'In-ger-land, In-ger-land, In-ger-land! : exploring the impact of soccer on the sense of belonging of those seeking asylum in the UK

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Abstract

Utilising research conducted in Sheffield (UK) with people seeking asylum, this article explores the ways in which soccer might be used to create a sense of belonging in the host country. It explores participant feelings about soccer and its potential to alleviate the pressures that the status of being an 'asylum seeker' brings. The ways in which soccer may play a role in the identity formation of those seeking asylum is considered in relation to both self-identity and the perceptions of others. The findings of this exploratory study suggest that the various ways of interacting with soccer can provide participants with a sense of control, identity and belonging.

Keywords: Soccer, asylum seekers, identity, belonging

Introduction

In 1999, the UK introduced forced dispersal of those seeking asylum to particular cities, including Sheffield, which has relatively well-established support networks, becoming the UK's first City of Sanctuary in 2007. Sheffield hosts a number of organisations that support those seeking asylum, via for example conversation clubs, educational classes, providing volunteering opportunities and advice on welfare, as well as supporting anti-deportation campaigns. These groups include, as is the case in many cities, Christian organisations. Our participants regularly attend Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD) a third sector organisation which utilises soccer as a tool to promote social cohesion and combat racism.

Bauman (1998) argues that society has moved from the socio-political concept of the nation-state and the traditional marriage of culture, ethnicity and geography on which it is based to an increasingly globalised milieu. While supra-states such as the European Union are arguably testament to this, the experiences and treatment of those seeking asylum in the UK is in sharp contrast, with no right to paid work and little financial support from the state. Our research context then was one where contradictory messages were transmitted; participants lived in a local area of sanctuary, but within a state increasingly reticent to receive those seeking asylum. In attempting to analyse how soccer might provide opportunities to shape identity and generate a sense of belonging for those seeking asylum, our research contributes to over lapping fields, such as the sociology of sport and leisure and migration studies, a recognition of the complexity of the milieu of our participants.

While we acknowledge the term 'asylum seeker' is used in legal and popular discourse, we use 'those/people seeking asylum' in response to participants' attempts to articulate identities on their own terms and their highlighting of the limiting nature and negative perceptions of the term 'asylum seeker'.

Literature on those seeking asylum

Some studies within this field have been criticised for focussing on statistical data that offers scant information on the lives of those seeking asylum (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen, 2009). Our research contributes a more qualitative, 'everyday' exploration of the straitened existence caused by a lack of paid work and what can be a reliance on government and charity

exemplified by authors such as Hintjens (2012) and how various interactions with soccer might alleviate these conditions.

Referencing the formalities of life faced by those seeking asylum, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh (2010) see lives as lived in relation to Government and their affiliate agencies e.g. the regular reporting of their whereabouts by those seeking asylum. Stewart (2005) echoes this, stating that there is a manifestation of governmental power in the lives of those seeking asylum which renders them subjects of the state, their lives regimented by actors with whom they have no communication. This is picked up on by Zembylas (2010: 362) who states an 'asylum seeker becomes... the homo sacer who has been left behind or been excluded from the territorial boundaries that confer the rights of citizenship,' the lack of citizenship underpinning the assigning of official terms to those seeking asylum.

Gibson (2003: 368) views the relationship those seeking asylum have with the country to which they flee as a guest-host dichotomy, conjuring images of 'hotels' rather than homes. Asylum seekers then exist in a temporary state of affairs, betwixt and between (Hynes 2011) and the effects which this has on identity will be expanded upon later in the context of soccer. Highlighting the flux that is experienced by those seeking asylum, Kunz offers:

'his main preoccupation is therefore the redefinition of his relation towards his country of birth...taking the first step that will change him from a temporary refugee into exile' (1973: 138)

It is clear then that central to research around people seeking asylum should be how the uncertainty of identity is felt and how this relates to concepts more grounded in officialdom, such as citizenhip which impact on the ability to feel that one belongs.

Identity and the self

Stone's (2007: 265) take on identity as 'a combination of personality traits and social characteristics' brings into focus ideas of identity performativity and subscription and how these are affected by the social features those seeking asylum associate with them. Importantly in the context of our work, Hognestad refers to nation as 'the primary collective identity to which individuals are attached' (2009: 364). Closely allied to this, Muller (2000) writing of the link between citizenship and identity, uses the term state-sponsored identity. Tajfel (1981) sees identity as context dependent and this fluidity is especially pertinent, as those seeking asylum may hold identities markedly different from the bulk of UK citizens, impacting on their perception of the extent to which they might belong. Others examine processes which lead to the formation or reimagining of identities, Jensen (2011) claiming identity formation comes via the process of othering those viewed as subordinate, evocative of the relationship between people seeking asylum and the state they reside in. Indeed Stewart (2005) shows how government assigning of the term 'asylum seeker' is a form of othering. Brettell and Sargent (2006: 169) offer a more active, individual take on identity formation, claiming it is produced due to the 'drawing of difference' and the distinguishing of oneself from others. While this view may not be as relevant to people seeking asylum due to their relative lack of power, it could be argued that this position fits well with arguments that soccer is an arena in which they have a modicum of freedom in determining their identity, something supported by Stone (2013).

Mata-Codesal et al (2015) encourage us to acknowledge the complexity and dynamics of identity formation, to not portray it as a linear process and to see it as one that includes

self-realization and expression, rather than merely coping and adapting. They highlight the contribution leisure can make to self-perception, multiple embeddedness and sense of belonging. With those seeking asylum not permitted to work, and the idea of employment as *the* source of self-concept being eroded, being superseded by leisure (Rojek 2009), this is particularly apposite to discussions of identity. However, in terms of how leisure choices are arrived at, we need to be cautious of Roberts' (2011) claim that leisure has value because it is relatively freely chosen, as in the habitus of people seeking asylum, leisure may be the *only* option to occupy time.

The soccer player Jack Wilshere, when hearing the Football Association was investigating the eligibility, via residency, of Belgium born Adnan Januzaj to play for England (it was also claimed he was eligible to represent Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey) stated 'If you live in England for five years it doesn't make you English' (BBC, 2013). Wilshere's stance on citizenship, a complex topic at times the subject of fervent, popular discourse, is examined in Gibbons' (2015) article on the eligibility of Spanish born Manuel Almunia to play for England, and is illustrative of postmodern, performative conceptualisations of identity (Keddell, 2009). Wilshere's adherence to a traditional concept of ethnic identity in relation to soccer can be contrasted with other sports such as cricket and rugby union, where senior male teams include a number of non UK born players, illustrative of a subscription to civic conceptions of identity. Such debates demonstrate that identity is not a social monolith and illustrate the potential of sport to deconstruct, formulate and reformulate an individual's subscription to markers of identity.

Hernandez et al examine personal identity and place, describing a 'process by which, through interaction with places, people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place' (2007: 310). Place is particularly pertinent to our research, FURD helping participants to interact with relatively well established networks and thus the place in which they live. Hernandez's et al's study concludes that the sense of attachment to a place, and thus the identity that a given place can generate, is greater for natives, suggesting place identity for people seeking asylum in the UK, with its policy of dispersal, would not be significant. Despite this, Shobe highlights the relationship between place, soccer and identity; 'sports and stadiums are themselves drawn upon to construct ideas about place and nation' (2008: 329). Mutz (2013) also offers that soccer is an arena where identity cannot only be vociferously played out, but can also be used as a foundation from which to negotiate and re-negotiate it. Our work then offers a lens through which to explore the importance of *club* soccer to participants, particularly in relation to Sheffield United, because of its relationship with FURD.

Sport, inclusion and nation

Claims that sport promotes social inclusion, the process by which people are able to participate fully economically, socially and culturally in society, are well rehearsed, with Kelly describing the 'international enthusiasm for the idea' (2011: 126). However, quite how such inclusion is 'measured' is unclear, and unfortunately there is no room here to debate the difficulties involved (outlined at www.socialwatch.eu.). Crabbe (2007) highlights the way sport has come to be framed by functionalist perspectives, and in his work with Blackshaw (2004) outlines the prevalence of policy makers and practitioners to speak of what sport does *to* people and *for* society. Spracklen et al (2015) also question the inclusive nature of sport and its ability to contribute to generate belonging. As well as suggesting that sport is likely to affirm 'otherness,' they challenge claims that sport can create bridging social capital (Putnam 2001), with proponents of this concept underplaying the importance of structural relations and

economic capital. They do, however, acknowledge the potential of *leisure* to generate a sense of belonging, that sense that you have not just the legal, but the social credentials to be a member of something, which may have parallels with bonding social capital. The importance of power and the local context to inclusion, pertinent in terms of the location of our research, are also highlighted by Van Zoonen and De Roode (2008).

Duke and Crolley describe how national identity is easier to imagine 'when eleven players are playing in a match against another nation' (1996: 135). Similarly in his study of mass sporting events and collective national consciousness, Ismer found a 'national euphoria' was created during soccer tournaments, highlighting international soccer as a strong source of identity (2011: 533). In the same vein, Mutz offers that the 'national team becomes a significant point of reference for national identification' (2013: 517). Additionally, Lee (2009) speaks of how soccer constitutes one of the most important contemporary arenas in which nationalism and national identity are expressed, performed, reinforced and negotiated. Both Mutz and Lee highlight that soccer and nationalism can interweave, played out explicitly and implicitly, Mutz highlighting the existence of a darker side to such nationalism, 'which idealises the own nation and devalues outsiders' (2013: 518) something of particular relevance to our participants in relation to their ability to develop attachment to the UK.

Bocketti identifies sport as a unique facilitator of identity in a host country, claiming it provides 'an unusual lens on immigrants' and natives' attitudes toward national identity and integration', offering opportunities for immigrants to construct or negotiate identities on their own terms (2008: 301). His study of the extent to which Italian immigrants use soccer when 'negotiating the process by which they became Brazilian... considers the cultural adjustment... through an analysis of the role that association soccer played' (2008: 275). His belief that cultural factors, such as recreation, should be examined to avoid research becoming too focussed on socioeconomic factors, has great relevance to our work as we intended to discover how the identities of people seeking asylum in the UK were negotiated within soccer, part of the cultural indices that Bocketti refers to. Mutz found that despite a spike in levels of patriotism during a tournament, levels were 'markedly weaker' (2013: 518) only a few days after it finished. His work suggests that national identity flowing from soccer is perhaps overplayed within literature. It may, however, be that for those seeking asylum, a stronger affiliation with the national team is a useful resource and explains the lack of sustained interest on the part of the 'native born' who already feel that they belong. Hognestad (2009) writes of the impact of globalisation and how its features, such as transnationalism, impact on identity, citing *club* soccer as a more important identity creator amongst contemporary fans. This work has particular pertinence for our research as it suggests that local soccer may have greater resonance for those seeking asylum in terms of identity than associations with Englishness/Britishness via support for the national team.

The concept of Englishness, as opposed to Britishness, is pertinent to our work as it impacts on how participants perceive themselves, but the terms are susceptible to conflation. Gibbons (2015) in the context of soccer, specifically England's hosting of EURO '96, helpfully portrays the way English national identity became separate from Britishness through distinctions drawn against the other Home nations, implying the concept of otherness pertinent to formulations of identity (Brettell and Sargent, 2006). Inconsistencies in such conceptualisations of identity are laid bare in a political context as a seemingly more fragmented Britain in terms of constituent autonomy, negotiates its position within the supra-national state of the European Union. How these conflicts are played out in the associations felt by those seeking asylum is something our work hoped to uncover. The 'Tebbit Test' an

examination by a prominent politician of the day of whether people born in, for instance, Jamaica, supported the England or West Indies cricket team when the two met, thus signifying their true identity, was considered crude at the time. In a liquid modern world, the multiplicity of identities and associations mean internal and external assessments of a person's identity are now rendered much more complex.

Methodology

In addition to time at the project speaking with staff, volunteers and participants, semi-structured interviews were used with participants to facilitate what Patton (1990) calls informal and spontaneous dialogue. The participants were seeking asylum in the UK, some coming directly to Sheffield, some via UK cities of dispersal. All were male and aged 22-45. Latif is from Pakistan, Hermin Angola, Alaudin Afghanistan, Emmanuel Zimbabwe and Raage Somalia. The sampling was purposive, participants among a small group with English sufficient to sustain an in depth interview, Kvale and Brinkmann offering that there is no 'gold standard' in relation to the number of interviews undertaken (2009: 140). The sample was also small as participants had to identify as soccer fans prior to arrival in the UK. Although not a requirement, all had supported a European club from a young age, giving us a group that engaged with soccer in a variety of ways, had a long term commitment to the game and were, thus, able to articulate their relationship with it.

Thematic analysis was used to generate the topics discussed in our analysis. (Braun and Clarke 2006). Transcripts were re-read to identify recurring themes, Leininger (1985, p. 60) arguing that themes are best identified by 'bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone.' While thematic analysis is inductive and top-down (Jones, Brown and Holloway, 2013) conducted from an emic perspective which gives primacy to the insight of participants, the identification of themes was done in tandem with the researchers' own experiences and their understanding of academic and populist discourse regarding forced migration. This helped create themes that were not only reflective of the contestations present in the lives of those seeking asylum but ones that also resonate at a more public level of engagement, characterising an advantage of this technique identified by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Our approach acknowledges the subjectivity and spontaneity of social actors, with perceptions of the world 'inextricably bound to a stream of experiences we have had throughout our lives' (Donohoe, 2004: 5). It allowed for an understanding of the 'meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of vulnerable groups' (Liamputtong, 2006: 7), Hesse-Biber and Leavy citing the importance of giving voice to those who are 'silenced, othered and marginalised by the dominant social order' (2005: 28). In terms of building rapport, one of the authors has a long history of working broadly with FURD and specifically around a project on belonging. The other author had been a volunteer with the organisation for some time. This meant that whilst being more socio economically privileged than participants, white and not speaking the first languages of those being interviewed, there was a level of trust which might not otherwise have existed, as well as awareness of the issues faced by those seeking asylum. Interviews were held at FURD and an asylum support group, venues which participants regularly attended and felt comfortable in. Attempting to mitigate against 'researching down,' the relatively equal possession of social capital, within the field of soccer, mitigated against a hierarchical citizen-non-citizen dichotomy, which helped to create a purposive conversation (Hammersley, 1989). These factors created a degree of comfort within interviews that allowed participants to provide in-depth, personal accounts of sensitive areas of their lives.

Standard ethics protocols around collaboration and informed consent were adhered to. Additionally, due to their status and the possibility that carries of sensitive/distressing topics being raised, participants were considered 'vulnerable' in terms of ethics approval, De Laine offering that research with those seeking asylum may 'intrude(s) into private space, may pose a threat or risk to actors who fear exposure and sanctions' (2000: 67). Again, author knowledge of Sheffield, FURD and issues pertinent to those seeking asylum mitigated against insensitivities that might, as Elmir et al state 'cause physical, emotional or psychological distress' (2011: 12).

Analysis and Discussion

Identity, belonging, inclusion, perceptions of government, nation and the local, as well as the multiple benefits of engagement with soccer emerged as themes and are examined here. Our findings contribute across multiple topics and, subsequently, numerous fields, such as sport and sociology, forced migration and leisure.

Identity

One aim of the research was to analyse how those seeking asylum came to identify with the host country and to assess the extent to which soccer shaped this. We found that the asylum seeker label weighed heavily on participants, Emmanuel viewing his status as undesirably important:

> 'Being an asylum seeker… at times tends to makes me feel isolated… because… I don't feel that I'm free to do… I'm restricted'.

Despite involvement with soccer alleviating this isolation, the restrictions this label had on his ability to feel included came to affect how he perceived his identity:

> 'I'm enjoying myself, I'm talking to people from all different walks of life... I've got very good relationships with them, but there's always that thing that is niggling with me, within yourself to say… you are not completely free and that's sort of tends to… bring about that social isolation'

Emmanuel's feelings reflect a position where little power is attributed to an individual in determining their identity, it effectively being determined by the relationships an individual has to organisations. Jensen's work (2011) is supported by the sentiments of Emmanuel, the author viewing identity as produced via a process of 'othering' in which people are judged in relation to the prevailing ideology, one which looks unfavourably upon many seeking asylum.

Raage spoke of his irritation at being referred to as an 'asylum seeker' and hints at how soccer offers a way to be defined on his own terms, it being an aspects of his life where he is, at least partially, in control, and in being so, helps to reformulate the citizen-non-citizen dichotomy;

> 'I actually hate people calling me an asylum seeker… It's a long sentence but why use the words that have been prepared for you with people with prejudice… So, deviate from that, when you say ''he's a Sheffield United fan'', ''he's an Arsenal fan'', I think that makes me more closer to you'

Raage highlights an urge to move away from the label, one which he sees as creating distance. The contextual perception of identity as offered by Tajfel (1981) is manifest in the following, where he highlights how he perceives himself in different environments:

> 'when I go to the Home Office I identify myself as an asylum seeker… when I come to the U-Mix [FURD's base] and Bob is introducing me to someone you say "hey, this is Raage, he's one of our volunteers". So you know it depends with the environment.'

His comments, a la Brettell and Sargent (2006) highlight how, despite limitations placed on him, there are opportunities for people to be identified as *they* would wish to be.

Soccer's multiple uses

A key insight to emerge is the importance of soccer in terms of the *various* ways it is utilised by people seeking asylum, in relation to playing and fandom. All participants spoke passionately about the major part soccer played in their lives. Each reported a desire to be seen primarily as a fan and it seemed this was a method of at least partially dispensing with the label of asylum seeker, as if a strong association with soccer would override their label as 'other'. In relation to support for national teams, O'Brien's (2014) work around support for Spain as providing a diversion from political issues highlights the potential of soccer to offer respite from the tensions of daily life.

Although not an explicit aim at the outset, when describing his identity and its context specific nature, Raage spoke about *club* soccer;

> 'when like I went to the Emirates, I sat next to, to a man and we started talking you know, and say "hey this is Raage, he's an Arsenal fan"'.

Raage here confirms the findings of authors who identify soccer as a source of identity (Hognestad, 2009; Gibbons, 2011). Missing from that literature though is the direct application of soccer and identity to the context of UK asylum seeking, and here our work illustrates that soccer is perceived by participants as helping them to supersede the labels given to them by others.

A comment about soccer from Raage ('we own it') is striking, when one acknowledges the relatively possessionless status of those seeking asylum, illustrating the game's potential to provide dominion over some aspects of their lives. While not explicitly in the context of forced migration, Ben Porat (2012) discusses the sense of ownership people have over their clubs, describing how a collective identification with a shared history and a deep relationship with a soccer club makes it 'their club' (2012: 176). Whilst Stone (2013) cites watching soccer as providing connections for people seeking asylum, a lack of money means that attending professional games is mostly off limits, making the generation of attachment via this aspect of soccer more difficult. This could though be said to be true for many soccer fans whose personal circumstances or choices dictate that they do not attend live soccer often or at all.

The *playing* of soccer has clear importance. For Emmanuel, it appeared to both depoliticise his status and offer escapism, to take him away from his status, with all the uncertainty it carries:

'That 2 hour period is a kind of very refreshing and exhilarating period and time where everything else is forgotten and you simply concentrate on your soccer… nobody's thinking of you as an asylum seeker, there is just thinking of you as either a good player or a bad player or a participating player, that's the difference'

This is indicative of Brettell and Sargent's (2006) active take on identity formation and suggestive of soccer as a context which offers participants the ability to exert some control over how they are perceived (Stone 2013).

Government and nation

'It be like you not supposed to be here' said Hermin, opening a window into the relationship between someone seeking asylum and the state. Emmanuel spoke of the dehumanising effects of seeking asylum:

'People in my situation are not being treated as human beings rather we are being treated as statistics… put in an in-tray and possibly pushed onto another out-tray, and not realising that you are actually a human being who's got emotions… you are a parent, you are a father, you are a husband … you've got…feelings'

Emmanuel offers a glimpse into the feelings of rejection, isolation and injustice which permeate the lives of people who have fled to the UK which government action and inaction can provoke. He is explicit about how powerfully this manifestation of governmental power (Stewart, 2005) affects people and offers valuable insight into the regimentation imposed on those seeking asylum by the state.

Despite feelings of resentment towards the UK government over the way their cases were being handled, participants were able to separate those negative feelings from more positive ones relating to other aspects of their lives, soccer being one. Whilst we are conscious that we conflate England and the UK, as is often the case in popular discourse, the distinction participants made between state institutions and actors and soccer teams and players, allowed them to simultaneously criticise the government whilst supporting the England soccer team. Emmanuel offered:

'It's a totally different entity… because this is purely social and this is… a game and I do differentiate between that. It doesn't mean that … because the government is not … attending to my situation in the manner that I wish… that doesn't follow that I then start to dislike the English team.'

The sentiments displayed here echo those of Anderson (1983) who saw nation as manifested from bottom-up in people's minds, rather than being created top-down by government definitions. Indeed this view appeared popular amongst participants, Raage commenting on support for those who play for the national team:

'we are here to support the teams cause these guys they're not part of any, they're not in any political institutions.'

All participants identified as England fans, describing how they often watched games. Latif reinforced this when discussing visual representations of support, describing how when seeing flags displayed on houses and cars, he felt an affinity with those symbols:

'Definitely, cause I'm living here and I've been here for three years, and I'm thinking, you know, this is my country'.

However, Alaudin, despite saying that he supports England 'because I live in England… I'm happy for England to win (the World Cup)' reported *not* being able to feel part of a wider fandom that accompanies major tournaments and in doing so illustrates the complexity and seeming inconsistencies present in research into identity generally and with those seeking asylum specifically.

Some interviews moved beyond discussions of soccer to describe good relationships with local citizens, highlighting that it was *agencies*, such as the Home Office, that cause their frustration. It seemed that it was such organisations, in this case with the power to decide who can become citizens, which prevented participants from expressing a full sense of belonging in terms of using the language of citizenship. This was contra to preconceptions at the start of the research where the theme of being seen as 'other' by residents was thought likely to emerge. Our findings support the work of Stone (2013: 9) who argues that there are aspects of life which 'transcend' the traditional idea of citizenship. His work speaks of how one identifies as British, or feels part of the country, *personally*. The identification with soccer, as well as the relationships with local citizens this fosters and is fostered by, meant some respondents, despite their status, were able to identify with their own perceptions of British/Englishness. This conflation, discussed in Gibbons (2015), did not play a significant role in our participants' view of their relative associations, redolent of Anderson's conceptualisation of imagined community (1983) and the emphasis this places on informal perceptions of national communitas.

Soccer and inclusion

At the core of Raage's narrative was a lack of certainty, confirming the 'betwixt and between' lives of those seeking asylum (Hynes: 2011):

> 'I've been here for 7 years…I don't know where I'm going tomorrow… So, it's a bit challenging not knowing what you're waking up to. You're not allowed to work, right, so, you cannot pay taxes, you cannot lead a life that you want to. It's like you're not the captain of your life anymore.'

The notion of sport as a tool for social inclusion was discussed earlier and the responses of participants reinforced soccer's potential in this regard, with its ability to provide routine and welcome. Alaudin commented how playing helped him to:

> 'make many friends, and, yeah it's just really helping me to integrate.'

This is supported by Alaudin 'it's helping me….I do Sunday as well, then Wednesday because there is many people, it's more important now.'

Emmanuel stated that:

> 'I interact with different nationalities; from Afghanistan, from Iraq, from Iran, from everywhere… Sudan and whatever… it's helped a lot in the integration process… and it makes me feel part of a much, much wider community.'

Emmanuel here uses 'integration' in the sense of allowing him to interact with, and be accepted by, others. He speaks of a particular type of inclusion which echoes Stone's work which reports that those seeking asylum initially spend much of their time with other people seeking asylum then make stronger connections with people from similar ethnic groups (2013). He found few connections between those seeking asylum and the 'indigenous' community in terms of playing, an issue discussed in our conclusion.

Whilst some argue that 'community' is a word so casually used in the public domain as to have become an empty concept (Blackshaw, 2008), our work highlights its continued *lived* importance as a collective orientation (Pawar, 2003). The benefits of being part of communities were reflected in comments from Raage when he addressed how important soccer was to him in terms of feeling included:

> 'Having that luxury of coming to soccer and integrating with other people and talking about soccer in that particular moment... I'm trying to show that you integrate you have the same conversation you're on the same platform and you see the people who play in the Premiership, you try to engage with them, put yourself in their shoes, like, y'know, how many players from your team have been called into international duty'

This illustrates the idea of soccer as a 'leveller'. It's relative ubiquity and accessibility, in terms of forms and media fandom, means that for our participants the sport is something which offers them common ground with citizens, locally and further afield; the opportunity to feel part of something. What the participants have shown is that soccer offers respite and an opportunity to interact through a commonality, rather than being distanced by othering.

Local soccer and place identity
Unsurprisingly, globalisation and transnationalism appeared in some discussions, Raage speaking of his support for Arsenal; 'Liberian defender called Christopher Wreh...I connect, I'm African', highlighting the associations that globalisation fosters (Giulianotti, 2006).
However, the locale where our participants live provided them with the greatest sense of solidarity and belonging. Emmanuel spoke of his support for Sheffield United, making a link between supporting this club and gaining closer ties to the local community; 'I support United cause it's part of the community, why not support a local team, not because I'm forced to.'

Raage spoke of how following United gave him a sense of solidarity with other Sheffielders, his fandom helping him to feel he belonged to the city:

> 'I enjoy it. I feel so relaxed when I'm at a soccer match and... it makes me feel part of the community, part of the city... it tends to make me identify more with the city. When I see players, everybody's rallying behind them and I'm also doing that I feel a sense of belonging.'

Alaudin demonstrated a hierarchy of fandom, perhaps not untypical as the nature of fandom changes, which included his local team 'My first team is Barcelona and second is Chelsea. We support Sheffield United cause we live here'

Links with United can be explained in the context of place identity which Hernandez et al (2007) claim is a component of personal identity, with the strength of it hinging on the power of association with the place in which one lives. Following United, coupled with the

interactions participants had within Sheffield appears to highlight how a locality and the senses of belonging to it, offers our participants a method of negotiating their identity.

In terms of how soccer fans might engage with those seeking asylum, at a time when significant numbers of refuges are fleeing Syria to Europe and migrant camps at Calais are expanding, Arsenal supporters, for example, raised a 'refugees welcome banner' at a game. However, Lyon fans displayed a banner with the message 'refugees *not* welcome,' demonstrating what can be the local and or national nature of attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers. Although a City of Sanctuary, Sheffield has 4 UKIP councillors, a political party that calls for stringent immigration controls and is popularly portrayed as right wing. At the final home game of 2015, there was racist and anti Islamic chanting by a small number of Sheffield United fans, their opponents being Bradford City, a city with a significant Muslim population. Adding further to potential local tensions, Sheffield has 2 professional soccer teams. If those seeking asylum are allied to United, which has close links with FURD, the deep rooted local patriotism of soccer means that they would be viewed as 'the other' by Sheffield Wednesday supporters, so here there is the local potential for soccer to create and sustain *ex*clusion.

Conclusion: limitations and future research

Focussing on an under explored area, we would argue that our findings offer new insights into the relationship between those seeking asylum, soccer and the generation of belonging and identity, However, the study *was* exploratory, with our sample not representative of the range of those seeking asylum in the UK. Research in locations which do not have the support networks present in Sheffield might generate different findings. In addition, we acknowledge that findings may have been different if the research had been carried out during a major international soccer tournament or outside of the domestic league season.

The research demonstrates that playing and supporting have significance for participants, providing distraction and release from daily uncertainties, while simultaneously acting as something through which they negotiate their identities. Involvement with soccer was a source of strength and created feelings of inclusion, whilst also giving individuals the opportunity to project a positive image of themselves. The broad appeal of soccer meant it was something participants used as a way of placing themselves on even ground with UK citizens, giving them a modicum of solidity. Relationships with members of the local community, supporting the local and national soccer teams and involvement with a voluntary sector organisation were all identified as contributing to feeling part of the UK, with participants seeing benefits as by products of their engagement with the game, rather than being solicited.

FURD shares ground with United Glasgow FC which provides regular, structured soccer for the host community, as well as those seeking asylum. Similarly, Plymouth's Hope FC promotes social cohesion, hosting players from a range of birth countries, including those seeking asylum. These three projects offer hospitality to people seeking asylum as well as holding a belief that soccer can promote inclusion. However, whilst these two facets are clearly at the heart of FURD's work, if project participants were primarily in contact with those seeking or who have secured asylum, if they have few connections with the local white citizenry, this could prove problematic in terms of achieving inclusion, Strang and Ager (2010:29) describing *integration* as 'two-way: it places demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned.'

Carrying out research with participants further along their journey towards citizenship and after citizenship has been granted, would allow us to explore the *dynamic* nature of identity and belonging. Such longitudinal research, whilst acknowledging the practical difficulties of maintaining contact with people seeking asylum, would provide a more accurate reflection of how we attain our sense of belonging via long term connections, to ascertain if participants can move beyond the current stage where they can only, because of the relatively short time they have been in the UK, 'belong enough' (Stone 2013: 82).

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