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Refugee youth, belonging and community sport

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Abstract

This article examines community sport as a site where refugee youth negotiate belonging, which is conceptualised as a dynamic dialectic of 'seeking' and 'granting'. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork among Somali Australian youth at community football (soccer) clubs in Melbourne, the article identifies the kinds of belonging that are constructed by refugee youth in community sport, the social processes that facilitate or impede these belongings, and the forms of boundary work involved. The belonging negotiated by Somali Australian youth in community sports clubs is multi-layered, dynamic and situational, and involves multiple boundary shifts. It operates at varying scales of experience from the sports team and local community to the transnational. The article shows that while social boundaries such as clan, team and locality are porous, other boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, notably gender, ethnicity and religion, tend to be more stable and more difficult to cross for Somali Australian youth in community football clubs.

Keywords: belonging; boundary work; refugees; settlement; sport

Introduction

Sport plays a significant role in the everyday lives of many young people with refugee backgrounds. One reason is that sport provides a setting in which young people can express themselves through bodily practices, construct and perform social identities, and craft emotional closeness to, or distance from, other people (e.g. Walseth, 2006a; Walseth & Fasting, 2004). Playing or watching sport is something that many young people, and especially young men, do as a way of occupying themselves and socialising with each other. Moreover, being good at sports may be perceived by new arrivals a way to ‘make it’ in a new country, especially in host societies where sport is a key site of culture production and social prestige. It is hardly surprising, then, that policymakers and advocacy groups in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have turned to sport as a site where the settlement of young people with refugee backgrounds may be promoted (e.g. DIAC, 2011; RCOA, 2010; Amara et al., 2004).

Normative assumptions about how sport may assist the settlement of refugee and migrant youth focus on its capacity to enable new arrivals to become active and valued members of the community. However, any generalised claim that sport is a mechanism for ‘good settlement’ is contentious because sport is not necessarily inclusive, but is also used to differentiate and exclude. The social and cultural norms that organised sports embody may potentially lead newcomers or minorities to feel alienated or marginalised. Indeed, international research shows that the presumed integrative role of sport for minority ethnic youth needs to be qualified. While playing sport can in some cases contribute to a sense of social integration (Walseth & Fasting, 2004), it can also have the opposite effect of exposing participants to social exclusion, racism and cultural resistance, which may lead them to

abandon sport or to segregate themselves into separate clubs or leagues (Burdsey, 2006, 2007; Bradbury, 2011; Spaaij, Magee, & Jeanes, 2014).

Understanding how young people with refugee backgrounds access, negotiate and enact social identities and relationships within the realm of sport can enhance our knowledge of how resettled refugees navigate life in a new country and how this is affected by discourses and practices of inclusion/exclusion and negotiation across difference in spaces of multicultural encounter. To do so, we need to move beyond an instrumental perspective on how sport participation enables or impedes people with refugee or migrant backgrounds to settle or 'integrate' in a new country (e.g. Walseth & Fasting, 2004; Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Olliff, 2008; Author 2012), to consider sport as a site where refugee youth can construct a sense of belonging (Walseth, 2006a). Previous research has asked whether sport participation creates feelings of belonging among migrant youth, and if so, what the reasons are for their sense of belonging to develop (Walseth, 2006a). This article builds on and progresses this research by considering belonging as a dynamic dialectic of 'seeking' and 'granting' to address the following questions: What kinds of belonging are constructed by refugee youth in community sport? What facilitates or impedes these belongings? And, lastly, what forms of boundary work are involved in the negotiation of these belongings? Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork at community football (soccer) clubs in Melbourne, Australia, the article seeks to demonstrate how refugee youths' belonging in community sport is multi-layered, dynamic and situational, and involves multiple boundary shifts.

The overarching purpose of this article, then, is to examine community sport as a site where refugee youth negotiate belonging. First, it will discuss the concept of belonging and the role of social boundary processes in the negotiation of belonging. Then it will describe the methods used in the research on which the present analysis is based. This will be followed by a discussion of the kinds and scales of belonging that are constructed by refugee youth in

community sport, and the factors and processes that facilitate or impede these belongings. Finally, I will draw together the main research findings and reflect on their implications.

Conceptualising belonging

In a broad sense, belonging refers to some form of emotional attachment that relates individuals to other people, places or modes of being (Probyn, 1996; Wood & Waite, 2011). Belonging can be understood as a personal, intimate feeling of becoming 'at home' in a place or in particular collectivities (Antonsich, 2010), or as a sense of being part of the social fabric (Anthias, 2005). In this interpretation, belonging is essentially about *experiences* of belonging and attendant identifications and emotional attachments, that is, the stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (not) relating to being a member of a collectivity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The experience of belonging is best understood as a process (i.e. becoming) rather than a state (i.e. being) (Antonsich, 2010). Belonging is dynamic and situational: it can shift and change over time, be contested and plural (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2007).

While the majority of work on belonging focuses on the relationships between ethnic and national affiliation and belonging (Wood & Waite, 2011), belonging should not be thought of in exclusively ethnic or racial terms. Other forms of identification and affiliation can be equally prominent bases for (not) belonging. For example, Anthias (2005) argues that belonging is a gendered process and that gender is central to the boundary formation which characterises the experience of (not) belonging. It is therefore critical to consider belonging in relation to different, intersectional categories of social location (Yuval-Davis, 2011), including race/ethnicity but also gender, kinship, religion, class and nation.

Belonging is both a personal and a social matter. Understanding belonging requires a focus on discourses and practices of inclusion/exclusion that enable or impede a person's ability to claim belonging. Yuval-Davis's (2006, 2011) theorisation of belonging as a dialectic of 'seeking' and 'granting' is particularly instructive in this regard. Her emphasis is on the politics of belonging, that is, the boundary discourses and practices that separate 'us' from 'them'. Control over these factors is not located within the individual or group, but depends on a dynamic interplay between the side that claims belonging and the side that has the power of 'granting' belonging (Antonsich, 2010). This 'granting' power involves what Hage (1998) refers to as 'governmental belonging' (p. 46), which is claimed by those who are in a dominant position and can lead to individuals or groups being silenced and positioned as 'other'. Belonging, then, is a dynamic process that involves a 'constant and ongoing co-construction and reformulation' through the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2007, p. 101).

Belonging is constituted and experienced differently in different societal domains. Key differences between spheres of belonging include the degree of dynamism and porosity of boundaries of inclusion/exclusion and the specific modes of performance and signification (Nunn, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The community sports club exemplifies an everyday shared space and situation in which belonging is negotiated. Andersson (2002) contends that sports clubs are situated within wider discourses on integration, multiculturalism and immigration politics. The forms of belonging produced in the sports club 'mediate and express the experiences people have from face-to-face interaction in other everyday arenas as well as from their interpretations of the images of ethnic minorities created in the media and politics' (Andersson, 2002, p. 85). Hence, the sports club 'provides for more complex forms of belonging than those defined a priori by categorical identities' (Andersson, 2002, p. 85). In other words, it is a site where the everyday experience of belonging and the politics of

belonging intersect. Building on Andersson's work, this article seeks to ascertain how (shifting) boundaries of inclusion/exclusion enable or impede refugee youths' ability to claim belonging in community sports clubs.

Belonging and boundary work

Boundary work is central to the process of belonging and, in particular, to the interplay between the 'seeking' and 'granting' sides of belonging. Wallman (1978) argues that social boundaries have two sides and two kinds of meaning: the 'interface line' between inside and outside, which 'marks a change in what goes on', and the 'identity line' between 'us' and 'them', which 'marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants' relation to it' (p. 207). Thus, a social boundary occurs at the line of difference (or 'interface') between categories of people when that difference is used by either side to define itself or to establish its identity in opposition to the other. Both the position and the significance of a social boundary are fluid and situational. Social boundaries are 'neither consistently marked not consistently placed'; rather, they are 'resources deployed for practical or symbolic purposes' in particular contexts (Wallman, 1978, p. 215).

Social boundaries are never truly fixed; instead, they shift and change. Wallman (1978) argues that it is possible to account for shifts in boundary edges by contextual changes in the criteria of inclusion/exclusion. However, while some boundaries may be porous and permeable, others are relatively stable and difficult to cross. For example, Anzaldúa (2012) points out various historical, psychological and social borders (e.g. between genders, between sexual orientation, between race and ethnicities, between religions) that have continued for centuries in ways that impact profoundly on people marked, or oppressed, by difference. She

shows how people who are denied belonging seek to break down dualities by creating a new, hybrid space or culture (*una cultura mestiza*).

The permeability of social boundaries is arguably the greatest during liminal moments when social distinctions are levelled and an egalitarian order is momentarily created among participants (Turner, 1974). During liminal moments, a unique form of solidarity, or *communitas*, can take hold which ‘transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency’ (Turner, 1995, p. 128). Some social theorists, including Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011), advocate a more structural transformation by making the boundaries that demarcate spaces of (not) belonging more fully permeable. In this article, I will demonstrate how, within the context of community sport, some social boundaries are shifted and crossed while others are preserved and created. In the next section, the methods used to investigate these issues are discussed.

Methods

This article draws on three years of ethnographic research at community football clubs in Melbourne. Ethnography was particularly well suited to investigate the meaning of belonging and social boundaries as they inhere in the subjective experience of participants. The research focused predominantly on refugees from Somalia who entered Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program, often indirectly via refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen or Djibouti, which serve as key centres or stepping stones for Somali migration to the West. The 2011 Census of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) records 5,687 Somalia-born people in Australia, a 31.8 per cent increase from the 2006 Census. Although Somalis are mostly nomadic pastoralists, in Australia they have become highly urbanised, with 96 per

cent living in capital cities such as Melbourne (ABS, 2011). I recognise, however, that the Somali Australian community is not a discrete, internally homogenous, externally bounded group (Brubaker, 2004), and that belonging is assessed and valued in many different ways by people with similar social locations and who might identify themselves as belonging to the same community (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This diversity is reflected in the composition of the research sample which comprised individuals with diverse socio-demographic backgrounds in terms of gender, age, education, employment and time in Australia. For the purpose of this article, data are drawn primarily from young people aged 16-25, but also from older football coaches and club representatives.

The research initially focused on one football club that was established in the late 1990s to provide sport opportunities to newly arrived refugees from the Horn of Africa who were settling in Melbourne in growing numbers. The club currently has approximately 60 registered members, the bulk of whom self-identify as Somali Australians. However, the research followed participants and their social relationships across multiple sites, the contours of which emerged inductively during the data collection process. During the fieldwork a number of participants moved to other football clubs in the city, including both ‘mono-ethnic’ clubs (i.e. clubs organised and dominated by members of the Somali Australian community) and ‘multi-ethnic’ clubs (i.e. clubs made up of people of various ethnicities in which Somali Australians are a minority group). The research was expanded and redirected to these new sites, which brought a unique comparative dimension to the study with regard to the different contextual settings within which belonging is negotiated.

The principal data collection methods used in the study were participant observation and in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with 39 Somali Australian players and volunteers, and a further 12 interviews with other Somali Australian community members and multicultural workers. Respondents were sampled through their participation in

the football sports under study. Interviews were undertaken at a variety of locations such as sports grounds, community centres, cafés and people's homes. Key respondents were interviewed multiple times at regular intervals to gather longitudinal data on their experiences of sport and belonging.

Another key aspect of the research was to collect data by means of observation and participation in the daily lives of respondents in their natural setting, both in sport (practice sessions, matches) and in other social spheres (family, neighbourhood, school). This method involved watching, observing and talking with research participants in order to discover their activities, experiences and meaning-making. Much of the research was accomplished by spending time with participants, listening attentively to their stories and to issues they deemed important, and understanding that they are people with diverse histories and lives. The ethnographic research raised particular questions concerning my own identity positioning (as a white, male, non-religious migrant) and its impact on the research process. An in-depth discussion of how my identity might have impacted on issues of access, data collection and analysis is beyond the scope of this article, but is provided elsewhere (Author 2011, 2013). The research findings elicited through these methods are discussed below.

Scales of belonging in community sport

Belonging is articulated and negotiated at a plurality of scales (Antonsich, 2010; Wood & Waite, 2011). The research data highlight the multiscale nature of belonging as it is experienced by Somali Australians in community sport. This section discusses their negotiation of belonging at different scales from local to transnational.

Belonging beyond clan

Somali Australians' negotiation of belonging in the realm of sport can first and foremost be found at the local level, that is, in their everyday encounters within community sports clubs. Their ability to claim belonging at this local level is influenced by discourses and practices of inclusion/exclusion. In this negotiation process, some social boundaries are shifted while others are created or reproduced.

A significant social boundary in the sports practices of Somali Australians concerns social relations between Somali Australians of different clan affiliations. Clan is the main category of internal social differentiation in Somali society. Perceived clan differences mediate all aspects of social order and stratification (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Clans consist of a confederation of kinship-based groupings that serve as a social security system, judicial system and unit of solidarity (Kamalkhani, 2001). Clans or sub-groups of clans are 'capable of combining and dividing at various levels depending on the prevailing social, political and economic circumstances' (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 80).

Clan identity continues to be an important form of social differentiation in the Somali diaspora (Griffiths, 2002; Bjork, 2007). In Australia, clan divisions have remained significant through the initial phases of settlement, with Somalis of different clan affiliations concentrating in different suburbs or parts of cities. This internal social differentiation is expressed in respondents' comments that 'there is not one Somali community, but at least eight' and in references to 'the Somali community of that clan'. Clan divisions can be particularly pronounced at the level of Somali community organisations that compete for power and funding (Hopkins, 2006). However, there is some evidence that clan-based social differentiation may be easing in the Somali diaspora as Somali migrants increasingly claim a nationality-based identity as Somali as opposed to membership of a clan (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Still, clan affiliation remains a source of social identification for many Somalis, and

one therefore cannot assume that simply because a number of individuals are from Somalia, they will automatically feel a sense of belonging to one another when they play sport together.

How, then, do clan boundaries mediate the experience of belonging in community sports clubs? The narratives of research participants indicate that clan boundaries tend to be porous and relatively easy to cross in the sports context. Sporting encounters are perceived by many respondents to enhance the internal cohesion of the Somali community in Melbourne. One respondent (male, 40s) expresses this as follows:

Sport, especially soccer, has no clan borders. In that sense it can strengthen the community bonds, the community relationships. It can, in a way, minimize clan tension. Most other activities are linked in one way or another to clan divisions and clan lines, but when it comes to sport, sport is actually above clan lines. It helps to integrate the community itself among its members.

This comment is indicative of the fact that, at least in the sports context, Somali Australians tend to claim an identity as Somali as opposed to membership of a clan, even when they have an awareness of and emotional attachment to their clan in their everyday life. Not a single respondent expressed the view that a sports club should represent only one clan. The dominant opinion is that ‘if you run a club like that it won’t exist for long’ (male, 20s) and that participating in sport ‘has nothing to do with clans’; instead, they believe, the challenge is to ‘set the right example for the Somali community: to be only one’.

The interviewees’ comments should be understood within the broader context of Somali Australians’ settlement in the host society where they are a visible minority and face particular challenges to social inclusion. In this context, participation in sport is perceived to

assist the rebuilding of social support networks and a sense of belonging that have been eroded or disrupted by war, displacement and resettlement. Mono-ethnic sports clubs in particular are places where they can find acceptance and familiarity among individuals with whom they share a culture and language (cf. Tirone, Livingston, Miller, & Smith, 2010). Such sports clubs, respondents argue, have important community building functions that transcend mere 'sport for sport's sake'. As a young male in his early 20s observes:

The club gives players and their families an environment where they can come together and develop friendships. Even though many of them live in the same area, they don't always know each other. It gives them a socializing environment where they can chitchat and come out of their houses and into the public area.... So it can provide that environment where they make a stronger bond of friendship. It also contributes to a general sense of respect, where people respect each other more.

Evidence of efforts to bridge clan boundaries can be found, for example, in the way Somali Australians of different clan affiliations are welcomed and treated as 'one of us' in football clubs that are dominated by members of a particular clan, in the mixed-clan teams that are prevalent both within local sports clubs and in occasional Somali or African Australian football tournaments (as discussed below), and in the friendly matches that are being played with some regularity between football teams of different clan affiliations. During the ethnography I observed young people joining football clubs that were historically dominated by members of a different clan. Their decision as to which football club to join appeared to have less to do with clan politics than with interpersonal ties and identification as Somali. For example, one player explained that he joined the club, organised by Somali Australians of a

different clan, because he knew many of the players there from school and from his neighbourhood.

Belonging as a gendered process

While the clan boundary is shifted in participants' sporting encounters to enable new forms of belonging to the Somali Australian community, other social boundaries are maintained or reinforced. Gender is a key source of boundary maintenance in the football clubs under study. We know that sport is a powerful gender regime. Sport allows men, including young men with refugee backgrounds, to seek attachment to others in a rule-bound structure and to prove and affirm their masculinity through bodily performances. Although sporting masculinities are arguably becoming more inclusive (Anderson, 2009), gender continues to be a structuring principle of everyday interactions in sporting spaces. The gendered nature of sport is reflected in the experiences of young Somali Australian women who face amplified barriers to both participation in club-based sport and the forms of belonging that are available to young males in the sports club context.

Some female respondents indicate that they are not interested in organised competitive sport because they consider it to be incompatible with hegemonic notions of femininity that exist within the Somali Australian community (cf. Walseth, 2006a). However, the demand among some young women for greater opportunities to participate in club-based sport suggests that it is the 'granting' side of their belonging that is principally at stake in the community sports context. These women indicate that they would like the opportunity to take part in sport just like their brothers, cousins and other male relatives, and they similarly recognise sport as a site for the production of belonging at multiple scales: to a team or club, to the Somali Australian community and to Australian society more broadly. However, in the

(mono-ethnic) football clubs that young Somali Australian men frequent there tends to be limited support for the provision of game-playing activities for young women. During the research a number of male club members expressed this view through comments such as ‘A soccer team for girls; that’s very hard for us because it’s against Islamic values in a way. It’s not something I would promote’ (male player, late teens). An assistant coach (male, 30s) of one of the Somali Australian youth teams further suggested that football participation was ‘unfeminine’ by stating: ‘If I’d let my daughter play, no one would marry her.’

Where support for women’s participation does exist, it is often conditional upon the activity being done in religiously and culturally prescribed ways, for example through gender-segregated provision where women can play sport in a closed environment where men would not be watching. Cultural and religious notions of female physicality and dress, such as wearing a *hijab* or full-length sports clothing, can also clash with the norms and requirements of sport organisations or leagues. These examples highlight the politics of belonging that affect Somali Australian women’s ability to claim belonging to and within local sports clubs. In this context, the gender boundary is one that is relatively solid and difficult to cross.

The young Somali Australian women who have been involved in sports activities seem to challenge this gender boundary. However, rather than transgress this social boundary and risk being subjected to antagonism or gossip, most of the young women committed to playing sport make use of alternative sport provisions outside of (mono-ethnic) sports clubs, such as the casual, women-only football and basketball programs provided by local community organisations. Since 2011, the Australian Somali Football Championships discussed below have sought to fill this void by hosting a two-day annual tournament for 60 young women from Somali and Islamic backgrounds. The young women’s participation in

this periodic event is motivated in part by their awareness of the amplified barriers to belonging they face at the football clubs.

Belonging to a sports team/club

The previous sections have examined some of the internal, community-based discourses and practices of inclusion/exclusion that enable or impede young Somali Australian men and women's ability to claim belonging within community football clubs. As shown below, the smallest scale at which their belonging is negotiated is the football team itself. A focus on this scale reveals both boundary shifts and the creation of new social boundaries.

A sports team's success is highly dependent on players' ability to cooperate and the creation of a common purpose and identity. The social ties established within a sports team can continue to bind people to a team or club. A team or club can serve as a 'second family' and a key social network for newly arrived refugees. The sense of pride and emotional attachment to one's team was highlighted by many interviewees; not only the joy they felt when their team won the league or an important match, but also how affiliation to a sports team influenced their everyday interactions in other societal domains, notably school, family and the neighbourhood. For example, for many Somali Australian boys a key Monday school ritual was to discuss their sporting successes and failures of the weekend. Those who had performed well would be revered, while those whose teams had lost would be subjected to friendly banter and ridicule. A male football coach in his 40s expresses this as follows:

The club is important to them. Every game when they win the game they are very proud of themselves. They talk about it at school, also about the kids they played

against and then see at school. That competitive part, pride. Winning or losing, there is something they can talk about, also at home.

Although this negotiation process is generally well-natured, it also highlights how sporting encounters can create new social boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ structured along the team and club lines that are ingrained in community sporting competitions. However, team identity is typically a porous social boundary that is easy to cross. The young Somali Australian men who participated in the research had changed teams and clubs multiple times during their playing careers. When players moved to other football clubs in the city of Melbourne they were generally welcomed and treated as ‘one of us’ by members of these clubs, regardless of any sporting rivalry that may have existed between their clubs. This was particularly the case in mono-ethnic football clubs in which Somali Australians formed the dominant group.

However, the research data also show that team- or club-based rivalries intersect with, and can graft themselves on to, other social boundaries. Such is the case, for example, during the annual Australian Somali Football Championships held in Melbourne, a community event that brings together the Somali diaspora from across Australia and New Zealand. In this tournament, teams are formed on the basis of suburban or city allegiance, with team names representing suburbs or cities rather than particular football clubs. Eleven teams from across Melbourne, five inter-state teams and an international team from New Zealand competed in the 2012 edition of the tournament. For some participants, suburban rivalries temporarily supersede more durable social boundaries such as gender for the duration of the tournament. The rivalry between the high-performing suburban teams of North Melbourne-Flemington and Carlton, nicknamed ‘The Battle of the Flats’ (a reference to the housing estates in these

suburbs where many Somali Australians live) serves as an example of this social dynamics. It is to these translocal and extra-local scales of belonging that I will now turn.

Becoming 'at home' in Australia

The translocal and extra-local scales of belonging that Somali Australians negotiate in and through everyday sporting encounters articulate with both race and religion. As visible minorities who practise Islam, Somali refugees enter a minority status in Australia (cf. Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). This presents particular challenges to their claims to belonging as they must negotiate the effects of 'othering' processes that are performed by those who have the power of 'granting' belonging. This challenge is evident, for example, in Somali Australians' attempts to construct a sense of belonging within multi-ethnic sports clubs in which they are a minority group. While there is a strong policy focus on how sport participation helps to integrate people with refugee backgrounds into the host society (e.g. Walseth and Fasting, 2004), the reality is more complex and ambivalent.

Several young Somali Australians, particularly young men, seek to construct a sense of 'home' in multi-ethnic sports clubs that is reflective of their broader attempts to claim belonging to 'Australian society'. A young male in his 20s expresses this desire as follows: 'There's a lot of good aspects of Australian culture, and why not pick up that and move forward, because we need to move forward, not stay static.' He believes that more conservative Somali Australians fail to fully engage with Australian society and culture, and instead become fixated on preserving their Somali identity. This, he argues, is problematic because

...Australia is a different identity, you know. You need to create a different identity, but that doesn't mean you have to leave your old identity behind.... I take some aspects out of it, I go into the Australian aspects, I take the best out of that, and I create my own culture, my own identity, you know, African Australian.

This young male's hybrid identity as 'African Australian' is reflected in his multi-layered belongings within the sports context. He has not only participated in football and Australian Rules football competitions with other Somali Australians, but also in sports clubs that host people from various cultural backgrounds, including majority ethnic youth. However, while his experiences in the latter clubs have been generally positive, they also highlight the complex dialectic between seeking and granting belonging that may lead Somali Australians to feel like 'an outsider in the club' (male, 20s). At one of the clubs, he and other African Australians were occasionally singled out and racially vilified by players on the opposing team due to their visible difference, denying them their claim to belonging within the context of sporting competition. A club representative (male, 50s) describes how in order to provide a safe and inclusive environment for African Australian participants, the club has adopted

...zero tolerance for any discrimination. Equal opportunity for everybody... and a lot of these new Australian kids would actually visibly see that. There were times where some of our kids were discriminated against, and as a club we made sure that we acted on that straight away. And whether that was internally or with the league, you know that in the first few weeks a lot of our kids were getting sledged. The African kids were getting sledged.

At a more general level, Somali Australians' ability to belong within multi-ethnic sport spaces can be impeded by the dominant group's rhetoric of sameness: for them to belong, they have to assimilate to the language, culture, values and behaviour of the dominant group (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The permeability of this social boundary is often limited in multi-ethnic sport spaces that are dominated by the majority group. Some Somali Australians, like the young man quoted above, are able to navigate this boundary, especially at sports clubs that recognise difference and manage inclusivity. They tend to do so through the cultivation of a multicultural network orientation: an attitude and skill set (i.e. multilingualism and multicultural awareness) that facilitates the crossing of cultural boundaries (Author 2011). The young man quoted above refers to this as 'picking up the goodness' from both sides. However, others are less able or less willing to assimilate to the dominant group in the sports context, and may therefore opt for alternative sport participation models, including mono-ethnic football clubs.

In these situations, alternative rhetorics of sameness can emerge through which different scales of belonging may become visible. A key example is that multi-ethnic sporting encounters are often structured by perceived sameness such as religion, race, cultural background or language. Several participants report how engaging with 'other Africans or Muslims' in sport is 'more comfortable' or 'easier' because 'you have something in common' and 'have experienced the same things'. These comments highlight how participants can give their religious or racial identity greater space than their national identity (as Somali and/or Australian) and thereby construct novel forms of belonging to African or Islamic communities (cf. Walseth, 2006b). This can be understood in terms of Somali Australians' negotiation of the effects of 'othering' processes based on race/ethnicity and religion. For example, a male in his 20s expresses that he prefers to play sport with other Africans because it makes him feel more 'at home', 'because we're the same color and everything. Most clubs

can call you any name they like, like “chocolate”. You want another person to say, like, “I’m chocolate too”.’ This comment suggests a strong emotional attachment to people ‘like me/us’.

This sense of belonging can also be observed in the mono-ethnic football clubs in which Somali Australians are the majority group. While these clubs originated from within the Somali Australian community, over time they have come to recruit Muslims with different nationalities (e.g. Eritrean, Lebanese, Saudi, Iraqi and Afghan) who they believe feel ‘at home’ in their clubs. This discourse of sameness, in turn, tends to exclude or marginalise those who claim majority status in Australian society more broadly (i.e. Anglo-Australians), whose involvement in the clubs is typically minimal. The vital social functions of these football clubs are not lost on club members from outside the Somali Australian community. An Indian Australian club member (male, 40s) expresses this as follows:

We have players from very different backgrounds: Sudanese, from Afghanistan, etc. So that’s fantastic. It is a community thing.... My wife is dark as well, she is Indian. She thinks there is a bit of racism [in majority ethnic football clubs] and she feels many times ... they don’t really want the African people or dark-skinned people involved. That’s a bit sad really. But here they actually run the club, they have prominent positions. They run their own show.

This comment strongly resonates with the experiences of black and minority ethnic amateur football clubs in the United Kingdom, where those who are denied belonging within ‘mainstream’ football club contexts can develop an alternative sense of belonging and cultural resistance (Bradbury, 2011; Burdsey, 2007). Yet, the findings also problematise the distinction between mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic football clubs by suggesting that some mono-ethnic football clubs have become increasingly multi-ethnic over time, even if they are

still mainly (but not exclusively) mono-religious. This also indicates the need to separate between ethnicity and religion in terms of how refugee youth negotiate social boundaries in community sports clubs.

Transnational belonging

In addition to the scales of belonging discussed above, Somali Australian youth also negotiate transnationally orientated sensations of belonging within the realm of sport. These sensations highlight the globalised, fluid and hybrid nature of Somali Australians' belonging, a finding that is consistent with what we know about immigrant minority youth in Australia (Collins, Reid, & Fabiansson, 2011). In the sports context, this has involved football teams composed of young Somali Australian men traveling to Sweden and Canada to compete in international football events such as the African Unity tournament. Their self-funded participation in these tournaments is experienced as a welcome opportunity to engage with other Somali diaspora around the world, including relatives and kin. It also provides a chance to meet and get to know other African refugees living in western societies. These global sporting encounters are but one aspect of the transnational lives that many Somali Australians lead, alongside other social practices (e.g. trade, remittances, communications) that foster belonging to Somali diaspora overseas. Their family and clan networks are profoundly transnational and most have themselves lived in multiple countries before settling in Australia.

The transnational sporting encounters that some of the young Somali Australian men under study engage in enable a sense of cosmopolitan belonging. The most talented players participating in the Australian Somali Football Championships have been recruited into the Unite FC Horn of Africa Refugee team that competes in prestigious international football tournaments. The representative team has competed, for instance, against elite football teams

from Arsenal, FC Barcelona, AC Milan and Manchester United at tournaments in Spain and Brazil. For those involved, Unite FC is more than just a football team. As one participant (male, 20s) puts it, the team's transnational sporting encounters are 'a good way to help correct misconceptions of African youths' and an opportunity to 'show everybody that we're just like everybody else'. Moreover, through their visits to other countries participants come to understand national boundaries in porous ways, rather than in discrete terms along religious and cultural dimensions (Bhimji, 2008).

Discussion and conclusion

This article has examined community sport as a site where refugee youth negotiate belonging. This negotiation process was conceptualised as a dynamic dialectic of 'seeking' and 'granting', with a particular focus on social boundary processes that separate 'us' from 'them' in particular contexts. In community sport, as in other societal domains, the everyday experience of belonging intersects with, and is affected by, the politics of belonging. This article shows that the belonging constructed by Somali Australian youth in community sports clubs is multi-layered, dynamic and situational. It operates at varying scales of experience from the sports team and local community through to the global Somali diaspora and cosmopolitan belonging. Yet, these different scales vary considerably in terms of how permeable social boundaries are.

Some social boundaries, such as clan, are relatively porous within community sport and through their shifting new forms of belonging can emerge. However, other boundaries, such as gender, are less easily shifted, thereby impeding young women's ability to claim belonging in the football clubs under study. Young Somali Australian women have fewer participation opportunities available to them, and those who challenge this boundary by

participating in competitive sport may experience antagonism or sanctions (cf. Walseth, 2006b). Furthermore, sporting encounters can create new, relatively porous social boundaries between 'us' and 'them' based on team, club or territorial (e.g. suburban) affiliation which can supersede or graft themselves on to other social boundaries, if only temporarily and within the specific context of sporting competition.

However, herein also lies a significant limitation of the present study. While the study provides novel insights into how belonging is negotiated by refugee youth in community sports clubs, it focused on only one group of people with refugee backgrounds and specifically on their participation in one particular form of organised sport (i.e. football) in a particular country (i.e. Australia). Considering the situational specificity of belonging and social boundary processes, the findings are not believed to be capable of generalisation to other newly arrived communities in Australia or elsewhere. For example, the degree of porosity of the gender boundary is contested in international research. While the empirical findings are consistent with research that highlights the socio-cultural barriers to inclusive sport participation faced by young migrant women (e.g. Sawrikar & Muir, 2010; Walseth, 2006b), some studies have found that these barriers need not influence young women's ability to take part in sport more than their male counterparts (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). Further research with a more diverse sample of refugee youth could explore variations in their ability to claim belonging in community sport and differentiate between originating societies. It can be hypothesised that different groups may encounter different experiences because of the partially different politics of belonging they have to contend with in their quest for belonging in sport and other societal domains (e.g. based on race or religion).

Notwithstanding the study's limitations, the findings reinforce Walseth's (2006a) conclusion that there are different forms and levels of belonging produced through sport. Somali Australian youths' ability to claim belonging in community sports clubs, and the

types of belonging they claim, tend to vary according to the context of sport participation. The politics of belonging, that is, the boundary discourses and practices that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011), operate in different ways in these different contexts. Thus, mono-ethnic sports clubs in which Somali Australians are the dominant group may facilitate forms of belonging that are different from those claimed in multi-ethnic sports clubs in which they are a minority group. In the former they have more power to ‘grant’ belonging, and it is within this context that they may experience their sport involvement as a temporary escape from tense social relations in other societal domains (Walseth, 2006a; Author 2012). The sense of belonging created in this context tends to involve emotional attachment to a particular ethnic, religious or geographical community, whether it be the Somali Australian community (typically cross-clan), one’s local neighbourhood or suburb, or a loosely defined African or Islamic community. As noted earlier, some of these mono-ethnic clubs have over time become increasingly multi-ethnic, to the point where they are arguably more multi-ethnic than ‘mainstream’ community football clubs.

Multi-ethnic sports clubs in which refugee youth are a minority group may facilitate greater opportunities for relationship building between themselves, other minority ethnic groups and the majority ethnic group, thereby potentially producing new forms of belonging (Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). The perception that multi-ethnic sports clubs open up opportunities for new modes of multicultural belonging strongly informs policymaking in this area. However, this article shows that in these clubs refugee youth are also likely to be confronted with particular exclusionary discourses and practices that impede their ability to claim belonging. This finding is consistent with British research which shows that while in some cases some degree of social integration is achieved in and through amateur football, the sport also operates as one of the primary outlets for manifestations of wider societal exclusion and racial discrimination against minority ethnic groups (Burdsey, 2006, 2007).

A key issue here is that ‘any dominant ethnic group tends to fill the notion of belonging with a rhetoric of sameness, which clearly prevents any recognition of difference’ (Antonsich, 2010, p. 650). When refugee youth have to assimilate to the language, culture, values and behaviour of the dominant group in order to ‘fit in’ and be accepted, this involves a profound misrecognition of their plural, hybrid social identities as well as of the value they place on community sport as a site to maintain and perform their multiple forms of belonging. A key challenge for community sport organisations of all types (i.e. multi-ethnic and mono-ethnic), then, is to make the social boundaries that demarcate spaces of (not) belonging more fully permeable and create conditions that make their crossing easy and equitable (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This, in turn, would allow those who may have been considered and felt themselves outsiders to claim and be granted multiple forms of belonging in community sport.

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