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# Calypso cricket: connecting cultures in California

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## Abstract

This paper is an early field-report from an ongoing PhD project investigating socio-cultural phenomena displayed through cricket in the USA. The targeted location, Los Angeles, California, is a melting pot of cultures from English to Indian, Jamaican to Australian, and not forgetting American, so it is an ideal place for ethnographic research around this trans-cultural activity. The paper attempts to highlight the grounded nature of ethnography when using narratives to (a) approach the field, followed by (b) observation notes in the field through participant observation, arriving at (c) representation of emergent concepts or new themes to guide the research further. The field notes made in the USA (b) are chronological and written stylistically to include a rich, detailed description of events that took place across one social cricket match (in the 4<sup>th</sup> tier of the Southern California Cricket Association) between teams from Bangladeshi and Caribbean backgrounds. This glimpse into the world of cricket in the USA mimics a style of writing in minutia used by Nicholson Baker (1988) when describing his observations during a lunch hour at work.

## Introduction

A value of narrative seems to be that it reveals life under the microscope, allowing the researcher and others, such as critical friends, to see things that were not apparent before. Therefore, prior to this visit to Los Angeles the first author drew on his previous experience of playing cricket in California to write a reflective narrative, which effectively kick-started his PhD project to explore socio-cultural cricket in the USA. This narrative helped to establish that his mission for *being there* was altering from that of player to his current role as social researcher, albeit having to play cricket along the way as part of his data collection strategy. Analysis of this formative narrative has driven the next phase of the research offered in this paper. Learning from experience, the narrative and/or successive passages of field notes have helped to identify a series of themes, which were used as a guide to collect the next round of data. Thus, moving from narrative and in to the field *Calypso Cricket* explores one aspect of the cricket scene as witnessed in the USA.



Taking an overview of the paper, a series of pre-event notes led the researcher closer to the field observations in America. These serve as a reflexive record of critical researcher awareness as he approaches his first major field engagement. Palmer and Hughes (2011) experimented with this graduated, pre-event tactic to making field notes in their paper *Upward Skydiving*. Their aim was to capture something of the richness of thoughts, feelings and anticipations before an event, a sports coaching scenario in their case, because note taking during an event can be difficult, and after-event notes can become unreliable being based upon misty recall, muddled by imperfect memory and biased post-event reflection. This rationale maximized the contrast in the data by placing the researcher's awareness and anticipations as an active element within the overall field notes for this episode. Interestingly, it is these pre-event notes that may reveal most about the researcher or the subject, his biases, fears and blind spots going in to the field that are such an important constituent part of Methodological Notes for the ethnographer operating within the Participant Observer Spectrum (Palmer and Grecic, 2014).

When a researcher enters the field, do they enter blindly and without purpose? Logic and tradition suggest this is not the case - there is always a reason why we are in the pursuit of knowledge. From a qualitative researcher's stance this knowledge is socially constructed through a range of life experiences (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). One view is that people's lives take the form of a story, so in order to research the lived experience it makes sense to capture these events by documenting narratives; stories of existence, experience and social exchange. When conducting fieldwork for qualitative research, Leavy (2009:38) recommends using 'the self as a springboard, as a witness' to merge data from within and from others. In *Calypso Cricket* the stories or narrative become the impetus for the study, in effect becoming part of the data for the overall story (Nickless and Palmer, 2012).

A benefit to the narrative approach is that the researcher becomes grounded in the context of the phenomena and is able to maintain their awareness of being a researcher and the biases they may exert, balancing their own life-history with their place in an evolving social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Garrett and Wrench, 2007). Leavy (2009) also points out that the narrative should be conducted early in the work to provide a purpose and drive before any further data is collected, helping to find a way through the data and confronting issues that may be clouding the researchers' thoughts. The narrative can then be revised, elevating the fieldwork into a type of reflexive auto-ethnography. This process is vital as the researcher must attempt to make sense of their data, and this may only become possible if the narrative is written before the researcher enters the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Smith and Weed, 2007; Humberstone, 2009).

Following the themes emerging from the pre-event notes as a guide, the field notes written in the USA became easier to construct; having more observational purpose – an idea of what to look for. For structure the researcher opted to follow the simple but reliable method of ordering field notes formulated by Schatzman and Strauss (1973) used in later studies by Pryle and Palmer (2013) and then adapted by Palmer and Grecic (2014). These consist of:

**Descriptive/observational Notes** (commenting on objective witnessed occurrences, what is seen, heard and felt i.e. sensory data),

**Theoretical Notes** (an attempt to make inferences from the observed information and make sense of what is being experienced)

**Methodological Notes** (a consideration of tactics in the field and limitations with thought given to the potential future direction of the study).

The reflective pre-event notes below attempt to transport the reader into the story, borrowing a concept from previous a study by Loic Wacquant's (2007) ethnographic account of boxing, which used rich description in an attempt to interpret and reflect on his field notes (Pryle, 2014).

### **(a) Graduated reflexive notes: Approaching the cricket fields of California**

#### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2015 – One month out**

It is four weeks until I will be travelling to Los Angeles to play cricket in a 4<sup>th</sup> Division game as part of the Southern California Cricket Association (SCCA). I have been in discussions with an old contact, David Sentance, who has invited me to play for his team, the Dolphins. He is aware of my research motivations and is keen to involve me wherever if possible and I am eagerly anticipating reconnecting with this world. Understandably, as I have not played cricket in the USA since 2008, I have many thoughts and feelings about this upcoming period and will attempt to document them here.

Firstly, how am I going to fit into this culture and environment? I do feel confident that my laid-back nature and amiable demeanour usually allows for a good rapport to be established with most people, so I have no concerns about this. I feel that I can approach individuals and put them at ease. What is noticeable from my previous experiences and reflections is that I do attract curiosity and an interest from others. Typically they want to know more about me and my research, reasons for being there and my playing background. Hopefully this will open up more opportunities for further inquiry during this trip. Will they want to know more about me and why this stranger is passing through their world, becoming involved in cricket along the way?

Another factor is how the players perceive my cricketing abilities and what has David already told them? Coming from England, they may feel that I should be technically sound and play very conservatively. An English stereotype? They may be right and this could apply pressure on me to perform, yet my current club form at home is very poor. This could exacerbate problems in future relationships if I do not perform as well as expected. Would I deflate their image of the English cricketer? Would they want me to return? More importantly, they may not even take me seriously in discussion and hamper any research I can conduct from the inside.

Regardless of this, I feel that I can draw on my previous experiences of playing in the USA; playing on strange surfaces, in unorthodox fashions, with a slower pace of the game – to transform my current form. I can then play with the freedom of knowing there is nothing to lose, I am not staying there indefinitely as it is only a short visit to *the field* for my research. However, at the moment I do feel that if I don't build a good rapport or perform very well in the game (become a match winner or contribute a game changing role) then in the bar after the game I may struggle to open up certain viewpoints of my new teammates. If I am successful with this, then I can relax, possibly leading them to share deeper and richer information.

Could direct disclosure of my research intentions lead to clamming up and a change of behaviours? I feel that this may not be the case and I do not have to mention that I am watching each individual but rather a collective observation of culture and interactions that are taking place. After all, the cricket is there for all to see. For all concerned it may be useful if David introduces me from the outset as a fellow researcher into cricket which may reduce suspicions or 'clamming' up. Having the social acceptance of a key gatekeeper such as David is a real advantage for me as I prepare my thoughts to travel and observe. I believe this early disclosure will not impact upon peoples' behaviours too much and I will still be able to observe the cricket in its natural setting.

### **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015 – One week out**

Things have moved on a pace in the last couple of weeks. I have contacted Richard Blackledge, an old team mate for the Corinthians team in Los Angeles, who has agreed to sign me on to his roster to play for them again. The process seemed a lot easier than before as he only asked me for my date of birth. When I played previously between 2005 and 2008 I recall problems with requiring a fixed address (in USA) and even being a US citizen in order to compete in the league. Maybe this is because Richard has also come from England and can understand my situation. Corinthians play in the top Division and include some first class cricketers amongst their numbers so I will have to raise my game in order to fit in. Again, I have played in this team before and it helps to be able to draw on these experiences. I estimate it will be a similar standard to the league I play in at home.

My fielding skills remain at a high standard and I have taken some good catches this season already. My batting is not at the required level at the moment but such is the nature of batting that it will only take one good innings to revitalise my confidence and form. My new teammates in the US do not have to know this either. It would be nice to get the opportunity to bat from the middle and have another observational viewpoint to draw upon. The old phrase *time in the middle* definitely applies to my situation here. However, I do not want to push anyone out of their regular spots either as this could upset the applecart. I look forward to catching up with some old acquaintances and Richard has done a good job so far in accommodating me. The nature of cricket in California from my experiences is one of continuous change and the players I used to play with may no longer be there.

In terms of the Dolphins game, there is uncertainty as Dave Sentence has said he could be confident of getting me in the team and is working on it, but at the moment is not confirmed. I have thought about playing in this game a lot as I feel there may be more pressure on me to ‘perform’ when asked (expertise-on-tap). In our last conversation, David asked me whether I had played for Lancashire or a similar high level as he said he wants to ‘talk me up a bit’ to get me in the team. I have interpreted that he is putting me on a pedestal with the potential to be shot down. I am wary of bigging myself up or allowing others to put pressure on me as this game will be on a local park with an inconsistent surface and bowlers, meaning anything could happen. For this reason I am trying to stay relaxed about this social cricket and focus on it as a game for fun and enjoyment. However, I am aware that the game is a research opportunity which I do not want to jeopardise. Hopefully I can use this game to open up wider relationships, get to know David better and share cricket ideas.

In a further email discussion with Richard, he has said it may be fine to play on the Saturday dependant on numbers but has asked me for a weblink to my statistics so he can show the team and make a judgement. I feel that this is unfair as cricket should not be based on statistics but unfortunately is governed by them. My current form is displayed on a weblink I sent them and may sway their decision.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015 – En route to the USA**

With regards to the Dolphins game, it appears that David’s efforts to put me in the team have been in vain – he says that the eagerness from others to play means that competition for places is high. Regardless of this, I will still endeavour to be there as a spectator and make some vital observational notes. I am getting the impression that some familiar problems may be resurfacing. For example, I have had difficulty as an outsider being recognised and trusted to feel part of a set up. This is natural of course but may hamper my progress and the recent discussion with David about whether I had played at County level has compounded these fears. Is this what

you have to do to get an opportunity to play? I will still turn up and if they need a sub I will be available. The benefit could be that I get to observe from the boundary and pick up some interesting points from another perspective. I may be able to just sit and chat to the spectators and uncover their feelings.

### **Getting closer to the action... 4 themes emerging from the pre-event narrative**

By reading and reflecting back on the short narrative pieces above, a series of themes were formulated to assist observations in the field. I could now travel to the USA with a sharpened awareness of what to look for and my eyes were open for opportunity. Whilst anticipating that new ideas will emerge from the field work, starting out with these initial themes was a helpful and logical approach to take.

#### **Theme 1: ACCEPTANCE AND OPPORTUNITY:**

Based on previous experiences of playing cricket in the USA and being regarded as the outsider, will this social ostracizing still be in operation or will the attitude have altered? Without opportunity, the potential for players to remain in a team or even playing at all is a huge barrier to participation. This point was emphasized by reading Sentance (2006) who discusses the cultural divide from back in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century through elitism that led to the working classes abandoning cricket to take up baseball.

**NB: Themes going in to the field and ideas coming out of the data:** The field notes that follow are rich descriptions of in-the-moment happenings during one cricket match in an afternoon. The ‘bubble’ themes *going in to the field* are recognised in the notes. Simultaneously *coming out of the data*, fresh concepts for socio-cultural investigation begin to emerge which will focus this research as it develops. Patches of description where new phenomena occur are denoted by a solid bar to the left and shading – and are summarised in the conclusion.

**Theme 2: EGOTISM AND CULTURAL  
BACKGROUND:**

It appears that a previous problem of ego has surfaced. Having been asked about my cricket credentials by a couple of people involved in the US cricket teams, this seems to be used as form of social capital which again can lead to exclusion from a game. This has occurred to me before, for example, if you have played county cricket maybe 10 or 15 years ago this puts you at a higher status than a young player with greater potential. In addition, there is a personal feeling that if my performances are not good enough, if selected, then I will also not gain credibility, potentially stalling any progress.

**Theme 3: TECHNIQUE:**

Another cultural difference I am aware of is that in other countries, including the USA, the game has been adapted and etiquette, technique and traditions differ from that of the English method, which remains one of technical proficiency rather than performance. Will my strict technical upbringing in cricket leave me out of depth here? Will I be able to adapt to the environment? Perhaps this is the problem with the sport in the USA and there is no strict coaching culture to improve the players mentally and physically.

#### **Theme 4: FACILITIES:**

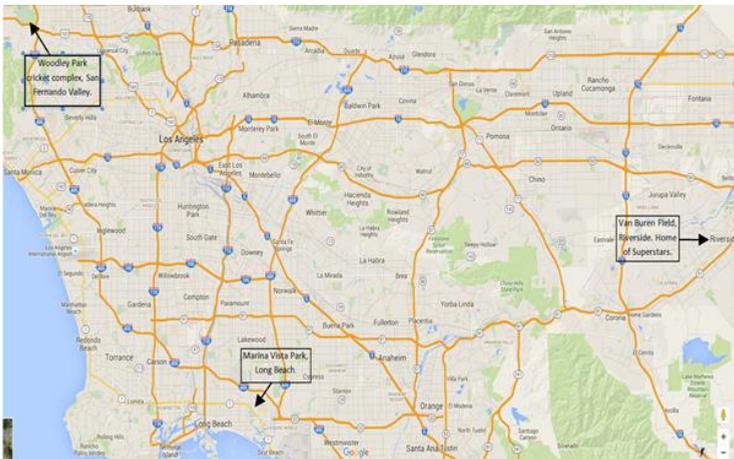
There is a sense that the strange playing surfaces encountered previously in the US will still have affected the quality of cricket being played. To add to this, other luxuries that are taken for granted in England may not be readily available in the USA, e.g. a clubhouse with a bar encouraging socialising between cultures, coaching aids, umpiring and scoring staff amongst others. All of these thoughts are in my mind just before observations commence.

#### **(b) Field notes from cricket in California: Joseph Pryle 2015**

**Event:** Dolphins v Superstars cricket match.

**Context:** 4<sup>th</sup> Division game in the main summer competition of the Southern California Cricket Association. 40 overs per side, coloured clothing.

**Time and location:** Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015. Marina Vista Park, Long Beach. Start approximately 10am.



**Figure 1:** Greater Los Angeles (Google Maps, 2015a)

### Pre-match thoughts and actions

Following all of my performance concerns during the lead up to travelling to California, the situation has developed and has altered in a rather different way than expected. I was involved in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division match on the Saturday (yesterday), where due to the large numbers available in the squad I was overlooked to play. It appears that the numbers

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and  
opportunity

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of players available for selection are inconsistent and on this hot, busy weekend there were sixteen players wanting to play. However, I performed a few roles including a central observer position as scorer which was excellent for data collection. I have discovered that due to being registered on the roster for the Corinthians team I can no longer play for the Dolphins as well. For this reason I am going to arrive early and explain the situation to David Sentence if he is there and he can either get a replacement or manipulate the situation so that I can play. After a few

beers last night I am also feeling tired, still slightly jet-lagged and maybe more relaxed. The advantage of today's game is that it is in Long Beach, the city where I am staying, whereas the other games tend to take place either in Orange County or at the cricket complex of Woodley Park in the San Fernando valley. This is a 40 mile drive north of Long Beach, past Los Angeles so being more local is easier in terms of travelling. I will simply drive over this morning before play and explain that I can't play, and make some observations.

Theme 3:  
technique

### Observational note: Arriving at the park – first impressions.

At 9.30am I drive east along Broadway towards Marina Vista Park where the game is to be played. As I drive along the road that runs alongside the park I gain a first glimpse of the field and spot if anybody is around. I am familiar with this area as I used to live on the other side of the marina on the Ocean Side Peninsula. Marina

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facilities

Vista is a former inlet of the ocean that was capped off to be used for the rowing events of the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932 and for the Olympic trials of 1968, and is still used for many other events. I drive into the car park entrance and I can already see some players warming up with stretches and some light jogging. In front of them, slightly set back from the boundary is a red gazebo, under which about half a dozen people are congregating as it is already quite warm and sunny. I park up and look over to see if David is around, yet most of the players are Black or Asian and I make an assumption that he must be on his way.

The players on the field are dressed in a red, black and green one-day cricket kit and are all Asian, perhaps from Bangladesh with those colours. They appear to be a full team and looking very serious, ready for action. They look like a professional outfit and are going through a number of warm up drills.

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opportunity

I am still looking for David amongst the other players but I can only see two players that are dressed in what I take to be the blue colours of the Dolphins. They are stood to the side of the gazebo and looking towards me. As I look around, I can see that the field has a very peculiar layout. It has been set out on the upper part of the park on a slope, next to some really nice tennis courts, yet has the strangest boundary I have ever encountered in cricket. Everything

looks fine where I am standing on the side closest to the marina, next to the car park. But as I scan around I can see that the cricket association have been forced to use most of the hill for the cricket field, leaving the flat part furthest from the marina as a really nice baseball diamond. At the top end of the hill towards the other road is a bunch of trees that have encroached inside the boundary and as far as I can see they only look about fifteen yards from the wicket! On the slope towards the baseball field, the boundary has incredibly been created out of a huge oil drum, a traffic cone and a wheel as the markers. The strip in the centre is facing up the slope and from the boundary appears to be laid as concrete with AstroTurf over the top. David has mentioned that the game should go ahead, even though there has been a forecast for rain. I cannot

Theme 4:  
facilities

Theme 4:  
facilities

believe that this is possible as it is already approaching thirty degrees. Yesterday I had asked Richard Blackledge about this and he told me that there is a very different approach here to England regarding playing in the rain. Any drop of rain tends to result in the game being abandoned.

**Theoretical note: ‘cricket, here, you must be joking...’**

I feel that it is astounding that in a park such as this, which is used for other events, that the local authority has even considered placing a cricket strip there, albeit in the worst section of the park. Regardless, there is an opportunity for cricket to go ahead here in Long Beach, and makes things a lot easier for those that might live south or east of the area to play, instead of having to travel the extra distance to Woodley. My experiences also tell me that these cricketers are committed to the game and will travel nevertheless, so I am waiting in anticipation to see how this game will pan out.

Theme 4:  
facilities



**Figure 2:** Marina Vista Park, Long Beach (Google Maps, 2015b)

Contrary to people's perceptions of cricket here in the USA, here is a prized example of the commitment to play from those of a colonial background, as it is now clear to me that the Dolphins are primarily a Caribbean team and the giveaway is that the Superstars, with the colours of their kit, are of a Bengali heritage – evidence of a cricketing diaspora.

They appear to be taking this very seriously, in spite of it being early on Sunday morning, there is no hint of rain and it is highly probable that the game will go ahead. This dedication to play the game anywhere is reinforced by the boundary, which I have found rather amusing. There are clearly no resources to assist with this and they have made best of what they have by putting out the oil drum, wheel and cone. The most alarming point has to be the presence of the trees inside the boundary. Surely even a defensive shot could reach the boundary and make this game into a bit of a joke and it could even be deemed as a risk of injury with fielders running into them.

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facilities

### **Methodological note: gaining acceptance**

As David is not present yet, I need to establish some kind of rapport with the others as they may start to get suspicious. Feeling slightly hung-over is helping as I am more relaxed and feel confident in approaching the group. I am deliberately wearing my England coach's shirt as this is an obvious symbol that can draw people in and make them aware that I

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am involved in cricket. I put this on to stand out and ensure David could notice me when I arrived. I do have a couple of plans in place and am in a good position. If I am asked to play then I feel that I am ready and can stay around. However, if they do not require my services then I have already made some good observations and plan to return later to watch the game when it is up and running.

**Observational note:** approaching the group



**Figure 3:** Standing at the side of the gazebo whilst Superstars bat. The rest of the team are in an approachable position for casual discussion.

I decide that as I am standing there and have not introduced myself, I need to explain why I am there. To the side of the gazebo are men dressed in the Dolphins kit, which is blue with white lettering. The gazebo has a foldout table and some large cool boxes containing ice and drinks for the players. One of the men, who is older and short in stature but quite loud is talking on his cell phone and appears to be very irate. He is looking towards me and his expression tells me that he is not happy. His voice is very much Caribbean, yet he is white skinned. He reminds me of the West Indian cricket commentator Tony Cozier, who similarly is a white Caribbean. I overhear him on the phone, and his allies are standing in close proximity listening to him shouting down the phone. In his patois I can hear ‘You all want game time, where the f\*\*\* you at? Get down here now’.

Immediately I understand what is happening. The rest of the team are late and with it being Sunday, perhaps they are still in bed. There is a black guy sitting in a deckchair to the side of him and he turns to face me. I immediately go over and explain that I am here to meet David.

‘You must be Joe? Listen man I’m sorry I didn’t register you in time, my name’s Colin’.

I explain that I can’t play anyway due to being registered for the Corinthians. Immediately, Tony Cozier to my left, who has now finished his phone call and is curiously listening in, pipes up...

‘Why the f\*\*\* you play for dem man, all dese players go to de shit teams? That Richard [Blackledge] has some nerve, coming taking players. He f\*\*\*s it up for everyone and he has a disgusting mouth’.

I am slightly alarmed with this vitriolic outburst, but quickly gather that his phone call has not gone to plan and he is clearly upset. One of the other players leans over to me with a grin on his face and says, ‘don’t worry about Ge (the old man on the phone), he is a character, he tells it like it is’. I feel more at ease now that I have made contact and ask,

‘Is this normal, players arriving late due to it being Sunday?’ With this, Ge (I am told in a later meeting with David that ‘Ge’ is his nickname and is short for *Portugese*, as many people from Guyana are of Portugese heritage. His real name is Glenn McMichael) continues his rant...

‘It don’t matter if it Sunday, dey drink too much. Dis would ‘appen if it was Monday, Tuesday, no matter’.

I go on to explain that I am sorry about how things are and I could have played as they are obviously short on numbers at the moment. I tell them that I will return later to hopefully catch up with David. At this point, Ge turns to me, slightly warming to me now and with a wry smile on his face says,

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and  
opportunity

‘We got rum, and we got reefer, you welcome to stay and get high man during de game!’

I politely decline and walk off feeling like the half hour I have spent here has been a thoroughly entertaining and interesting experience.



**Figure 4:** A good perspective of the difficulties faced for any fielder at the top of the slope. The trees are fully twenty yards within the sprayed on boundary, no more than fifteen yards from the edge of the wicket.

**Theoretical note: have a drink my friend...**

Although the reception was slightly hostile initially, I took into consideration that the circumstances were such that I could understand the frustrations. It is difficult to perform to a competitive level if you do not have a committed team and by looking at the opposition I could visibly see the difference in approaches to the game. Ge is clearly a passionate man who has a deep love of the game and just wants to get this game going. This said, I did feel a strong unifying bond between these disparate teams centred upon the ‘honeypot’ game of cricket, uniting various cultures from different nationalities. I do not feel that a group of Caribbean’s would even associate with a group of Bengali’s if it were not for cricket and here they were in conversation prior to competing out in a more relaxed setting. For me personally, I do feel that if I was to approach a group of Afro-Americans in this manner just up the road in nearby Compton, then the reception might not have been so generous. Yet here I was within ten minutes of arrival being offered the opportunity to join them for the day and get on the booze!

Theme 1:  
egotism and  
cultural  
background

### Methodological note: power of symbolism

A shared love of the game has assisted me on this occasion and has provided common ground with which to initiate dialogue and I have found that they have reciprocated by accepting me. By wearing my symbolic shirt I have been recognised as a fellow cricketer and been able to gain favourable rapport. My relaxed and amiable approach has also eased their suspicions. There has been no language barrier, but I did have to slow my words and ensure I pronounced everything clearly. It would not have worked if I had used my Lancashire dialect on this occasion. I could follow most of the West Indian creole and I feel that the dialogue should be written to reflect this to create a more sensory effect for the reader.



Theme 1:  
acceptance  
and  
opportunity

### Observational note: A return to the action

I disappeared back to my friend, Luis Enrique's house, where I was lodging. We went for a nice Mexican lunch and a couple of drinks with some old friends. However, I needed to return and Luis was happy to tag along. It would be a good opportunity to show him what I am researching and although he has experienced cricket when he has visited England, he does not have a great insight into the game. In fact, he is probably the only person of Hispanic origin that I have ever known to watch cricket.

We return at 3pm, using the other road at the top end of the hill. We park on the road and walk through the trees that are actually within the boundary. I can see that the Dolphins are fielding and that Luis and I should do a few laps of the boundary taking in the action and taking photographs.

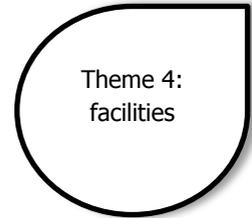
After we watched one over, the man who had just bowled from the bottom end came up towards us to take a breather under the trees, now positioned at third man. It was very hot at this stage of the afternoon and he was sweating. This man was a huge black guy, about 6ft 4in and very broad shouldered and from what I saw, could bowl at a pretty fast pace for this standard of cricket. I approach him to talk and he is very amiable. He nods as he sees my cricket shirt and says 'Hey man'. I ask him the match situation and he gives me the low down. It appears that Dolphins have been bowled out already for a paltry 92 and the Superstars are well on the way to knocking them off at 40-2. I discuss this score briefly but am also interested in the ridiculous boundary where he is standing. In fact, I am officially standing in the middle of the field myself! He explains that it actually extends beyond the tress all the way



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facilities

back to the road, about a further 20 yards. I make a gesture of thanks and tell him I am doing a few laps so will catch up with him later.

As Luis and I walk amongst the trees, I was still aware that I was within the playing boundary so was more actively engaged in the game to ensure the ball wasn't travelling in our direction. Then came the most interesting observation I have ever made on a cricket field. Earlier I had noticed that the boundary on one side consisted of an oil drum and cones. However, amongst the trees I now saw that the organisers had attempted to spray paint the boundary, I had seen this before back home but never had I seen it to this detail. It was so irregular and fluctuated around all of the tree roots. Somebody had gone to great pains to ensure that the roots were not on the field and it looked like a work of art. I find this very amusing and I take photos. Without me mentioning anything, Luis comments that 'It looks like they are just making do with whatever they have' and he is right.



**Methodological note: get some evidence**

For this extraordinary find (the boundary), I have thought it essential to take some photographs to further illustrate this unusual and dedicated practice of ensuring cricket takes place. These will help to document evidence that the colonial cultures will go to many lengths to continue their traditions such as cricket.



**Figure 5:** A view of the close boundary from amongst the trees at the top of the slope. Lee Williams, the big man that I have spoken to, is standing in the foreground.



**Figure 6:** My friend Luis and I walk around the boundary, which is on this side is made of traffic cones, an oil drum and a wheel! The gazebo is amongst the trees in the distance and the bench with the 3 old men on is to the left.



**Figure 7:** Incredibly, the boundary has been spray painted around the tree roots. My friend Luis also finds this amusing

**Theoretical note: making do and getting on**

It becomes clear from this observation that the players in this division will use whatever means necessary to get a game on, they appear to love the game that much. This much is indicated by the boundaries that had been laid, and the fact that they will not let a bunch of well established trees and their roots get in

the way. I don't think that the top division would use this ground as it is not a turf wicket and the boundaries are not acceptable for that standard.

### **Observational note: scoring**

Upon closer inspection of the wicket, I confirmed that it is an artificial surface. However, it is running up the slope and the bowlers from the bottom end have to encounter this before it plateaus out and is quite disorientating. I have played on grounds like this back in Bolton and I guess that cricketers are always making adjustments to their environment so is not a problem. As we walk back around to the gazebo I talk to the scorer from the Superstars. Up until now, the opposition have not been very friendly or interacting with the Dolphins. However, I find that this is not deliberate and engage in some pleasant dialogue with this man regarding scoring and he explains a few issues he is having. He is struggling to keep pace with the game, in particular as many of his own team are frequently standing in his way. I can totally find accordance with this as I was scoring by myself yesterday. I found that players would always come to you for updates and stand in your line of vision. These disruptions can lead to inaccuracies in the scoring. It only takes a split second to miss a delivery and the whole score can be misaligned. My experience thus far of the scoring system here is that it is conducted entirely out of trust. The team that is batting will always do the scoring. So for the first half Colin was scoring for the Dolphins, and now this guy was performing the role for the Superstars. The umpires are supposed to keep a running total as well but from my experience this too has been unreliable.

### **Theoretical note: reflections on scoring**

I find that there are many problems here with the scoring system which creates the potential to become divisive and lead to arguments. i) There is an issue with eyewitness reliability. Scorers have to follow every delivery of the match and this can be impeded if players stand in their way. In addition, any distractions caused by talking to the scorer can lead to them missing vital action. In England, scorers are usually away from everyone and on many occasions are in a score box that is elevated above the action. This can ensure a full line of vision at all times. However, it is difficult enough to get the game to go ahead here and the installing of score boxes is unrealistic at this point. ii) The scorer can miss deliveries due to the pace of the game and idle chat with other players stood around nearby. This is usually overcome by operating two scorers so that information can be shared and decrease the likelihood of action being missed. The system here of one team scoring per innings increases the chances of unreliability.

iii) I feel that this trust is fragile and could lead to arguing. These feelings were compounded yesterday when there were suspicions that the opposition were adding runs on to their total. Without the umpires more closely scrutinising this frustrations and anger may flare. I can say this with more confidence due to my experiences yesterday when I was scoring at a match. The scoreboard frequently read a different score to that in my scorebook. The opposition score was usually 4 runs in front of mine and they tried to convince me that I had missed it whilst distracted. However, I was not convinced as I had kept my eye on proceedings throughout. Due to this 'trust' with the opposition scorer, the rules dictate that this is taken as the official score, so I had no argument. I feel the solution has to be paired-scoring, to eliminate any bias and this has to be conducted away from the team gazebo and distractions.

### **Observation note: further probing, new cricket aspiration**

The Superstars scorer interestingly makes a comment that Ge from the Dolphins is always complaining and chirping away and has not shut up all day. This doesn't really bother him, he appears to be used to it but I do wonder why he mentioned it. At this point, the rest of his teammates in the gazebo nod their heads in agreement and it does seem that collectively they are irked by him. This is the first sign I have had of any potential division as it has all been quite civil until now. I ask where they come from, and they tell me they are based at Riverside, which is way out to the north east of the greater Los Angeles district and I guess about 30 miles from Long Beach. In further discussion, I find that they are also a relatively new team who have formed with big ambition in mind. They have not lost a game in this Division and are working their way up from the bottom. That explains why they are taking things seriously, from what I saw in the morning with their drills to their appearance in their kit.

My thoughts were correct, they are a Bangladeshi outfit. I thank them for their input and move back towards a group of West Indians to the side of the tent. Close by is a park bench and three older Caribbean's are sat watching the action. I listen in intently. They are the regulars who come to watch the Dolphins. I can see that they are drinking rum and laughing at the dire situation of the game. I get a sense that they are about to give up and go home soon. The man closest to me is open to discussion when he sees me. He has an Indian appearance but a strong West Indian accent, typical of a Guyanese. 'This game be over in 20 minutes man', he says to me, with a grin on his face. Just at this moment however, we all look up to watch the next delivery and the big guy who I had spoken to in the trees, the fast bowler, clean bowls the number four batsman. This makes the three men I am with sit up and take notice, they are suddenly more alert to the game.

In a trice their expectations and tone have changed, sounding more optimistic. ‘That a big wicket there man, that boy can play. Couple more and you never know in de cricket man’ another of the men says with a chuckle, and the others agree. This man is a bigger and darker man who takes on a look of a Bajan. This wicket was followed quickly by another in the same over by the big man (the bench tell me he is the key player and his name is Lee Williams, he is too good for this level but is happy to be passive and play socially). He has bowled another of Superstars key batsmen and the bench roar in unison ‘Game on man!’ The Superstars were now four wickets down but only require 30 more runs. It was still a forlorn situation but the bench were now switching from desperation to excitement.

I was getting a sense of déjà vu from my own playing experiences. I have played with many West Indians before and they tend to display their emotions openly but are passionate about the game. They like to moan and groan and have a negative outlook at times and this was no different. In the very next sentence there was a good example of this from the Bajan, who was wearing a very doleful look on his face. Surprisingly he pipes up,

‘These Asians man, sick of dem opening der mouths and chatterin’. Every time we do we get called racist, wish dey would f\*\*\*off’. This alarms me as up till now there has been no sign of trouble, let alone ethnic division. I decide to leave as they are becoming vexed.



**Figure 8:** Watching Superstars bat, I am looking up the slope from the gazebo. Ge has his back to me and is standing at gully with number 34 on his shirt, no doubt chirping away.

I am still waiting in the hope that David arrives soon. I decide to ask the Guyanese where he could be. ‘Oh Dave man, he f\*\*\*ed off about 40 minutes ago when he see de game up. I got his cell if you wants?’ Just at that moment, the winning runs are hit and the game finishes at a rather tame 4pm, despite only starting at 10.30am.

I tell the man I have David’s details and will contact him later for a meeting in the week. The Caribbean’s are slightly upset at losing so I opt to leave. It would have been nice to talk to some of the players but they were in no mood for it. From my own experiences of playing with them they can be bad losers, which could be because of their love of the game.

### **Methodological note: I am a participating observer...**

I was consciously aware that as a researcher I should always accept people as I find them and not how others have perceived them. I am piecing together from my prior reading that perhaps the negative outlook from the West Indians may be inherent and passed down from their days as colonial slaves. I may be wrong but it is something worth looking further into, whether there has been prior research. Although the Asians were not as forthcoming or as accommodating, they were perhaps more reserved and cautious about talking to an unknown. However, by simply observing the interactions between them I could see that they too were just as passionate about the game.

To travel the lengths that they do to play takes commitment and they are perhaps more organised and driven to succeed, evident in the structure that they have created. Coming from Riverside, they will have travelled a lot further than the other teams, yet on this evidence it is not a barrier to prevent them playing. The old men on the bench I encountered drew parallels with my own situation as I have seen this at every club I played at in England. The older members love to sit during the match and reminisce, sharing cricket tales and passing on their knowledge – their infinite wisdom counting for everything. What is apparent to me during this afternoon is that cricket can succeed anywhere and in any environment, yet is again confined to the drive from those ex-colonials of the British Empire. There are no indigenous Americans on show today.

### **Methodological note: learning to become a field researcher**

I feel that I have effectively infiltrated without becoming too intrusive with the group. They are now aware of me and it bodes well for my taking part in future matches, where they may ask me to play. This would be my next phase of research as it provides me with a different observer perspective, from the centre of the field. I would be able to draw on the senses and comment on my feelings and interactions with greater purpose. This afternoon of field observation has provided me with so much about the nuances and quirks of cricket from another culture. I was glad that I

was able to walk around the boundary this time rather than become embroiled in the scoring, which in itself provides a unique viewer role, as I was able to comment on events safely as a relative outsider.

### **(c) Concepts and themes emerging to guide the research**

In spite of this episode of cricket activity being relatively brief, a high level of descriptive detail was achieved in the observation notes. This tactic to say a lot about a little was intentional, focused and aided by the note structure to describe, theorise and be reflexive about the researcher's positioning and interaction to gather data. Whilst the initial themes from the pre-event notes were recognised and positioned in the match-account, being more prevalent earlier on, new areas of cultural phenomena were being revealed (patches of text with bars and shading) which seemed to be more dominant in the latter phases of the notes. Through the opportunity to over-express or indulge in free and detailed commentary about what was going on before the researcher's eyes, new dimensions of the social malaise seem to be productively 'squeezed' out from this pressurised explanation and may lead to new discovery – or at least help to guide the next phase of research.

*Emergent themes and concepts were:*

- Culture clashes colonial vs indigenous: identity crisis - clothing - symbolic internationalism.
- US Cricket Language: acceptance, attitude and play, working class, naming use of names/nick-names - cricket fraternity.
- Booze culture: drinks, relaxing, smoking, is being laid back a charade or mask for fitness, exercise and health?
- Competition (scoring issues): cultural baggage/stereotypes (e.g. of Bangladeshi or Caribbean). Geography and culture - who to trust?
- Make-and-do attitude: facilities makeshift, momentary, temporary, elusive – but somehow the game seems 'concrete' in the memory of players. Enthusiasm and drive, passion and interest in cricket, maybe in each other?
- Innocence and naivety in the 'newness' of cricket in California: in the US sport scene are they are outsiders? Problems with acceptance in society.
- Travel, commitment, ex-pat participation for fond memories of home. Is it really ex-colonials only? (nb: scratch deeper on this).

## Conclusion: forward and deeper in to socio-cultural cricket phenomena

Themes emerging from the reflexive notes and graduated approach to the field were very useful for establishing a focus and sense of mission for the novice researcher to observe in real time. While it was recognised that there would be a diverse range of events and interesting sub themes that could emerge from the fieldwork, conducting a pre-event narrative did highlight some main areas to target when entering what was an uncertain environment. To add to this, travelling such a long distance to observe and attempt to infiltrate a group of unknown people from a different culture was an anxious period. With these insecurities in mind, the narrative assisted in providing clarity of thought and confidence to proceed into this field episode. When in America, the reliable yet basic structure of the field notes allowed for social instances to be interrogated, proving to be a practical means of recording participant observation data. By structuring the field notes in this way, the researcher was able to remain central to the study as well being guided by the data from one phase to the next. Furthermore, by writing the story-as-experienced in an accessible way it is hoped the account might appeal to readers who are interested in cricket, both generally and in the USA.

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## **JQRSS Author Profiles**

Joseph Pryle<sup>1</sup> is undertaking MPhil/PhD research at UCLan into the cultural issues surrounding cricket in the USA. He has particularly enjoyed exploration through personal narrative in his ethnography, establishing empirical data to look deeper into the phenomenon of cricket from an international and socio-cultural perspective.

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## **Reviewer Comments:**

This paper provides a novel and valuable representation of data that explicitly guides the reader through not only its narrative but also the data analysis process itself. The use of the bubbles, shading and lines embedded in the data help the reader to follow the researcher’s reflections set amidst this cricketing journey. In this innovative manner, the evolution of the research and researcher is ‘spelled out’ and made visible through a patchwork of connections interspersed with photographs that further bring the data to life. The paper also demonstrates an honesty not only in its graphical depiction of events, but also in the author’s reflexivity. The merits of this study should therefore be judged through its creativity, its rich description of events, its inventive approach to presenting new emerging ideas and the reader contemplation it evokes.