CALL FOR PAPERS: Playing for Nations and/or States: Cricket and Politics in South Asia
(september 14, 2022)

Cricket like Bollywood eulogized like a religion in South Asia and regarded as one of the most popular sports played in the region. Despite the popularity of the game and its ubiquitous relevance for the nation-states of South Asia, there has been a dearth of scholarly works to understand the game’s inexorable relationship with politics. The existing scanty scholarly landscape on the subject has mostly focused on the colonial roots of the game, the decolonization and indigenization of it after the end of colonialism[1], the casteist nature of the legacy of the game[2] and its role in improving the bilateral relations of the two belligerent neighbours, India and Pakistan.[3] But the region overall, in particular India and Pakistan, in the last decade has experienced tremendous political tumult and a sharp rise in new political currents which espouse populist, nationalists, and authoritarian tendencies. In India, Narendra Modi, after a historical populist campaign, had a landslide victory in the 2014 elections, ushering in an era of secularization of India with his Hindu nationalist vision.[4] Pakistan after a democratic transition in 2008, continues to suffer democratic fragility with military’s overwhelming role in civilian affairs. After a controversial election, 2018 marked the rise of populist politics in the country with an ex-Cricketer politician, Imran Khan, ascending to power. [5] Similarly, the consolidation of power in the hands of Shaikh Hasina in Bangladesh show similar attributes. Afghan cricket’s rise over the years is also entangled with domestic and regional politics, and as of today going through an intricate situation with the resuscitation of the Taliban regime and increased difficulties for the Afghani men’s and women’s cricket team to play the game[6]. The island nation of Sri Lanka suffering through decades of internecine civil unrest which historically used cricket for nation building and entertainment purposes, continue to use cricket to placate ethnic tensions in the country.

Notwithstanding the distinct histories of state and nation formation, size of economy and ethnic diversity cricket is very much embedded in formal and informal domains of politics. The coming of T20 cricket and swelling of commercial leagues, on the lines of football leagues in Europe, further complicates the game-politics nexus in South Asia. Moreover, we can say that neoliberalism’s coalescence with authoritarianism across the region is also mediated by cricket. IPL (Indian Premier League), PSL (Pakistan Premier League), BPL (Bangladesh Premier League) and LPL (Lankan Premier League) are not only commercial enterprises, but they represent a concerted effort for building a peculiar image of respective nation-states. This webinar is an effort to put the sports-politics nexus in South Asia in the global academic map. The focus of this series will be on exploring following questions/themes, however, the contributors could develop their own questions too.

1. What explains the increased interest of political elites of South Asia in the game of cricket?
2. How is cricket involved in the self-imag ration of the nation?
3. How does cricket shape the popularity or unpopularity of political leaders in the public?
4. How regional politics (diplomacy and foreign relations) are mediated by the game of cricket?
5. How the commercialization of cricket corresponds to the political logic of populism and economic logic of neoliberalism?
6. What cricketing celebrities directly or indirectly influence the politics of respective countries.
7. Modernization impulses and gaining momentum of women's cricket in the region.

**Timeline**

- **Abstract Deadline: June 15, 2022**
- **Notification of decision: July 1, 2022**
- **Webinar: September 14, 2022**

Please send abstracts (300 words maximum) with a short biographical statement to Jean-Michel De Waele (Jean-Michel.De.Waele@ulb.be) and Adil Zahoor: adilzahoor10@gmail.com

The working language of the webinar is English.

**Fees**

Participation in the webinar – both as speaker and listener – is free.

**Questions**

Please send any questions about the webinar to Jean-Michel.De.Waele@ulb.be

**Bibliography**


