

‘FOOTBALL’S COMING HOME’ BUT WHOSE HOME? AND DO WE WANT IT?

Nation, football and the politics of exclusion

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Racism manifests itself in plural and complex forms. In this situation the logic of racism needs to be appraised in what we shall call *metonymic elaborations*. This means that racisms may be expressed through a variety of coded signifiers.... Contemporary racisms have evolved and adapted to new circumstances. *The crucial property of these elaborations is that they can produce a racist effect while denying that this effect is the result of racism.*

(Solomos and Back 1996:27, emphasis added)

Introduction

This chapter argues that the dominant discourse that surrounded Euro 96 (the 1996 European Football Championships) drew on, and reinforced, a form of cultural racism that currently appears to be pervasive. It is argued that the national ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) that was re-constructed was one that actively worked to exclude certain categories of people—being both gendered and racially exclusive. Seeking to understand the underlying cultural processes that generated this discourse, I show the connections between other cultural spheres, notably pop music, and argue that these cultural expressions are part of a wider reassertion of a narrow and closed white male English identity which has become coded as the so-called ‘New Lad’ phenomenon. The chapter surveys some of the contemporary characteristics of popular culture before locating the pivotal role of comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner in generating the Euro 96 anthem, ‘Three Lions’ with its ‘football’s coming home’ chorus, and outlines why this song and related themes became so popular within both the public and political imagination.

Imagining England

It is well acknowledged that sport provides one of the key symbolic sites for the production and reproduction of social identities. Eric Hobsbawm's dictum that the identity of a nation of millions 'seems more real as a team of eleven named people' (1990:43) is a pertinent reminder that sport, and by that it is normally meant, elite-level male competitive sports, is still seen in many countries as being central in symbolising a nation's identity.¹ In relation to English identity Chas Critcher has argued that, it 'is difficult to specify anything, other than war and royalty, which articulates national identity quite so powerfully as the England team competing in the latter stages of a World Cup competition' (1991:81)—to which we should now add the latter stages of a European football championship.

The symbolism of national sporting sides, and sport itself, has therefore acquired huge political significance, especially for the political right, in trying to foster certain narrow notions of what Britain's/England's (the two are often confused within these discourses) cultural identity should look like. The continuing questioning of the 'loyalty' of black Britons, as spectators and players, demonstrates both the importance of national sports teams to nationalistic projects and the powerful effect that the presence of black athletes can have in challenging the assertion that 'there ain't no black in the Union Jack': Norman Tebbit's 'cricket test', and, more recently, the article in *Wisden Cricket Monthly*, arguing for the replacement of 'Negroes' and other 'foreigners' from the English Test team by 'unequivocal Englishmen' as they supposedly lacked commitment to the national cause (Henderson 1995), is testament to this.²

Although racially coded in a way in which previous invocations of sport and national identity had not been, John Major's 1993 St George's Day speech deliberately tried to invoke a mythical, nostalgic, and implicitly white, notion of England as, essentially, a rural country full of 'invincible green suburbs', warm beers, and 'old maids cycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist' to the distant sounds of cricket being played at county grounds. Such portrayals of Englishness were important in trying to construct a national identity—a nation at ease with itself—which inevitably precluded a vision of a multi-cultural, urban and modern Britain, at a time of crisis for the Conservative Party both from without (economically and politically from Europe) and within (in relation to growing social problems and the party's own internal divisions). Sport, and in this instance cricket, thus assumes a heightened political status in standing *in for* a particular image of the nation. As Mike Marqusee accurately pointed out:

As the British economy wrestled with the demands of a global market, Major offered the governing party shelter in the cosy old England of county cricket. This was an England that did not exist, except, powerfully, in people's heads. Major's real audience was in

the suburbs.... Here ‘the county ground’ and the traditions of county life, including cricket, were ideological mantras to ward off the demons encroaching ever more menacingly from the crime-ridden, multi-racial, dispossessed inner cities.

(Marqusee 1994:10)

We can see here how the cultural sphere has become the key modality through which racist expressions are articulated. Increasingly notions of ‘race’ and ethnicity are conflated with national identity thereby working to exclude, by definition, blacks from Britain. Surveying this shift towards what some have labelled a ‘new’ racism (Barker 1981), Gilroy argues:

We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognised as such because it is able to link ‘race’ with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, a racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified *cultural* community. It constructs and defends an image of national culture—homogenous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without.... This is a racism that answers the social and political turbulence of crisis and crisis management by the recovery of national greatness *in the imagination*. Its dreamlike construction of our sceptred isle as an ethnically purified one provides a special comfort against the ravages of decline. It has been a key component in the ideological and political processes which have put the ‘Great’ back into Britain.

(Gilroy 1992:53)

Thus, far from the processes of imagining the national community being incompatible with racist discourses, as Anderson (1991: ch. 8) seems to suggest, nationalism is now often central to racist ideologies and discourses. These ‘dreamlike constructions’ of earlier ‘golden ages’, so central to John Major’s speech, are increasingly used as a way to manage contemporary political, economic and social problems by recourse to an invented past of imperial greatness when ‘Britain’ was supposedly at ease with herself. More importantly, we can see here the way in which certain expressions can come to have racial connotations within particular semantic fields, even as their protagonists deny that there is a ‘racial element’ to their pronouncements.

Britpop and the new ‘British’ renaissance?

One of the effects of these attempts to put the ‘Great’ back into Britain has been a growth in the idea that British popular culture is experiencing a form of renaissance. This can be seen most clearly in the attempt, by some, to

herald the arrival of 'Britpop' as the saviour of the British music scene. In fact, the most culturally significant musical form of recent times has, for me, undoubtedly been the emergence, in the inner-cities of the British metropolis, of Jungle music and its cultural correlates within contemporary Asian dance music culture (Sharma *et al.* 1997). Jungle, or 'drum and bass', has announced the arrival of black Britons into the diasporic black Atlantic world, and is characterised by its denouncement of closed ethnic, racial and national categories, embracing and extending notions of cultural hybridity and offering a powerful critique of the 'overground', commercialised, music industry, all of which has gone largely unremarked on by the mainstream music press. Jungle's 'dark' connotations, 'faceless stars' and its refusal to conform to the commercial formats of the established music industry have made it largely unacceptable for the Sunday spreadsheets and the tabloid 'exclusives', except for occasional excursions 'into the jungle' by ill-informed journalists.

Jungle, itself a derivative of the late 1980s' 'rave' scene, is clearly far more important as a means of gauging the nature of cultural politics in Britain today, telling us who we are, and what we are likely to become, than Britpop could ever be.³ However given the wider political climate in which 'the past', always selectively defined, is currently being invoked as a time when Britain was once proud (and white) it is not surprising that the media, and, as shall be shown later, politicians, have latched so strongly onto the largely white, guitarbased, indie tunes more commonly known as 'Britpop'. At a time when dance music in general, with all its variants from trip-hop, through to Jungle and more recently 'speed garage', is exploring new dimensions in musical and cultural identity it is the insular and parochial sounds of Britpop that have dominated the media's attentions and which has fit so easily into the cultural and political climate of late 1990s Britain. As Simon Reynolds (1997) has argued:

For Britpopsters, the Sixties figure as a 'lost golden age' in a way that's alarmingly analogous to the mythic stature of the Empire *vis-à-vis* football hooligans and the BNP. Even more than the insularity of Britpop's quintessentially English canon (Kinks, Jam, Small Faces, Buzzcocks, Beatles, Smiths, Madness), it's the sheer WHITENESS of its sound that is staggering...Damon Albarn's pseudo-yob accent testifies to a nostalgia for a lost white ethnicity, one that's fast eroding under the triple attrition of America, Europe and this nation's indigenous non-white population.... Thanks to rave, the most vital sectors of '90s UK subculture are all about mixing it up: socially, racially, and musically (DJ cut'n'mix, remixology's deconstructive assault on the song). Returning to the 3 minute pop tune that the milkman can whistle, re-invoking a parochial England with no black people, Britpop has turned its back defiantly to the future.

(Reynolds 1997)

The profoundly conservative underlying ideology of Britpop was demonstrated by the fact that leading up to the 1997 British General Election both sides of the, increasingly contracting, political spectrum were so willing to link their own party's political agendas with that of Britpop. For instance, the right-wing reactionary Conservative MP John Redwood tried to lay claim to the Britpop mantle as an example of all that was best, in his views, in 'British' culture—i.e. white, largely male and rarely counter-hegemonic (Redwood 1996).⁴

Indeed the Labour Party went further in trying to associate itself with Britpop with the Autumn 1996 edition of *New Labour New Britain* ('The Magazine for Labour Party Members') having none other than Noel Gallagher of Oasis on their front cover. In the centre-fold feature (interestingly co-written by Labour's chief election strategist Alastair Campbell) entitled 'New Labour, New Britpop', Britpop is praised for having shown that British bands have transcended the musical influences of (black) America and have found their own distinctive voice. In an insightful analysis of this article and the wider implications of New Labour's desire to attach itself with 'Britpopism' Jeremy Gilbert states:

Let's not be coy. The implications are clear. Britpop is being *praised* in this article for supplanting Black American music with White British sounds. This process is presented as in both cases being deeply connected with the welcome onset of a period of Labour government. The story being told is this: Black American dance music dominates British youth culture; Authentic Native White guitar pop supplants it at the same time as a Labour government is elected; this constitutes a moment of national renewal. So in our case, Britpop = Blairism = the triumph of native white culture over mid-Atlantic Black culture.
(Gilbert 1997:2)

As both Reynolds and Gilbert highlight, the promotion of Britpop serves to reinvent a racially exclusive version of British cultural history, both ignoring, or down-playing, the musical debts to black culture of British pop music from the late 1950s onwards and denying the cultural diversity of contemporary Britain—it was not Jungle music that Redwood applauded but Britpop, largely white boys having fun.

Thus what we see here is an attempt to promote a fixed, closed and racially homogenous sense of national cultural identity that actively excludes black representations from the national imaginary. This form of cultural exclusion is not just manifest within popular culture. *The Sunday Times*, on the eve of the European football tournament, heralded a new movement in British arts signalling the 'rebirth' of British cultural identity (see *The Sunday Times*, 'Rebirth of a nation', 19 May 1996). *The Sunday Times* proudly exclaimed, 'Yes, we got it. We had it for some time, but now people are

taking notice. We have the makings of a cultural renaissance, based on a new generation of young talent that is being recognised both nationally and internationally.’ Significantly, the curious list of creative artists who were supposedly reshaping notions of ‘Britishness’ were all white, ranging from Britpopers the Gallagher brothers and Damon Albarn, through artists Damien Hirst, Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet to Sir Simon Rattle. No mention was made of Jungle as constituting a new British musical form, or the truly innovative creations of artists like Diran Adebayo, Meera Syal, Isaac Julien, Sonia Boyce, Grooverider or Talvin Singh, to name but a few.

New Lads, new racism

It is against this cultural backdrop that we can best understand the recent emergence of the so-called ‘New Lad’.⁵ What is often missing from the discussions about this phenomenon, if it deserves that title at all, is that the expression of New Laddism was, and is, essentially about trying to redefine the limits of white English masculinity even though it is rarely labelled as such. What is interesting is the way in which the New Lad phenomenon has come to signify a supposedly post-feminist, non-racist white English masculinity that is somehow already ‘politically correct’, and therefore does not have to be. Its cheeky sexist and coded-racist remarks are (in true postmodern fashion) ironic; they are not meant to be taken seriously, and anyone who attempts to critique what is expressed is simply dismissed as not having got the joke.

As Stephen Wagg (1995:197) has pointed out the comedy duo of Frank Skinner and David Baddiel are important signifiers in locating the recent changes and convergences within popular culture between the media, pop music and sport. Skinner and Baddiel have a long running, and seemingly popular, television show ‘Fantasy Football’ where they, quite literally, sit on a couch, drink beer, talk about football, and tell jokes about women etc., but circumvent any simple charges of this show being a typical male-only and sexist space as they also invite on guests such as comedienne Jo Brand—so how can they be sexist? In this respect they have, however much they would reject the term, become central icons of New Laddism—their diverse class backgrounds becoming largely irrelevant for this re-imagined class-less English masculinity (see Figure 6.1).

I want to focus here on one of the widely publicised ‘Fantasy Football’ comedy sketches, as it highlights the complex ways in which contemporary racisms manifest themselves, and some of the problems with the notion that ‘New Laddism’ is, essentially, a harmless manifestation of ‘boys just having fun’. The sketch that attracted most attention was one where the former Nottingham Forest footballer Jason Lee was subject to a series-long ‘joke’ that seemed to catch the (white) public’s imagination. After having earlier ridiculed Jason Lee’s footballing ability they then had a sketch whereby

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Figure 6.1 Baddiel and Skinner on the front cover of the 'New Lad' magazine *Loaded* ('For men who should know better'), on the eve of Euro 96 in a 'cheeky' pose with a model

Source: Reproduced courtesy of *Loaded* magazine.

David Baddiel ‘blackened up’ (evoking the barely-coded racist imagery of the minstrel shows), with a pineapple on his head, out of which Jason Lee’s dreadlocks were growing—the ‘joke’ being that Jason Lee’s dread’s resembled a fruit on top of his head. This joke was then carried, with increasing frequency for the rest of the series, with young children sending in drawings of Jason Lee adorned with various fruit on his head. The pineapple joke was taken up by football fans in the terraces who chanted songs about Jason Lee’s hair, and significantly transcended the normally insular world of football fandom, and entered into the public domain as both a descriptive term, and a form of ridicule, for any black person with dreadlocks tied back.

Much has been said about this but I want to briefly mention a couple of points as the episode demonstrates well the way in which contemporary racisms are often subtly coded and how such racisms will deny that their motivations are racist even as their effects are. Kobena Mercer has remarked how hairstyle has become an important part of black expressive cultures marking them out from the (white) mainstream and signalling a form of black cultural resistance to racial oppression. Hair in particular functions as a key ‘ethnic signifier’, its very malleability making it an important and sensitive area of expression. Mercer notes:

The patterns and practices of aesthetic stylisation developed by black cultures in the West may be seen as modalities of cultural struggle *inscribed* in critical engagement with the dominant white culture and at the same time *expressive* of a neo-African approach to the pleasures of beauty at the level of everyday life.

(Mercer 1994:114)

Dreadlocks have long since come to signify the most politically assertive form of black resistance—the enunciation of ‘dread’ or ‘rasta’ acting as a form of acknowledgement and respect between black peoples. Mercer suggests that dreadlocks, at the symbolic and semiotic level, were vital in ‘marking a liberating rupture, or “epistemological break”, with the dominance of white-bias’ (1994:104). Thus, it could be argued that such hairstyles, ‘*counterpoliticized* the signifier of ethnic and racial devalorization, redefining blackness as a desirable attribute’ (1994:104). I would suggest that the specific targeting of Jason Lee’s ’locks for ridicule, the degree to which it was taken up by (white) fans and the public at large, and the length and extent to which the ‘joke’ was carried, suggests that it was far more than just another ‘joke’ that just happened to be directed at yet another black footballer. Rather it constituted a public challenge to one of the most powerfully symbolic forms of black cultural resistance to white supremacy by trying to belittle and therefore undermine such expressions.

There is not the time here for a content analysis of the wider media reaction to this episode, which grew especially when the Nottingham Forest

manager singled out Baddiel and Skinner for wrecking the confidence of Jason Lee, and described them as ‘middle-class wide boys’. I will, however, briefly mention the BBC’s cultural review show, the ‘Late Review’, presented by Mark Lawson, which debated the issue, in the run up to Euro 96, of whether such satirical criticism had overstepped the mark in this case. Interestingly, Suzanne Moore had no interest in the issue as it was football-related and thought the whole matter was therefore trivial. Jim White (at the time a journalist on the *Independent*, now with the *Guardian*) however, argued that Jason Lee had simply been too sensitive about the joke, a point that was supported by Lawson. Lawson also suggested that being able to take a joke was an inherent feature of British identity—something which Jason Lee obviously lacked. White then went as far as to say that if Jason Lee was so upset by the remarks he should have had his dreadlocks cut off, which would have then endeared him to the (white) audience.

JIM WHITE: When he was first pilloried on ‘Fantasy Football’ he should have gone into the studio the next week and shaved his hair off and he would have become a national hero.

MARK LAWSON: Yes, because the great British virtue is being able to take a joke...

JIM WHITE: He has a distinctive haircut, now he’s making a statement with that. If he’s prepared to make a statement that I am different from all the other footballers around with their shaven heads then he should be big enough to accept the flak.

Against this the poet and critic Tom Paulin suggested that the treatment of Jason Lee had been deplorable and the whole episode clearly had racist undertones:

TOM PAULIN: Jason Lee has been treated with great cruelty.... The charge of racism is a very feasible one—the *Sun* had him portrayed as having bananas growing out of his head! It doesn’t take very much to realise what that’s saying.

Unable to see the continuity between the tabloid depiction of the episode and his own analysis, Jim White replied, ‘Oh well that was the *Sun*, Baddiel and Skinner never suggested bananas’—no, only pineapples! This hardly needs much critical analysis. Jason Lee is portrayed as being outside of English working-class sporting culture because he cannot take a joke (like a man) and in some way had asked for the abuse by daring to deviate from the (white) norm of what a footballer should look like. The argument runs that he is too sensitive (and presumably has a chip on his shoulder if he cannot take a simple joke), and if he wants to fit (read ‘assimilate’) into English footballing culture all he has to do is to shave off his dreadlocks,

which are seen as being somehow alien to the culture of English football anyway.

The following season, no doubt to the delight of Lawson, White and the terraces, and due to the pressure put upon him, Jason Lee shaved off his dreadlocks. There was, of course, no evidence that this had now ‘endeared’ him to fans of English football.

Fantasy nation

During the build up to Euro 96 the distinctions between the separate cultural fields of Britpop music and football began to disappear. What Steve Redhead (1991:153) has referred to as the ‘holy trinity’, at least for young men, of fashion, pop music and football began to converge in ways unknown before. Footballers appeared on front-covers of indie music magazines, comedians became singers and appeared on *New Lad* magazines, such as *Loaded*,⁶ and pop stars were falling over themselves to be involved in celebrity football matches (Smith 1996)—pop, footie, and *New Lads* had finally fused into one indistinguishable cultural form in order to promote English nationalism (see Figure 6.2).

Given the climate, it was hardly surprising then when the English FA announced, no doubt to the approval of Blair and Redwood, that Skinner and Baddiel had been chosen to write the official England song for Euro 96, together with Ian Broudie of the Lightning Seeds, a Britpop group! The song itself was entitled ‘Three Lions’ referring to the England team’s emblem, though it was the chorus’s deceptively catchy hook, ‘football’s coming home’, that most people came to know the song by.

The basic theme of the song is an attempt to connect English football’s finest moment in 1966, when England won its, to date, only major football championship, the World Cup, to the present. The opening lines, which on the record are said over the voice of a football commentator dismissing England’s chances, are meant to be a rebuff to those who would put England’s chances down—‘they just know, they’re so sure/that England’s going to throw it away’—which is then met with the assertion that this time it could be different if the memory of 1966 could be invoked again. The intervening thirty years are described as ‘thirty years of hurt’ when jokes about England’s footballing inadequacies were too much to bear, but now is a chance to reclaim those glorious moments.

It’s coming home, it’s coming home,
It’s coming,
Football’s coming home.

Everyone seems to know the score,
They’ve seen it all before,



Figure 6.2 The cultural fusion is complete as Baddiel and Skinner join the England striker Teddy Sheringham and the lead singer of the Lightning Seeds, Ian Broudie, on the front cover of the indie music magazine *New Musical Express* before Euro 96

Source: Reproduced courtesy of *New Musical Express*, IPC Magazines.

They just know, they're so sure
That England's going to throw it away,
Going to blow it away,
But I know they can play,
Cos I remember.

Three Lions on a shirt,
Jules Rimet still gleaming,
Thirty years of hurt,
Never stopped me dreaming.

So many jokes, so many sneers,
But all those oh so nears wear you down through the years,
But I still see that tackle by Moore,
And when Lineker scored,
Bobby belting the ball,
And Nobby dancing.

I know that was then but it could be again.

It's coming home, it's coming home
It's coming,
Football's coming home (Repeat)

(‘Three Lions’, music by Ian Broudie,
lyrics by Frank Skinner and David Baddiel
© 1996 Chrysalis Music Ltd. Used by permission.)

In interviews at the time the song's writers denied that the song was overtly nationalistic and argued that it was merely meant to be a reply to 'people who knock England'. But whilst Baddiel and Skinner would no doubt distance themselves from any associations with the extreme right, such views do sit uncomfortably close to the constant cry of the right which bemoans the fact that 'British history' is not taught in schools anymore and that English identity is being drowned under a flood of other cultures. It was, after all, the ex-Conservative MP Michael Portillo who talked about 'one of the greatest threats that has ever confronted the British nation', namely, 'the New British Disease—the self-destructive sickness of national cynicism' (1994:30). This line of thinking argues that it is the trendy 'politically correct' (never defined of course) and the influx of 'foreign cultures' which are, apparently, the source for Britain's social decline and crisis of identity. Prescriptions to reverse this situation range from educationalists arguing for a reassertion of a stronger British identity based on the 'majority culture' to 'revisionist historians' arguing for the merits of Britain's colonial record, and in some cases even calling for a new wave of British imperialism, to some mainstream right-wing commentators actually arguing for the repatriation of blacks.⁷

The song's repeated use of the chorus 'football's coming home' fits neatly into this wider political discourse and reinforces the ethnocentric notion that football is returning to its rightful place, back into the national psyche of England. The song's chorus became the tournament's theme, virtually usurping the national anthem, and stayed in the top ten throughout most of the summer—seemingly striking a chord with more than just the football watching population. Mirroring the discourse of British colonialism, 'football's coming home' works by seeing England 'educating' the world through sport. Unfortunately for this narrative, England lost its way, and its world position, but now, after 'thirty years of hurt', it is coming back to its rightful place, back home, where football belongs.

The ethnocentric arrogance of these accounts can be traced back to 1904 when FIFA was set up without English support because foreigners could not be involved in jointly running what was thought to be, by rights, an English game (Tomlinson 1986). And, of course, no England team took part in the World Cup finals until 1950, when they were eliminated by the USA, as the tournament was seen as an infringement of English sovereignty over the game. Indeed, suspicion of foreign footballing sides was such that English sides, playing in Europe between the wars, often against the wishes of the Football League, would take their own balls with them to prevent ball-tampering by foreign teams (Andrews 1996). 'Football's coming home' is, then, essentially about trying to reconstruct an imperial Britain, with the assumption that, no matter what others may say about football being a world game, England somehow has inalienable rights to the game on the spurious basis that its codification originated in England a hundred years ago, and therefore football is essentially *our game*.

As Dyer (1993) has argued, representation is not merely about aesthetics but is often deeply implicated in producing and reproducing social relations and inequalities—that is images are inherently political. The music video for 'Three Lions' itself proved instructive in showing which 'eleven people' were deemed English enough to represent the national community. The video, following the format of the recorded song, opens with Baddiel and Skinner at home, watching previous England games on television, listening to the commentator deriding England's chances, and then cuts to the two of them, and Ian Broudie, dreaming nostalgically of previous great moments from English footballing history. The boys are then seen watching football on the TV in a pub, surrounded by other 'lads', cheering on England, as stills of England players past are flashed across the screen, before being magically transported to join members of England's current squad, signifying the link between the fans and the players. Yet from watching the video it is amazing how black faces, be they on the pitch or off, be they supporters in the pub or the children shown emulating their heroes, are *completely* absent. The current England players chosen to reconstruct those 'golden moments' of English footballing history are all white: Robbie Fowler takes the place of

Gary Lineker, Steve Stone of Nobby Stiles, Stuart Pearce of Bobby Moore, and Teddy Sheringham of Bobby Charlton, almost as if ensuring the white male continuity of footballing glories. The nostalgic national community being (re)presented in the video is definitely ‘homogenous in its whiteness’—and it should be added, almost entirely male.⁸ Indeed, the only black faces that do, momentarily, appear in the video—Pelé and Jairzinho—are shown only to be thwarted by Gordon Banks and Bobby Moore.

If ever there was a sport which represents, to some degree, Britain’s multicultural history, football is it. The first black professional was Arthur Wharton who turned professional over a century ago in 1889, and there was a number of black players who played for various British clubs, at differing levels, during the inter-war years and immediately afterwards, mainly from the Caribbean but with a few from Asia and Africa as well (Cashmore 1982; Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research). Black players have played for England since the late 1970s, there has been a black England captain (Paul Ince), and it is now not unheard of to find some professional clubs, such as Leeds during the 1996–7 season, starting with more black players than white. At the recreational level too, football is the most popular team sport with Asian and black youngsters. Yet this entire history, which is inherently part of *the* wider history of English football, was nowhere invoked in the video, with even the current reality distorted so as to deny the existence of even a contemporary black presence in England.

1966 and all that

The notion of a ‘return to 1966’ reached ecstatic heights during Euro 96 as the angst of ‘thirty years of hurt’, as Baddiel and Skinner termed it, came pouring out. The ‘myth of 1966’, with its main elements being ‘those of nostalgic nationalism, an unequivocal masculinity and a submerged reference to class’ (Cricher 1994:86), was replayed for all it was worth. This ‘myth’ is neatly captured in Dave Hill’s (1996) book *England’s Glory (1966 and all that)*. The sleeve cover informs us that, ‘The 1966 World Cup is still celebrated as a time of unassailable national glory. The image of glamorous cockney captain Bobby Moore holding the trophy aloft remains strikingly recognisable to millions. The contribution of Bobby Charlton is remembered as demonstrating English football at its most pure and free, uncontaminated by dishonesty and deceit.’ It is interesting, and significant, how notions of purity and contamination (which have a biological resonance that invokes racial meanings) only come into play during the 1970s, the same time as we witness the first significant increases in black professional players; a period which now gets recast as a time of dishonesty and deceit, compared to the pure and innocent times of the 1960s, epitomised, of course, by the blond Bobby Moore.

However, this longing for a return to past national greatness transcended more than just a desire to reclaim past sporting glories. There was a deliberate

attempt to link the wider cultural and political context of the 1960s to the current situation. Thus part of the 1960s was recast (even by right-wing politicians unable to resist paddling in the wave of nostalgic sporting glory from that year) as a lost golden era linking, sometimes quite literally, the music, sport and political climate of the 1960s to the 1990s (see Figure 6.3). However, the theme of football coming home became coded as arguing for a particular view of Britain in the 1960s, and British economic and political confidence, returning home too.⁹

However, what was left out of these ‘back to 1966’ narratives was the position of Asian and black people in Britain. As the Political and Economic Planning Report, published a year after England’s greatest sporting moment (as some have hailed it) showed, black Britons faced unparalleled levels of racial prejudice, discrimination and violence (Daniels 1968). This was the period when the Conservative MP Peter Griffiths could openly campaign using the slogan, ‘If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour’, and still win, and of course the era of Powellism. If this is the Britain which many commentators want to rekindle it is not surprising that so many black people had more than a little apprehension about what exactly was supposed to be returning. ‘1966 and all that’ for many is characterised not as a period of unabashed national glory and confidence but rather as a period painfully marked by struggles for recognition against a backdrop of increased (white) public persecution, both in terms of discriminatory immigration laws (Solomos 1993) and acts of racial violence (Whitte 1996).

England reached nationalistic fervour during the 1996 championships and English nationalism, much to the delight of the right, and many on the left, reared its head again, but this time it was supposedly an inclusive, non-xenophobic, sense of Englishness. However, the reality gave a lie to the propaganda. The *Daily Mirror* half apologised for its use of Second World War imagery when England played Germany and in true fashion said their images had only been a joke anyway. The reaction generally was that the *Daily Mirror* had gone too far and was out of step with the rest of the tournament’s media coverage. But the images, and associated nationalistic rhetoric, of England and her competitors used by many sections of the media were remarkably similar to the *Daily Mirror*’s deliberate use of war time imagery and national stereotyping (Garland and Rowe 1996; Whannel 1998; Blain and O’Donnell 1998). The images and representations that dominated the television screens, street posters and even commemorative stamps during the tournament barely acknowledged the presence of black people in Britain, or were able to come up with a forward-looking notion of what English identity might be like without recourse to war-time imagery. For example, ITV’s tournament coverage used the strains of ‘Jerusalem’ over shot with the white cliffs of Dover which symbolised more Britain’s war time efforts to keep out foreign invaders from our sceptred shores than the idea that England was welcoming and staging an international football tournament.

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Figure 6.3 The Sunday Times Magazine. Action Replay: The Beatles and Oasis, Charlton and Gascoigne, Wilson and Blair—are the Sixties back?

Source: Reproduced courtesy of *The Sunday Times Magazine* and Allsport.

Interestingly, the images used by ITV, and others, were embarrassingly similar to those used by the British National Party during their election broadcast in the run-up to the 1997 British election. The only difference was that when the BNP's broadcast switched from the very same white cliffs it represented the decline of Britain by using images of black people walking

in the streets of London whereas ITV portrayed an England of footballers complete in their whiteness. Gilroy (1997) has drawn attention to the importance and power of mass-mediated spectacles to nationalistic projects, and his analysis applies as forcefully to the BNP's attempts to re-present the nation as it does to the official images of Euro 96:

The ultra-nationalist and fascist movements of the twentieth century have developed elaborate technological resources in order to generate spectacles of identity, capable of unifying and co-ordinating an inevitable and untidy diversity into an ideal and unnatural symmetry. This synthetic, manufactured version of national or ethnic identity looks most seductive where all difference has been banished or erased.
(Gilroy 1997:305–6)

It is easy to see through the far-right's attempts to construct a racially pure, and ethnically homogenous, sense of England as their manufactured versions of national identity are usually so crude. Yet I would argue that the ideological work of the dominant Euro 96 images produced an effect of cultural and racial exclusion from the constructed national community that was inadvertently more powerful than anything the BNP could have achieved.

Oh what a success?

What was most worrying during this display of English nationalism was the absence of any critical reflection on the part of most commentators. The desire to present the championship as a success seemed to negate dispassionate appraisals of the games themselves, the tournaments organisation and their wider implications, for fear of being labelled a 'traitor', or worse, to the English cause, especially when it emerged that England were bidding for the 2006 World Cup.¹⁰

The BBC's 'When Football Came Home' provided an excellent example of the way the tournament was hailed as an unequivocal success, both on and off the pitch, with embarrassing incidents like the tabloid's xenophobic coverage put down to exceptional over-exuberance. The rioting that took place around central London, and other parts of the country, after England's loss to Germany, and the serious attacks on anyone who was not English and white went largely unreported in the mainstream press and where it was covered it was given minimal space so as not to distract from the 'overall success'. The message seemed to be that a few foreigners and/or blacks fighting for their lives after being attacked by 'England supporters' was not enough for any serious questions to be raised.¹¹

Interestingly, it was another BBC programme, 'Soho Stories', shown on BBC2, which neatly exposed the cosy narrative of the success of Euro 96. Shot, by coincidence, at the same time as the championships it showed

terrified people trying to escape rampaging ‘England supporters’ as they wrecked London’s West End and fought with the police, singing loudly as they did so, ‘football’s coming home...’. The fact that the majority of the black population living in England had either a large degree of ambivalence towards England or openly supported ‘anyone but England’ underscores the points being made that the form of national identity produced failed to be inclusive and actually alienated large sections of the nation.¹²

The extent to which the ‘football’s coming home’ discourse was a deeply conservative ideology was further shown when, after the tournament, both sides of the mainstream political spectrum, fighting desperately over the so-called ‘middle-ground’, tried to associate themselves with the coming home theme. Tony Blair, in his final conference speech before the 1997 General Election, argued that ‘Labour was coming home, after seventeen years of hurt...’ (October 1996). A few weeks later at Prime Minister’s Question Time (12 November 1996), in response to an attack by Blair, John Major, replied, not quite grasping the logic of the metaphor, that in fact it was the Conservatives who would be ‘coming home’ at the next election.¹³

Conclusion

It would be tempting to think that the coded racist imagery and messages of Euro 96 could now be put behind us as we attempt to construct a new notion of English identity that is not predicated on either subsuming itself within a British identity, which inevitably means excluding the voices of the other nations within the British Isles, or basing itself on war-time imagery. The need to redefine an inclusive and forward-looking national identity is as urgent as ever for *all* of England’s, and Britain’s, residents. Here I would concur with Gilroy in arguing that such critiques, as I have tried to advance here, should not be read as suggesting the necessity for:

the abandonment of any idea of Englishness or Britishness. We are all, no doubt, fond of things which appear unique to our national culture.... What must be sacrificed is the language of British nationalism which is stained with the memory of imperial greatness. What must be challenged is the way that these apparently unique customs and practices are understood as expressions of a pure and homogenous nationality.

(Gilroy 1987:69)

However, the chances of this happening do not look good. For one, as has been suggested, there has been precious little *critical* analysis of Euro 96, even from normally astute and perceptive commentators, beyond proclaiming it as the greatest sporting tournament ever staged anywhere in the world. The arguments that followed the tournament between the football

associations of Germany and England over who was to stage the 2006 World Cup only serve to reinforce this pessimistic reading. The nationalistic arrogance of the press in assuming that England automatically had a right to stage the finals after the Euro 96 ‘success’ was only matched by the Eurocentrism of assuming that it was simply a matter of deciding *which* European country should have the finals—forgetting, of course, that this was the World Cup and that other countries/continents, such as South Africa, might have a greater claim! However, should the English FA somehow manage to secure the finals, which looks increasingly unlikely, we can only hope that the cultural identity projected and the messages produced are radically different to what Euro 96 had to offer. For many the thought of having to endure listening to the national mourning of *forty years* of hurt would be too much to bear.

Notes

- 1 My use of the signification of sport in this chapter is slightly loose as there is not the space here to analyse the complex semiotic relationship between sport and society, and the degree to which sport stands as a mirror, extension, substitute or parody of society—an interesting analysis of these questions can be found in Blain and O’Donnell (1998), see also Krawczyk (1996).
- 2 In 1990 the former Conservative MP Norman Tebbit argued that Asians and blacks who continued to support the cricket nations from where they had migrated were disloyal British subjects and proposed that a test of their citizenship should be whether they supported England in Test matches—for a brilliant analysis of the ‘Tebbit test’ and cultural racism in cricket see Marqusee (1994). The author of the *Wisden Cricket Monthly* article, Robert Henderson, later argued that the numbers of blacks playing for England should be kept to a minimum so as to avoid the problems which would inevitably arise due to the incompatibility of different ‘racial cultures’: ‘If you’ve got, say, three blacks and eight whites in an England side you’re going to be getting two basic groups. If you have one black and ten whites it probably doesn’t matter, but I think if you get more than one, certainly if you get three, you’re going to get two separate cliques’ (Marqusee 1996). The absurd essentialist racism of such arguments is a common feature of ‘cultural racism’ which posits the inherent incompatibility of black and English cultural identities
- 3 Let me make clear here that I am not, necessarily, suggesting that Jungle is *better* than Britpop, ‘merely’ that it is more culturally significant—I am thus side-stepping somewhat the more vexed question that cultural studies is accused of avoiding, i.e. that of cultural *value*.
- 4 One letter to Redwood’s article, which appeared in the *Guardian*, replied: ‘John Redwood’s lauding of Britpop as reflecting the vitality and distinctiveness of British (or English?) cultural identity is at best naïve, at worst pernicious. The likes of Blur and Oasis do not advance an expansive and contemporary notion of cultural identity. Britpop is, for the most part, retrospective, appealing to a by-gone age of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Small Faces. One suspects that this is exactly its appeal to Redwood, for whom the village cricket green and pretty brick buildings encapsulate what was and continues to be central to our identity as a nation. This rather simple minded view of British

- culture has little bearing on contemporary realities' (*Guardian*, Letters, 21 March 1996, p. 28)—see also Jonathan King's dismissal of Britpop on much the same grounds (King 1997).
- 5 'New Lads' were supposed to be a reaction against the 1980s creation of the caring, sharing and socially reformed man—the so-called 'New Man' who fully respected the rights of women to be his equal, and even superior, and did not mind adopting previously considered 'feminine' roles such as child-rearing and house-keeping (it should be pointed out that very few people actually saw a 'New Man' before he became extinct). The New Lad then was a partial reversion back to the traditional 'laddish' masculinity of old, although the *New Lad* was now supposed to have accepted the basic claims of feminism and so any behaviour, gestures or actions that appeared to be sexist were now deliberately ironic and not meant to be taken literally.
 - 6 Recent years has seen a phenomenal increase in the number and volume of magazines aimed primarily at 'young men'/New Lads from 'general interest magazines' such as *Loaded* to a number of new football and sport magazines, to 'health and fitness' magazines (Cosgrove 1995; White 1995). Despite the claims made by the publishers, most of the men's magazines stick to a format of sport, usually football, fashion and women, preferably naked. *Loaded* is often accused of having shifted the content of the 'serious' men's style magazines 'downwards' to the extent that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish such magazines from so-called 'girlie magazines' (i.e. soft porn publications). As Katherine Viner (1997:4) observed in the *Guardian*, 'Oh yes, we're all post-feminist now. So of course it would be ridiculous to be offended by the latest spread-leg cover of *Loaded*. Or this month's nude on *GQ*. Or the femme in the tiny bikini on the launch issue of *XL*. Or the soap star in her lingerie on *FHM*.... It's all to do with nineties irony, we know that. It's not sexism by the back door, it's not porn dressed up as general interest, it's not men feeling threatened and looking at pictures of bare women to make themselves feel powerful, it's just *ironic* fun. Don't forget!'
 - 7 The government's chief curriculum advisor, Nick Tate, has repeatedly called for the promotion of 'British culture' in schools in order to foster a greater sense of British identity amongst what he has termed the 'majority culture'. Underlying his argument is the suggestion, that 'non-white' cultures are undermining traditional British values and traditions—see 'TEACH THEM TO BE BRITISH: School chief calls for children to have sense of national identity' *Daily Mail*, 18 August 1995, p. 1, and also 'Respect is lost for heroes of British history', *The Sunday Times*, 17 September 1995, p.1. Numerous articles have argued that British imperialism was essentially benevolent (for example see R. James 'Now that the sun has gone down', in *The Times*, 3 June 1995), and more recently there have been calls for a second-wave of British imperialism—for example see B. Fenton 'Is it time for Africa plc?', in the *Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 1996, p. 7. and N. Stone 'Why the Empire must strike back', in the *Observer*, 18 August 1996, p. 22. The right-wing commentator Paul Johnson has consistently called for black repatriation in a number of mainstream publications as 'the cultural gap between blacks and the other races of western democracy is too great to make assimilation likely' (1995:20)—see for example 'The logical end of black racism is a return to Africa', in *The Spectator*, 30 December 1995, p. 20.
 - 8 The video is a good example of the way in which whiteness becomes normalised and therefore 'disappears'—it has an 'everything and nothing' quality, as Dyer puts it (1993:142), see also Dyer (1997). Thus, the effect of the video is that

- Englishness *becomes* whiteness, the correlate being that blackness and Englishness are then produced as mutually exclusive categories.
- 9 Gilbert (1997:2) suggests that the 1960s is also an important period within New Lad and Britpop culture: 'It's no accident that 1966 is the moment which Britpop and much of "New Lad" culture looks back on as [a] Golden age. The era of Alfie and the dolly bird, of silent wide-eyed girls on the back of bikes and scooters, is remembered with an unproblematic affection by the readers of *Loaded* and *Melody Maker* alike. It's not just that England won the World Cup; the moment immediately before Women's Liberation, the black civil rights' movement and Gay Pride shook the self-confidence of normative white male heterosexuality is an obvious point of reference for this group who no longer occupy quite the privileged place they once did. The anxiety being suffered by a generation of young men no longer sure of their place in the scheme of things is well documented and *Loaded* and Oasis are symptomatic of this malaise.... If Britpop makes concessions to liberal feminism in allowing a couple of woman-fronted bands to join its second or third ranks, it's only on condition that singers like Justine Frishmann and Louise Wiener adopt an identity forged from an almost impossibly unthreatening alloy of sex-appeal and androgyny.'
 - 10 The anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* provided a notable exception when its front cover provocatively asked 'Football's Coming Home: To what?' and argued that the footballing authorities, and others, had missed a great opportunity to promote a different version of the tournament and football fandom within the 'increasingly nationalistic and xenophobic political climate' (1996:2). See also Mark Perryman who, in the build up to Euro 96, similarly argued that although there had been significant, and welcome, changes in football fandom in recent years much of this had failed to be reflected in the dominant images of Euro 96: 'Euro 96, in its marketing and presentation, goes with the grain of petty-minded Englishness, rather than celebrating England's coming of age as part of Europe. The marketing slogan says it all: "Football Comes Home". Let's reassert all that history, those faroff days when we invented every game known to mankind, then taught Johnny Foreigner how to play it. The banners draped over all eight host-cities portray the game as a solely English product, and the portraits used pass off our sport's history as a white thing too' (1996:24). For a rare balanced assessment of the footballing side of Euro 96 see McIlvanney (1996).
 - 11 Garland and Rowe (1996:1) report that following England's defeat by Germany in the semi-finals 'German-made cars were attacked and other property identified as German was targeted. It was reported that a Russian man was seriously assaulted by an English crowd who, not minded to distinguish between foreigners, mistook him for a German.' Other less well-reported incidents concerned an attack in the East End of London on two Asian brothers, an Asian woman and a young black man by 'football supporters' following the England-Switzerland match on 9 June which resulted in the two brothers being hospitalised with serious injuries (see London Update Monitoring Racism in London, 'Euro 96 violence', Institute of Race Relations, No. 2, Summer 1996).
 - 12 A survey by the black newspaper, *The Voice*, found that the majority of black British football supporters did not support either England or Scotland as they felt uneasy with the form of nationalism expressed during the tournament which was seen as largely xenophobic—Garner (1996), see also Sewell (1996).
 - 13 To paraphrase Gilroy (1987:57), I am not suggesting that the differences between New Labour and Conservative languages of nation and patriotism are insignificant but rather that these languages, particularly in relation to the cultural discourses outlined in this chapter, significantly overlap. Indeed, with Labours

use of the 'British bulldog' during the 1997 general election campaign it could be argued that there is now a disturbing degree of overlap with the far-right too.

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