘successful’ assimilation. There is a need for more research that contests the use of sports for cultural assimilation and homogenization. For Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand for instance, cricketing allegiances do not aim to contest white supremacy and do not provide distance from the uncomfortable and alienating elements of *Englishness* (cf. Burdsey, 2006). Rather, as the present research has shown, cricket can also be appropriated in more agentic and culturally hybrid ways.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored material enactments and migrant reflections on their hybrid identities in the context of their participation in the colonial game of cricket. In doing so, we have shown how contemporary Sri Lankan hyphenated identities among migrants in New Zealand are shaped by not only Sri Lanka’s colonial history, but also by elements of this history that are shared with New Zealand. Considering the broader cultural, socio-political and historical contexts that have shaped people and nation states offers deeper insights into migration and migrant life-worlds. As this research illustrates, people and context are not discrete phenomena, but are inseparable, dynamic and manifold.

Further, our analysis contests the assumption of a clear binary between the *colonizing* them and the *colonized* us, the colonial and the *postcolonial*, and the traditional and the modern. Rather, for countries like Sri Lanka and New Zealand, today, national and/or cultural identities are multiple, hybrid and hyphenated (Baldassar & Raffaeta, 2018; Sirin & Fine, 2007). In postcolonial contexts, the colonial pasts strongly inform post-colonial presents (Wagg, 2005). Aspects of past cultures have been appropriated by the peoples of postcolonial nations such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand, and continue to be evident as unique cultural markers of national identities in such nations today. That is not to say that there is nothing unique or original about Sri Lankan or New Zealand cultural identities. Rather, for the purpose of the present research, we draw primarily on the particularly hybrid aspects of these cultures.

Admittedly, on a global scale, there is an ongoing heated debate regarding the colonial footprints persistent in postcolonial landscapes. Despite such sensitivities, the fact remains that these events in history have shaped the present. Moreover, such histories have been brought over by migrants from their countries of origin, to their new homes. Thus, we argue that the colonial footprint needs to be acknowledged more often in discussions of culture, identities, and migration. The reality of the Sri Lankan context for instance, is that the influences of the colonial settlers on the people of the island throughout its history, have persisted over time, through the generations. The result being that Anglo-colonial norms and practices have fused into, and formed a hybrid set of cultural identities that have come to represent aspects of the enactment of *Sri Lankan-ness* today, within and beyond the nation’s borders. This evolution and adaptation of cultures over time, highlights that cultures are not homogenous variables or static measures constrained in time and space. As shown by the participants of the present study, such complexities play an important role in shaping the (re)settlement of migrants in their new homes.

The connections between nations such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand have been made through common historical threads shared between the two nations. The colonial history shared by both Sri Lanka and New Zealand means that practices such as the game of cricket have helped migrants moving from Sri Lanka to New Zealand feel more at home in the new country. Not only did the interconnected spatialities forged by common historical elements such as cricket provide a sense of familiarity for Sri Lankan migrants moving to New Zealand, it also helped them develop feelings of rootedness in this country. Here, the cricket field can function as a contact zone in which these migrants find a place to be part of the host nation whilst also

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remaining distinct. Thus, through a particular exploration of the significance of cricket, we highlight the complexity of migrant identities that is often overlooked. The fluidity of migrants' hyphenated identities, reflect both the countries of origin and new settler societies occupied by migrant groups (Sirin & Fine, 2007). A sense of belonging for contemporary migrants thereby extends beyond singular national contexts to encompass multiple places, and migrants create new identity formations that reflect this fluidity.

The complex realities of the everyday lives of the peoples from postcolonial nations like Sri Lanka can be overlooked if culture is viewed as dichotomous and oppositional, traditional or *Western*. Moreover, for Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand, this level of complexity further increases, where these people negotiate hyphenated or hybrid cultural identities, rather than insular or discrete identities as Sri Lankans or New Zealanders. As articulated by Cresswell (2006), culture no longer sits in singular, confined places. Rather, culture is hybrid, dynamic and is more about routes than roots. Thus, movement is rarely just about getting from A to B. The connection between two locales is both meaningful and laden with power (Cresswell, 2006). Here, mobility, settlement and adaptation are not abstract concepts. Rather, these processes involve both locales, and the lived experiences and practices that occur within them. Furthermore, mobility, particularly as enacted by migrants, is not just about the psychological processes occurring within a singular human agent, but also involves the relationships between people, things, places and histories that together produce new effects across spaces (Cresswell, 2006).

Finally, while we acknowledge that there are instances when Sri Lanka's colonial history is indeed deterring, we also assert that there are times, especially today, when connecting to this historical context can be seen as a sign of agency. In the context of the present study, for migrants living away from Sri Lanka, hybrid practices such as cricket speak of a sense of home, and stand for notions of cultural identity, heritage, *Sri Lankan-ness* as well as adaptability. Such factors can also function to reduce the notion of distance between the *here* and *there*, extend a sense of belonging, foster hybrid identities, and build connections between migrants and host societies.

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