Cultural diversity in community sport: an ethnographic inquiry of Somali Australians' experiences

Ramón Spaaij

School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Australia

Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract

Sport organisations aim to grow the participation of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted by the author at community sport organisations in the multicultural city of Melbourne, this paper examines the key factors that affect the sport participation experiences of Somali Australians. It is shown that interpersonal and structural barriers to sport participation predominate, and that the significance of these barriers varies according to age, gender and time in Australia. The paper concludes that in order to foster inclusive sporting environments in which people from refugee backgrounds can participate in a safe, comfortable and culturally appropriate way, refugee settlement needs to be understood as a two-way process of mutual accommodation requiring adaptation on the part of both the migrant and the host society.

1. Introduction

Managing cultural diversity is a central theme in academic and political debate on the future of multicultural societies. In several liberal democracies, multicultural discourses have come under attack amidst a growing preoccupation with the possible dangers to social cohesion posed by nations becoming too culturally diverse, such as the erosion of western democratic values, residential and educational segregation, and the marginalisation of minority groups (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne & Solomos, 2007; Harris, 2010; Boese & Phillips, 2011; Kesten, Cochrane, Mohan & Neal, 2011). Discourses about cultural diversity have generally become more exclusionary and nationalistic, while social cohesion is often being redefined to equate with homogeneity and assimilation (Vasta, 2010). The issue of cultural and ethnic diversity clearly remains politicised in many liberal democracies (Hasmath, 2010).

Sport is not immune to these broader issues. Following Bourdieu (1978), sport can be considered a field (*champ*) which has its own dynamics, logic, rule-making and history. This sporting field is relatively autonomous from the society of which it is a part (Bourdieu, 1978). However, although sport is a relatively autonomous field, it cannot be understood in isolation from other social spheres such as the economy, politics and education. Cultural diversity is a case in point. It has been argued that diversity represents one of the most significant issues confronting sport organisations today (Cunningham & Fink, 2006; Cunningham, 2011), both as a social reality and as a normative principle. Diversity management in sport has received growing attention from academics, policy makers and practitioners in the past eighteen years (DeSensi, 1994; Taylor & Toohey, 1998, 1999; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Taylor, 2003; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2006; Hanlon & Coleman, 2006; Cunningham & Fink, 2006;

Cunningham, 2009, 2011; Gasparini & Cometti, 2010; Adair, Taylor and Darcy, 2010; Doherty, Fink, Inglis & Pastore, 2010).

The literature on cultural diversity in sport recognises the importance of equity and cultural maintenance (Taylor & Toohey, 1998) and emphasises the need to create safe, welcoming and culturally appropriate sporting environments in order to engender the involvement of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This recognition is also captured in sport policy rhetoric of cultural diversity. Most sport organisations have introduced equal opportunity and/or affirmative action policies to foster cultural diversity (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006). However, it is questionable whether policy-level initiatives have been effective in promoting a genuine consideration of cultural diversity issues in practice. Adair, Taylor and Darcy (2010) argue that "the policy rhetoric of cultural diversity has often not translated into sport management practice", with some groups and individuals "remaining marginalised or subordinated despite institutional goals of affirmative action and other equity-based reforms in sport" (p. 307).

One such group, it is argued, are persons from refugee backgrounds living in liberal democracies. The *Sport and Multiculturalism* report prepared for the European Commission notes the demand for sport in established refugee communities that recognise its use as a vehicle for integration and a means of dealing with some of the stresses of everyday life (Amara, Aquilina, Henry & PMP Consultants, 2004a). The report recommends that the European Commission "promote the benefits of provision of sport opportunities for refugee and asylum seeker groups", and that "consideration be given to the means for disseminating good practice and policy lessons" (Amara et al., 2004a, p. 90).

Similar calls to action have been issued at a national level. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government has recently established a Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program which aims to engage young people from CALD backgrounds, including

newly arrived refugees (Australian Government, 2011). Organisations such as the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA, 2010a) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY, 2007) identify sport as a priority for young people from refugee backgrounds and recommend that more resources be devoted to it. RCOA recommends that sport organisations and other relevant agencies tailor programs and activities to the specific needs of refugees, which is seen as more effective than incorporating refugee participants into a mainstream program or activity. Among its many recommendations, CMY (2007) stresses that "much more comprehensive research is necessary" (p. 29) in order to inform good practice and understanding of how sport impacts on refugee settlement. This call for further research echoes a UK report which found that the role of sport in the settlement of refugees is an under-researched theme (Amara et al., 2004b). The report concludes that more research needs to be done in a number of areas, such as the social interaction of refugees with the "host community" in and through sport, and the impact of a host society's sporting culture on the sporting needs and practices of refugees.

This study is designed both to respond to recent calls for further research into these issues and to advance understanding of the ways in which people from refugee backgrounds perceive and negotiate sport participation in Australia. The objective of the paper is to explore the key factors that affect resettled refugees' sport participation experiences. The paper draws on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted by the author at community sport organisations in the multicultural city of Melbourne to examine Somali Australians' experiences of participation in organised team sport. As will be seen, this paper is the first to apply multi-sited ethnography to the study of sport participation of refugees and immigrants.

Somalis constitute one of the largest refugee populations from Africa currently living in Australia. Somali refugees began to arrive in Australia in significant numbers from the late 1980s, especially following the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. The 2006 Census recorded

6,430 of Somali ancestry in Australia. This figure included 4,310 Somalia-born persons, 95.2% of whom self-identified as being Muslim (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The majority of Somalis with refugee backgrounds have suffered repeated trauma due to war-related experiences such as physical injury, forced separation from family members, and unnatural death of family or friend (McGraw Schuchman & McDonald, 2004; Bentley & Wilson Owens, 2008). Post-migration experiences such as immigration difficulties, socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of social support can compound the adverse effects of previous experiences (Herrman, Kaplan & Szwarc, 2010). To date, no reliable figures are available on the level of sport participation among Somalis in Australia. While their participation rates in organised sport appear to be low compared to the total population, a number of young Somalis participate in sport in a social capacity through schools and ad hoc sporting events such as the annual Australian Somali Football Championships, whose 2011 edition involved 220 players. This paper, then, seeks to explore the factors that affect Somali Australians' participation in sport. These factors include both barriers and facilitators, yet the primary focus of the present analysis is on barriers, as discussed below.

2. Literature review

Barriers (or constraints) to participation in sport for people from CALD backgrounds are multi-faceted (Stodolska, 1998; Taylor & Toohey, 1999; Cortis, Sawrikar & Muir, 2007; Stodolska & Shinew, 2010). Conceptually, the most systematic analyses of barriers to sport participation have been informed by an ecological perspective which proposes that individuals exist in environments that can hinder or enable participation. Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) argue that participation is heavily dependent on a process of negotiating through an alignment of multiple factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal

barriers are those individual characteristics, traits and beliefs that impede or discourage participation, such as those related to mental health, religiosity, past experience, and personal evaluations of the appropriateness of sport activities. Interpersonal barriers, on the other hand, stem from interpersonal interaction and relations, and can include those individuals or groups whose influence discourages or diminishes participation in sport. Structural barriers can be found at the level of social and physical institutions, organisations or belief systems, such as (lack of) financial or cultural resources, (knowledge of) sport participation facilities, gender expectations, and reference group attitudes concerning the appropriateness of certain activities.

Crawford et al. (1991) propose that barriers to sport and leisure are encountered hierarchically. Intrapersonal barriers are seen to be the most powerful due to the fact that 'they condition the will to act, or the motivation for participation' (p. 314). Moreover, they note that this process might also apply to the understanding of how barriers affect choices and preferences among people who are already participating. It is questionable, however, whether their arguments also apply to the barriers to sport participation experienced by recently arrived refugees. Research into the sport and leisure barriers facing newly arrived migrants suggests that they experience barriers that are different from or more pronounced than those experienced by the general population, such as language constraints and social unease/isolation (Stodolska, 1998; Cortis et al., 2007). Furthermore, as will be seen below, the perceived significance of some of these barriers tends to diminish over time as people adapt to their new environment. The sport and leisure behaviour of immigrants appears to be most severely constrained immediately after their arrival (Stodolska, 1998).

Raymore (2002) has expanded the Crawford et al. model to incorporate intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural *facilitators* to participation, arguing that barriers and facilitators are complimentary approaches to understanding participation and nonparticipation. Although

the focus of this paper is primarily on barriers, in the discussion below some key facilitators are also identified as these can inform policy and practice directed at growing the sport participation of people from refugee backgrounds.

3. The research project

In this paper, data are drawn from a three-year ethnographic research project (2008-2010) that explored Somali Australians' participation in organised team sport, especially soccer which is the most popular sport among Somalis (Abdullahi, 2001). The choice of research methods in this project flowed from its objective to capture the voices, experiences and meaning-making processes of the people being studied. The primary research site was a north-western suburb of Melbourne, which is one of the main concentrations of Somalia-born people in Australia. Melbourne has by far the largest number of Somalia-born people of any Australian city, just below 2,600 at the 2006 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Although Somalis are mostly nomadic pastoralists, in Australia they have become one of the most urbanised groups. Significant factors in this concentration pattern are the availability of low-cost housing, pre-existing support networks, chain migration patterns (with later migrants sponsored by earlier ones), and access to mosques (Clyne & Kipp, 2005).

The research initially focused on one soccer club in this suburb: Melbourne Giants Football Club.[1] This club was established in the late 1990s to provide sport participation opportunities to African refugees, particularly Somalis and Eritreans, who were settling in the suburb in growing numbers. The club currently has approximately 60 registered members, most of whom are first- or second-generation immigrants from Somalia with refugee backgrounds. The research initially covered this single club, but over time developed into a multi-sited ethnography in order to "track" participants across multiple sites that turned out to

be relevant in the light of the research questions (Marcus, 1995). The contours of these sites of observation and participation emerged only during the research process (Nadai & Maeder, 2005). After closely following a group of players, volunteers, club administrators and spectators (i.e. parents, community members) for almost two years, a proportion of this group moved on to other clubs. The research was expanded and redirected to these new sites, which brought a unique comparative dimension to the study. The essence of multi-sited ethnography is to follow people, connections, associations and relationships across space, which implies some form of spatial de-centredness (Falzon, 2009).

The research combined multiple data collection strategies. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 39 players and volunteers, and a further twelve interviews with local community members and bicultural workers. The interviews were conducted 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, in some cases up to eight times throughout the data collection process. Repeated interviews provided the opportunity to gather longitudinal data on respondents' evolving experiences of sport, building on a central tenet of multi-sited ethnography that the object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated (Marcus, 1995). They also allowed me to keep a check on continuities and changes during the research (Griffiths, 2002). Overall, research participants' socio-demographic backgrounds were diverse in terms of gender, age, education and employment.

A key aspect of the research was to gather data by means of observation and participation in the daily life of respondents in their natural setting, both in sport (i.e. at practice sessions, matches and club social events) and in other social spheres (home environment, neighbourhood, etc.). This method involved watching, observing and talking with research participants in order to discover their interpretations, meanings and activities

(Brewer, 2000). In the early stages of this process it was imperative to have individuals associated with the club and the community who could grant initial research access and vouch for my presence in the field. Initial access was gained through my pre-existing relationships with a community organiser and a youth worker, both of whom were born in Somalia and active within Melbourne's Somali Australian community. The youth worker also held a leadership position in one of the clubs under study. These initial contacts were central to the early stages of the research, providing guidance, support and positive recommendation.

The nature of observation evolved during the research from passive into moderate observation and, eventually, into active participation. Passive observation refers to a situation where the researcher is present and observes events at the research sites, but does not interact with the people under study to any great extent. Active participation, on the other hand, refers to observing and participating in the behaviour of those under study to the fullest possible extent, where the distinction between participation and observation is blurred (Spradley, 1980). The development of trust and mutuality was central to the gradual shift from passive observation to active participation.

Ongoing involvement with research participants is vital to building rapport (Hashimoto-Govindasamy & Rose, 2010). The bulk of the research was accomplished by spending time with participants, listening to their stories and to issues they deemed important, and understanding that they are people with diverse histories and lives (McMichael, 2003). Attending sports and related activities was one of the commitment acts that helped foster rapport, effectively showing my willingness to spend time and share space with them. Listening attentively and respectfully, and demonstrating genuine concern for research participants and their interests, appear to have contributed to me being seen as a trustworthy person, and in return respondents came to talk more openly about their public and private lives. Whilst initially the observation focused on specific community events and activities that

the researcher attended as well as more general observations made while spending time in the neighbourhood (community centres, cafés, shops, streets), as the rapport with respondents progressed the researcher was also regularly invited into people's homes, where social interaction and conversation with respondents continued.

In order to develop trust and mutuality between the researcher and the research participants, participatory elements were built into the study from the outset. Active engagement with community members was sought throughout the research process to enhance the usefulness of the research results and to ensure that all voices would be fairly heard. For example, the specific research questions, themes and interview schedules were scripted in collaboration with community members and club representatives, and ideas and early drafts of my writing material were shared with key respondents. One issue that was discussed at length with community members at the beginning of the research was whether it would be mutually beneficial and culturally appropriate to work with an interpreter and/or research assistant from within the local community. Concern was raised that using an interpreter or assistant from the Somali community would not offer confidentiality to respondents due to the small and close-knit nature of the community (cf. Laws, Harper & Marcus, 2003). This concern is also documented in studies of (fear of) gossip amongst Somalis in diaspora communities (Isotalo, 2007). Community members also argued that the research could well progress without the assistance of an interpreter, as most club members and other community residents were seen to have sufficient English language skills, especially the second generation which tends to be fluent in English and often less well versed in Somali. This argument was corroborated by Griffiths (2002), who reported in his research with Somali refugees in the United Kingdom that all his Somali respondents spoke English and that there was no need for interpreters.

The ethnographic research imposed multiple identities and role relationships on the researcher. Immersion in the research sites involved personal interaction with participants,

with the result that the boundaries between the researcher and respondents became blurred (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2006). This blurring of boundaries was complicated by my ambiguous status in the field as a white, non-Somali male who was visibly different yet apparently well integrated into the sports clubs under study. My ambiguous status raised questions about the particular role(s) I performed: was I a researcher, a coach, a scout looking for new talent, a government official, someone's friend or colleague? The blurring of boundaries was further enhanced by club officials' requests for me to perform certain tasks at the club due to the perceived shortage of skilled volunteers. The performed tasks included match officiating, refereeing, coaching, administrative assistance and public relations. From the researcher's perspective, this request was a fair research bargain and an opportunity to give something back to those who were generous enough to talk to me about their public and private lives. Performing these tasks was also thought to be beneficial to data collection, providing an opportunity to enhance rapport and trust with participants and to obtain deeper insight into their lived experience of sport (Author, 2011).

The various roles which I established within the research settings facilitated the collection of different kinds of data whose comparison can enhance understanding and interpretation of participants' lived experience. However, occupying multiple roles in relation to participants during the research can create conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks & Singer, 1999; Shuttleworth, 2001), such as the role conflict noted earlier. During the research, I sought to reflexively engage with these issues in order to prevent misunderstandings and feelings of deception or exploitation. The strategy put in place to manage boundaries in the field focused on reducing ambiguity by ensuring that the participants were clear that the researcher was conducting an interview rather than having a conversation as a friend or coach. Although the rapport described earlier served research needs as defined primarily by the researcher (Glesne, 1989), the wellbeing of the participants

was considered paramount where it came to managing the different roles. In cases where participants disclosed relevant information that was not shared under the premise of research, their permission to use the information as (de-identified) research data was explicitly requested. The research findings are discussed below.

4. Findings

In this section the research findings regarding the key factors that affect the sport participation experiences of Somali Australians are presented. Following Crawford et al.'s (1991) model, it is proposed that intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers affect not only Somali Australians' participation and nonparticipation, but also the choices and preferences of those who are already participating. The first part of this section addresses the main barriers to participation reported by the respondents. The second part focuses on the issues that affect the choices and preferences of those respondents who participate in the soccer clubs under study, emphasising the relevance of negative social encounters in sport such as racial discrimination.

4.1. Barriers to participation

The research findings indicate that barriers to sport participation among this particular group of people can be found at all three levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural). However, interpersonal and structural barriers were typically more dominant than intrapersonal barriers. Respondents' narratives further revealed that their perceptions of sport, and the barriers they encountered, tended to be different for the first generation and the second generation. For those Somalis who arrived in Australia as adults, structural factors such as non-sport obligations and language difficulties were key barriers to participation in

sport. In contrast, young Somali Australians reported structural and interpersonal constraints such as lack of parental support, financial constraints and gender expectations as major barriers. Lack of organisational capacity and partnerships was noted as a barrier by many respondents (young and old) who worked at the soccer clubs as volunteers. The different barriers are discussed below.

4.1.1. Non-sport obligations

Non-sport obligations were a key barrier particularly for older Somali Australians. First-generation Somali Australians typically gave sport relatively little consideration when they first arrived in Australia. Their struggle to settle in a new country and to raise a family was clearly their highest priority (Taylor & Toohey, 1998). Abdi, who is in his 40s, described how he used to play soccer in Somalia, but only at school and in unorganised settings.[2] Arriving in Australia in the early 1990s, his priority was to access affordable housing and find a job. Abdi only became involved in sport a decade later through his sons, two of whom play at Melbourne Giants while two of his older sons have moved on to other soccer clubs. Although he valued his children's participation in organised sport, Abdi indicated that his non-sport responsibilities (i.e. work, study and family) prevented him from actively participating in sport. Other first-generation Somali Australians had a similar experience. Mohamed, a community organiser in his 40s, argued that his generation is

> influenced by their children who actually want to have fun and engage in activity such as sport. So it may not be an activity that is of interest to the old generation but it is coming from the other side, from the children, who are asking their parents to take them to soccer games. In a way because they don't have many other activities to keep them away from the streets…

In a similar vein, Ahmed, a father in his 40s who has been Melbourne since 1995, noted how "parents like to see their kids play football but they don't have time to be involved themselves. They are too busy working or running the household. It's the children who are pushing their parents to take them to soccer".

4.1.2. Language

The importance of language barriers was recognised by most respondents, both participants and non-participants. In reflecting on his own life in Australia, Abdi described how "mostly there is a barrier here, a language barrier. It starts with the parents, most of them don't speak English, you know with the community living around only speak English, they cannot communicate". Abdi went on to assert that younger Somali Australians, who grow up in Australia, have fewer language difficulties and are often better connected to the broader community. He explained: "It comes down to the kids. When you are new to an area, new to an environment, it's very hard to get to know the other [people] straight away. It will take some time ... but gradually, you know, the kids they are in the same class, the same school, they will get together." For many respondents, their limited knowledge of the English language also meant that they faced a lack of awareness of sport participation opportunities. For example, in Ahmed's case, his nonparticipation was influenced not only by time constraints or the low priority afforded to sport, but also by simply not knowing how to access existing sport participation opportunities. When he arrived in Australia he did not speak any English, which made him to feel socially isolated and unable to make contact with community sport organisations.

4.1.3. Lack of parental support for involvement in sport

Parental disapproval was identified as a barrier to young people's sport participation. Young Somali Australians, and particularly young males, typically expressed a much stronger interest in sport participation than their parents; especially soccer, but also other team sports such as basketball and Australian Rules football. Their enthusiasm for sport may be an indication of their selective adjustments of family cultural values to accommodate personal preferences, with Australian popular culture offering them an alternative to their parents' view that sport represents a distraction from academic pursuits (Dodds et al., 2010). The main reasons for young Somali Australians to participate in soccer were to have fun, make friends, spend time with peers, and fitness/health. As 17-year-old Ayew put it: "It is soccer that I really love. I really enjoy it. Along the way it gives us connections. It allows me to make friendships. It's a great opportunity to get together with friends and to love this game".

At the same time, however, most young Somali Australians in the study recognised the existence of certain barriers that affected their participation in sport. One interpersonal barrier was the lack of parental support for sport participation. While some parents, such as Ahmed and Abdi, were supportive of their children's involvement in sport, others were less understanding of the potential benefits of sport or have concerns about the safety of their children. A local youth worker expressed this lack of understanding as follows:

Parents don't like letting young people play sport a lot of the time. A lot of our Somali parents don't understand the value of sport. A lot of our Somali parents see sport as an extra, as a luxury. These are kids that aren't performing academically […] but then you want to take time away from them to play soccer or basketball? […] Parents often don't want the kids to come play because they don't understand the benefits. If you don't understand those benefits … then fair enough, it's taking away from academia.

However, there are signs of change in parental attitudes to youth sport participation, owing in part to the efforts of the soccer clubs to involve and build trusting relationships with families. Ayan, a Somali female in her 20s, noted that 'more and more parents are realising the importance of occupying their kids with sport and being more in touch with their kids' interests'. The development of trust between families and community sport organisations is a key issue here, and one that is more easily negotiated in ethno-specific clubs such as Melbourne Giants. Former Melbourne Giants coach Awaale described how the club, being run from within the Somali community, appeared to be have a higher level of trust among parents because "here they know other people will look after them", whereas "they don't really know what happens to their kids when they drop them off at another club". The club was also perceived to provide more culturally and religiously appropriate activities, for example through adapting playing and practice times to religious commitments such as prayer and Ramadan. Mainstream clubs, Awaale argued, "don't do that". As such, the club was seen by many community members as a relatively safe, supportive and culturally sensitive environment. Importantly, most players had close friends or siblings among their teammates, and in several cases they joined the club as a result of information provided by friends or siblings who were already involved in the club. Friendships and family are thus not only important support networks that can be strengthened by playing sport, but they also provide a conduit to sport (VicHealth, 2010). Put differently, while lack of parental support can be a barrier, presence of such support can be an interpersonal facilitator to sport participation.

4.1.4. Financial constraints

Financial cost was identified by some respondents (both participants and non-participants) as a barrier to sport participation. Although most adult participants were in some form of paid employment, registration fees could be a significant source of financial pressure. Several

families had multiple players in the club, in some cases up to four siblings, for whom registration fees were to be paid. Most adult participants had competing financial priorities, notably the need to provide for their families and to send money to relatives in refugee camps or countries of origin. For example, former club secretary Bashir stressed his "huge responsibility to send that money home. Each family sends back home one way or another every single month. It gets really hard". For these reasons, Melbourne Giants and the other clubs under study sought to offer affordable, low-threshold soccer activities. The former was awarded small grants by state government and sport agencies which enabled the club to acquire football jerseys and training materials and to lower registration fees (currently $150 per annum). The club had set up special payment plans and subsidies for those members who struggled to pay their fees.

4.1.5. Gender expectations

Female respondents typically faced additional and amplified barriers to sport participation. Respondents' narratives indicated that sociocultural barriers to sport participation are gendered. The perceived appropriateness of organised soccer as a physical activity for Somali Australian girls and women was identified as a barrier to female participation. In many cases, it was not the woman herself who saw female sport participation as inappropriate but rather others in her family and social environment (Taylor & Toohey, 1998; Kay, 2006). Indeed, several young women indicated that they would like the opportunity to take part in team sports just like their brothers, cousins and other male relatives (cf. Palmer, 2009). Cultural and religious notions of female physicality and dress can also clash with the norms and requirements of sport organisations (Cortis et al., 2007). Although one might expect ethno-specific sports clubs such as Melbourne Giants to be well positioned to cater for the specific needs of Somali Muslim girls, there was little support among club members for providing

game-playing activities for girls and young women within the club. For example, Abdihakim, a player in his late teens, asserted: "Definitely not girls playing… 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." Those who did express in principle support for female participation in sport typically stressed that this was only acceptable if done in religiously and culturally prescribed ways, for example through gender-segregated provision (Walseth & Fasting, 2004; Kay, 2006).

The lack of support for female sport participation at the clubs led some girls and young women to look elsewhere for sporting opportunities. A group of young Somali Australian women had established their own indoor soccer team, while others joined indoor basketball or swimming programs. Responding to the women's demand for access to sport and physical activity, local community organisations have initiated programs that offer low-threshold sports activities to women from refugee backgrounds. For such programs to succeed, the issue of trust was once again crucial. Families needed to be assured that appropriate provision was being made and that female participation did not transgress religious or cultural requirements (Kay, 2006).

Although there were no game-playing opportunities for women at the soccer clubs under study, they could and did participate in an 'involved' capacity such as volunteer, administrator or spectator. Some women fulfilled important support roles within the clubs, such as driving children to matches, running the canteen and organizing social activities. This form of engagement was encouraged by the clubs, however a few female respondents were critical of the gender expectations and stereotypes that they felt underlie male club members' acceptance of women's involvement. Halima, a Somali female in her 20s who used to volunteer at one of the clubs, expressed her concerns as follows:

The thing that really disappointed me is that the girls really became involved in [the club] but they were like doing the barbecue and the fundraising, you know. Even if they are not going to play, OK fine, but then the boys also have to… if [the girls] want to volunteer in that way because their brothers or cousins are playing that's fine. But the boys because of the attitudes with which they are raised at home they think it's fine to let them do the barbecue and the fundraising. And they reap the benefits. And there isn't even an acknowledgement for [the girls] in the end. There isn't a respect or a thank you for doing this for our club. It's expected. This is not just a chauvinist male thing to do, but it's just inhumane. It's just wrong to let the boys continue to think this way. The thing is that the girls are taking on leadership roles. They are more educated than the boys, they have more skills, a lot more experience. … And they think just because they are doing the barbeque and they love doing it the poor girls think they have to do it. Again this is a misunderstanding and a miscommunication.

The lack of genuine acknowledgement of her contributions to the club and the reproduction of gender roles within the club eventually led Halima to leave. She later enrolled in indoor soccer and basketball programs for women from CALD backgrounds organised by a local NGO, however these programs were mostly short-term. For Halima, sports programs need to be sustainable over the longer term: 'It is important to offer sport on a weekly basis, structurally, not just occasionally; also in the off-season'.

4.1.6. Lack of organisational capacity in recruiting and retaining volunteers
Unlike many community sport organisations, the soccer clubs under study have thus far not adopted more professional management systems and structures. Considering the clubs' reliance on volunteers, the experiences of the Somali Australians who volunteer at the clubs

warrant further consideration. We know that individuals' experiences in community sport organisations are influenced by organisational capacity (Sharpe, 2006). Community sport organisations vary in their capacity to manage volunteers and need to be cognisant of designing volunteer experiences that meet volunteers' needs in order to maintain volunteer commitment (Hoye, Cuskelly, Taylor & Darcy, 2008). The research data reveal some of the clubs' challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. A number of volunteers reported how they had become increasingly discouraged by what they perceived as the structural shortage of human resources at their club. One volunteer who felt increasingly disenfranchised was former club president Abdirahman, who argued:

> There are people who can do it, but they are not involved with the club. Mostly they will have work, and they don't want to help. If it's one days two days, okay, but if it's a continuous period for six months, they don't want to do it ... it's a secondary priority for them.

Several respondents expressed that they had pressing non-sport responsibilities or that they lacked the competences required to perform complex administrative tasks. As a consequence, coach Roble noted, "it always comes down to one or two people … who take it on for a few years, but then they leave because they have too many other things going on in their lives. But there's no one to take over the job." This disproportion in volunteer contributions is consistent with broader trends in sport volunteerism (Sharpe, 2006).

A related issue reported by some volunteers was that they felt insufficiently supported or skilled to contribute to building a sustainable sport organisation that is connected to other community services. Club secretary Hussein expressed this concern as follows:

The club is in a situation where it cannot support itself. … There is this [external] support but the management of the club don't really know where the support is. They don't have the experience to know how to get support, how to fill in forms and applications. … We need people who know the system and who know the language. They need someone to come to the club and maybe give a workshop on how to have a good structure. And to find different ways in which to get assistance.

Hussein related the club's limited organisational capacity to older members' lack of knowledge of "the system", that is, of "how things are done in Australia". In order to attract external support and knowledge, Hussein argued, the club should establish formal linkages and partnerships with sport, government and community organisations, which would allow the club to connect with and access resourceful institutional agents outside of the Somali community. Other volunteers also felt that such linkages were insufficient and, where they did exist, to be "not very visible" and "not that proactive". Abdirahman argued: "You have to have that sort of link. If you don't have any link with the outside communities, you miss out".

4.2. Factors influencing sport participation experiences

As noted earlier, intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers also affected the experiences of those respondents who were already participating (i.e. those who are not excluded from participation). The prospect of social interaction and connection with others was perceived by many respondents as an important benefit of sport participation in terms of its contribution to a sense of belonging, learning from others with a similar or different cultural background, and accessing certain resources (Author, in press). This subjective evaluation of the social connection potential of sport can be seen as an intrapersonal facilitator

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to participation. Participation in organised soccer was perceived by several respondents as contributing to the (re)building of social networks that had been eroded or disrupted by war, displacement and resettlement. For example, Omar, a volunteer and former player in his 20s, remarked that soccer provides an environment where community members can come together and develop friendships: "It gives them a socialising environment where they can chitchat and come out of their houses and into the public area … where they make a strong bond of friendship. It also contributes to a general sense of respect, where people respect each other more". The perceived community building aspects of sport participation not only related to bonding with others "like me", but also to social interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. Although the clubs' members are predominantly of Somali descent, the clubs also had a small number of players and spectators from different cultural backgrounds, notably from other African countries such as Eritrea, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Ghana. Furthermore, a few players had also played at other, 'mixed' clubs where they maintained good relations with people from different cultural backgrounds (Author, 2011).

4.2.1. The limits of intercultural interaction in sport

However, the research results suggest the 'social mixing' potential of community sport participation should not be over-stated. The data indicate that although intercultural interaction occurred in the clubs under study, there was often a focus on perceived similarities. Socialisation with others in sport tended to be affected by identity markers such as a shared cultural background, language, religion or skin colour (Author, in press). A number of respondents, such as 20-year-old Abdullahi, reported how engaging with "other Africans or Muslims" was "more comfortable because we're the same colour and everything". Another player, Yusuf, agreed: "I find a lot of times when we play against, say, Turkish

teams, we have a lot more in common… Islamic way and all that, different ways of greeting … That makes it easier because you have something in common."

The data further show that where intercultural interaction did occur, the social ties created were typically confined to the sports activity itself and did not transfer to other life domains. In this context, some respondents noted the lack of durable and transferable social connections created between themselves and members of opposing teams, arguing that it "would be good to have more interaction with other teams" (female, mid 20s). This was particularly the case with regard to the development of relationships between Somali Australians from refugee backgrounds and the host community. A number of respondents sought to develop durable social connections with the host community both in and outside sport, and some argued that this would simply be a matter of time. Mohamed, a former player and coach in his 20s, drew a parallel with other ethno-specific soccer clubs in Melbourne. He recognised that soccer in Australia has long been distinguished by its popularity among sections of newly arrived migrant groups (Mosely, 1997), and argued that most soccer clubs serving these communities have gradually become more culturally diverse and open to outsiders. Mohamed explained:

We are going through that phase now, but down the track I don't see the reason why it shouldn't open up… [Other migrant clubs] have opened up now and it's going to open up eventually. [But] don't push it, let it come itself. … Just invite people you know and I think we'll get there and it will be a hard work, but you know, it's a hard work for myself and the generation that are younger than me. It's gonna be us who are going to make this club something and who are going to develop this community…

Mohamed's argument that one should not "push it" in attempting to foster a culturally diverse sports club relates to the point made earlier that the opportunity to play and socialise with other people from a similar background was an important factor in respondents' experience of sport participation. This does not mean that Somali Australians only want to play with others "like us", but that recognition should be given to the importance of resettled refugees being able to engage with peers who they feel comfortable with and who can provide mutual support.

4.2.2. Discrimination

The research data indicate that the developmental process described by Mohamed ought to be viewed as a two-way process in which both the newcomer and the host community engage with and adapt to each other in respectful and mutually beneficial ways. Sporting encounters did not automatically produce the sort of mutual respect that Omar (quoted earlier) referred to. On the contrary, at times intergroup relations in sport fuelled misunderstanding, disrespect and hostility. Discrimination was reported as a significant issue (Author, in press). Several (but not all) respondents reported that they had been racially vilified while playing sport, while some described discrimination as being "common", "very common" or "normal". My fieldwork observations suggest that subtle forms of discrimination are more common than overt racism, notably through references to the perceived insurmountability of cultural differences. This type of discrimination, which can be termed cultural racism (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991), does not postulate the (biological) superiority of certain groups or individuals in relation to others but rather the incompatibility of lifestyles and cultural traditions. For example, during a junior soccer match a spectator of the opposing team accused the Somali Australian players of rough conduct and the Somali Australian referee of bias. She remarked that rough conduct and referee bias were "un-Australian", and added:

"We're not in Africa here, but in Australia. Get used to it." Whether covert or overt, this type of discrimination not only reinforces intergroup boundaries, but can also have a negative effect on wellbeing and social inclusion (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010).

5. Discussion

The barriers to sport participation discussed in this paper are largely similar to those found in previous studies that concentrated on people from CALD backgrounds. The importance of structural barriers such as non-sport obligations, financial cost and language difficulties as voiced by the respondents reflects previous research (Taylor & Toohey, 1998, 1999; Cortis et al., 2007; CMY, 2007). However, the significance of lack of parental support as an interpersonal barrier to participation is a relatively underexplored issue that, as this study has shown, is highly relevant to young Somali Australians' lived experience of sport. The research results indicate that interpersonal and structural barriers are the most powerful for this particular group of people from refugee backgrounds.

This study has further shown that the relevance of various barriers varies with age, gender and time in Australia. This is an important finding that complements Hanlon and Coleman's (2006) conclusion that community sport organisations tend to refer to all people from culturally diverse backgrounds as a whole rather than to specific groups or cultures. As the present study suggests, even within particular ethnic or cultural groups there are divisions and differences that affect individuals' sport participation experiences. We need to recognise that even though people may share a cultural or refugee background, they are individuals with diverse histories and lives, and with different perceptions and experiences of sport participation. The second generation, and particularly young males, tend to have a much stronger interest and time investment in sport participation compared to the first generation,

whose primary obligations are work, family and physiological needs. This finding resonates with studies that show that the sport and leisure participation of immigrants is most severely constrained immediately after their arrival, i.e. for the first generation (Stodolska, 1998). Compared to men, female respondents were less likely to feel they had the freedom and opportunity to participate in organised sport. This finding is consistent with previous research on the sport participation of Muslim women from CALD backgrounds (Kay, 2006; Cortis et al., 2007; Palmer, 2009).

In this paper I also have examined the factors that affected the experiences of those respondents who were already participating. It was found that for many respondents the ability to engage with peers who they feel comfortable with and who can provide mutual support was important. This finding resonates with international research on sport participation among CALD communities which has found that the opportunity to play and socialise with other people from a similar background is an important factor in the experience of sport participation (Verweel, Janssens & Roques, 2005; Theeboom, Schaillée & Nols, 2012). The research results support the Centre for Multicultural Youth's (2007) conclusion that ethno-specific sport models do not necessarily have a use-by date, whereby recently arrived people from refugee backgrounds move from playing with those from similar backgrounds into mainstream clubs or programs. The social ties established within a sports team or club can continue to bind people to a team or club. In this sense, a team or club can become a 'second family' and a key social network for newly arrived individuals. As this paper has suggested, the preference for ethno-specific sport models can be enhanced by certain negative social encounters in sport, such as racial discrimination.

The research findings discussed in this paper confirm the relevance of organisational capacity in recruiting and retaining volunteers from refugee backgrounds in sports clubs. Specifically, respondents emphasised the need for linkages with external partners to provide

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guidance and support. The reported concerns about the lack of organisational capacity and institutional linkages reflect those raised in previous studies that focused on CALD communities' involvement in mainstream sports clubs (Hanlon & Coleman, 2006; Cortis et al., 2007). In particular, they echo Cortis et al.'s (2007) recommendation that formal partnerships be established between sport organisations and different segments of the community. As the present study shows, a (perceived) lack of organisational capacity and resources can also act as a barrier to participation in ethno-specific sports clubs. This finding highlights the need for sport organisations to establish relationships with new arrivals through engaging with ethnic community organisations and other agencies that support or interact with new arrivals (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006; VicHealth, 2010). The soccer clubs examined in this paper are well positioned to develop such relationships because they are mainly run from within the Somali Australian community and have a deep understanding of the specific needs of community members, yet their ability to build formal partnerships is restricted by their limited organisational capacity.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the key factors that affect the sport participation experiences of Somali Australians. Considering the diverse experiences of different groups of people with refugee backgrounds that have settled in Australia, the results associated with this study's multi-sited ethnographic approach are not believed to be capable of generalisation to other newly arrived communities in Australia or elsewhere. Instead, the study's objective was to examine in depth the voices, experiences and meaning-making processes of Somali Australians in relation to sport participation. However, the aforementioned resemblances between the findings of this particular study and previous research suggest that the barriers to

participation discussed in this paper have relevance beyond the Somali Australian community. There is a need to further explore such patterns of commonality and difference by means of comparative research into particular groups and their experiences with organised and unorganised sport.

Two specific issues that have remained underexplored in this paper require further analysis. The first issue is the intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural facilitators to sport participation for people from refugee backgrounds, and the strategies for building and strengthening these. The second is the issue of racial discrimination which, although often referred to as a significant issue affecting sport (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006), is yet to be systematically researched in relation to the sport participation of newly arrived communities in Australia. At the same time, the study's argument that sport is a significant arena for analysing the societal participation and settlement of people with refugee backgrounds is a call to action to scholars in migration and refugee research to take sport seriously as a field of academic inquiry. Cross-fertilisation between sports research on the one hand and migration and refugee studies on the other is still in its infancy.

Notwithstanding the study's limitations, its findings can inform the development of policies and initiatives to effectively support the sport participation of people from refugee backgrounds as players and in non-playing roles. One important recommendation for practitioners in the field to be gleaned from this study is that establishing long-term trusting relationships with new arrivals and disseminating information about sport participation opportunities and benefits to families can contribute to transforming interpersonal barriers, such as lack of parental support, into facilitators to participation. In this process, policymakers and practitioners should work with young people who themselves can play a central role in educating their families about the value of sport participation and in sourcing or developing sports programs and activities that parents are likely to support. Such a strategy could

particularly benefit young women whose parents need to be confident that safe and culturally appropriate sport activities are being made available to their daughters.

Fostering inclusive sports spaces for people from refugee backgrounds requires an understanding at all levels of the community sport sector that refugee settlement is a two-way process of mutual accommodation requiring adaptation on the part of both the migrant and the host society, without having to discard one's cultural identity. This understanding is supported by the broader research literature on immigrants and refugees, which emphasises the need to move away from the assumption that settlement is a one-way process in which migrants are expected to "integrate" into the receiving society without any reciprocal accommodation (Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec, 2002; Korac, 2003; Strang and Ager, 2010). This body of research further shows that successful settlement can only take place if the host society provides access to key services and acceptance of immigrants in social interaction, as well as support them in maintaining their cultural and social identities (Castles et al., 2002). This more complex understanding of refugee settlement points to the need for ongoing cross-cultural awareness and diversity education and training in order to break down barriers and open up channels of communication between sport organisations and newly arrived communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006).

In order to enhance the ability of people from refugee backgrounds to engage in sport and take up volunteering and leadership roles within community sport organisations, the skills and talents of new arrivals need to be fully recognised and encouraged to flourish. This recommendation builds on recent research that shows that resettled refugees' informal volunteering plays an important role in building social capital, and that volunteers from refugee backgrounds provide the greater part of their services to benefit society as a whole rather than their own ethno-specific group (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010b). To realise this potential, a proactive approach to reducing and preventing discrimination in sport needs

to be developed and maintained. Only if the perceived barriers to participation are addressed and community sport organisations are seen as genuinely valuing and encouraging cultural pluralism, is the participation of people from refugee backgrounds in "mixed" sports clubs likely to increase. Their participation can enhance the quality and performance of these sports clubs and make community sport organisations in Australia more truly culturally diverse.

Notes

[1] The fictitious name Melbourne Giants is used to preserve the anonymity of respondents and to prevent any potential damage to the club or the community under study.

[2] Pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

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