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Towards Understanding: Antisemitism and the Contested Uses and Meanings of ‘Yid’ in English Football

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(accepted by Ethnic and Racial Studies)

Abstract

This article addresses an omission in the currently brief body of work on antisemitism in football and contributes to and advances wider sociological debates in the sub-disciplines of race and ethnicity, religion, linguistics and sport. The article examines antisemitic discourse in English football and in doing so, explains the different uses and meanings of ‘Yid’ in the vernacular culture of fans. While many conceive of ‘Yid’ as an ethnic epithet, fans of Tottenham Hotspur – Gentiles and Jews – have appropriated and embraced the term, using it to deflect the antisemitic abuse they are targeted with due to their ‘Jewish identity’. The study maps the contested uses of ‘Yid’ on a continuum to explain and demarcate between the nuanced forms of antisemitism in football. It makes central the cultural context in which ‘Yid’ is used, together with the intent underpinning its use, since epithets and slurs are not simply determined by their lexical form.

While racism in sport, particularly football, has been well researched over the last two decades (Carrington 2012), a specific focus upon antisemitism within football has been a relatively neglected area of academic enquiry. Yet there have been some high profile examples of antisemitism in English football – and elsewhere in Europe – in recent years, on and off pitch. This includes several antisemitic incidents at the institutional

and occupational levels of English professional football involving club owners, coaches and players.

Highlighting this, Wigan Athletic's chairman Dave Whelan was fined and temporarily banned from 'football-related activity' by the sport's national governing body, The Football Association, for claiming 'Jews chase money more than everyone else' in a newspaper interview (Conn 2014). Whelan was defending his appointment of new coach, Malky Mackay, who was dismissed by his previous club for using similar Jewish stereotypes in leaked SMS messages. The Football Association, controversially, opted not to discipline Mackay because the communications were 'sent with a legitimate expectation of privacy'. French footballer Nikolas Anelka received a fine and five match ban for performing a 'quenelle' (reversed Nazi salute) after scoring in the English Premier League. The gesture is associated with Anelka's friend, the black French comedian, Dieudonne M'bala M'bala, an anti-Zionist activist with convictions for inciting racial hatred against Jews. An image of Anelka's infamous salute featured on the cover of the [Jewish] Community Security Trust's (2013) *Antisemitic Discourse in Britain* report, indicating its significance.

This article, however, focuses on the more regular occurrence of antisemitism within the vernacular culture of English football *fans* (Back, Crabbe and Solomos 2001). Using empirical evidence collected through media sources and observational data, the aims are three-fold: 1) to identify the nature of antisemitic discourse in English football's fan culture; 2) to explain the contested uses and meanings of 'Yid', the slang Jewish ethnonym, within this culturally specific context; 3) to advance a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of antisemitism in English football, which may lead to more reasoned and relevant policies and campaigns to combat it.

The article is situated within the context of some key empirical and theoretical issues that provide a starting point for this focus upon antisemitism in football. Back et al. (2001) presented the first systematic and empirically-grounded account of racism and the changing role of racial and ethnic identity within football. In establishing a sense of how the processes of racialization work within the broader structure of football, Back et al. (2001) identified six forms of racial abuse in the vernacular culture of fans. While their seminal work remains useful, it is becoming a little dated given new legislation and new media. Furthermore, their primary focus on racism directed towards black players and fans is not always pertinent to antisemitism. Pointedly, they do not fully recognise the changing nature of language or the complexity and contextual specificity of linguistic discourse. In this connection, the article foregrounds and explains the contested uses and meanings of the controversial word ‘Yid’ in English football fan culture.

While many people in Britain today conceive ‘Yid’ to be an ethnic epithet and ‘race hate’ word (Baddiel 2013; Chakraborti and Garland 2009) – similar to ‘Kike’, ‘Ikey’ or ‘Hebe’, which are more common in North America – it is a term that has taken on differing subcultural meanings within the context of English football. This is because fans of Premier League club, Tottenham Hotspur – both Gentiles *and* Jews – have for some forty years appropriated and paradoxically used this taboo term as one of endearment in songs and chants and use the sobriquet ‘Yid Army’ in an attempt to actually *deflect* the routinised antisemitic abuse they receive because of their perceived identity as a ‘Jewish club’ (Poulton and Durell 2014; Williams, Dunning and Murphy 1984). Tottenham fans have regularly been subjected to opponents’ songs, chants and now social media posts that employ hostile Jewish stereotypes and in their most noxious form refer to Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust/*Shoah*, together with hissing

sounds to simulate the noise of the Nazi gas chambers (Poulton and Durell 2014; Hytner 2012; Kelso and Winter 2012). In extreme cases, Tottenham fans have been physically attacked by anti-Semite gangs when playing competitions in mainland Europe, where the problem is much worse (Mann and Cohen, 2007).

Despite sustained forms of antisemitism towards Tottenham fans, there have been various attempts to censure them for their use of ‘Yid’ as a self-referent. Many have resisted efforts to reprimand them, believing they are wrongly targeted and arguing that the antisemitism of opposition fans should be the focus of anti-racism campaigns and criminal justice system (Poulton and Durell 2014). In a survey of their season-ticket holders (*n*.11389) by Tottenham Hotspur Football Club (2014) to gauge opinion on the use of ‘Yid’, seventy-four per cent of non-Jewish respondents and seventy-three per cent of Jewish respondents were *in favour* of being allowed to use the word. This thorny issue has prompted much public debate, which renders it a highly pertinent socio-political issue for academic enquiry.

This article proposes a new continuum upon which we can map antisemitism in English fan culture to explain some of the ‘greyer’ areas and demarcate between the more nuanced forms of ‘antisemitic’ discourse. The *cultural context* in which the word ‘Yid’ is used by Tottenham fans and opposition fans is made central, together with the *intent* underpinning the usage of the term, since epithets and slurs are defined and shown to be determined by their situated context of use, not simply lexical form (Allan and Burrige 2006). The significance of the complexity and contextual specificity of linguistic discourse underlined by McCormack (2011) is applied to explain and defend the contested usage of ‘Yid’ by Tottenham fans. In doing so, this article adds substantially to the currently brief body of work on antisemitism within the context of

football, as well as wider sociological and linguistic debates on ‘racist’ discourse and semiotic meaning.

Antisemitism

Space precludes explaining the emergence and development of antisemitism and different ways of theorising the phenomenon. In brief, the socio-historical manifestations of antisemitism in Britain are complex (Holmes 1979; Lipman 1990; Kushner 2013) and antisemitism is recognised here as paradigmatic of racism in wider Europe (Goldberg 2006). It is most commonly apparent and theorised in Britain today as cultural racism, occurring on a micro rather than macro level (Meer and Noorani 2008; Klug 2012; Kushner 2013). Historically, antisemitism has included allegations of Jewish conspiracy, wealth, power, manipulation, immorality, hostility, and Holocaust denial. Echoes of these allegations, though seldom made explicitly against Jews in contemporary society – unless in the name of a radical ideology or extremist view of religion – can still be found in some mainstream political and media discourse about Israel, Zionists or ‘the Jewish lobby’. Meer (2014: 8) broadly defines antisemitism as:

... the suspicion, dislike or hatred of Jewish individuals or groups. This can be attitudinal or structural, and proceeds from a real or assumed ‘Jewishness’. It therefore reflects a racial and not just theological character (as in anti-Judaism), and can take a number of forms spanning behaviours, discourse and state politics.

Physical manifestations include verbal abuse or threats, damage and desecration to property, and violent assaults. Antisemitic discourse is language, themes or imagery that use or evoke malicious ideas about Jews and Jewish-related issues. This is found in graffiti, hate (e)mail, and social media posts. Such discourse can influence and reflect hostile attitudes to Jews, so contributing to an atmosphere in which antisemitic ‘hate crimes’ against Jews and Jewish institutions are more likely to occur.

Chakraborti and Garland (2009) report a discernible rise in the number of antisemitic hate crime incidents in the UK (and also wider Europe and North America), suggesting anti-Jewish sentiment may be embedded in the cultural fabric of many societies. This is compounded by the concurrent geo-political situation in Palestine and Gaza, which has seen the confused conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. The Community Security Trust's *Antisemitic Incidents Report* (2014) recorded 1,168 antisemitic incidents (including threats, abusive behaviour, damage and desecration, violent assaults). This was more than double the previous year and the highest annual total ever recorded by the CST, who recognise that conflicts in the Middle East serve as 'trigger events' that cause 'spikes' in antisemitic incidents in the UK.

Antisemitism within English football became heightened during the 1970s and 1980s, when far-right groups like the National Front infiltrated and recruited from football's then working-class fan-base and football-related disorder was at its most acute (Williams et al. 1984). Though the prevalence of antisemitism in English football fan culture has been significantly reduced due to wider anti-racism campaigns and introduction of football-specific legislation (Garland and Rowe 2014), it is still evident today, usually in fan chants, songs and increasingly social media. Chants and songs are central to English football's traditionally boisterous and partisan fan culture. They are ritualistically generated in response to events on the pitch and as an expression of collective identities. They are used to encourage their team, celebrate particular players, insult the opposition, or simply to entertain. Some chants/songs ridicule opposing players or fans; others are more aggressive and/or personalised. Some can be more than insulting and be racist, sectarian, sexist, or homophobic in nature. As will be explained, it is unlikely that antisemitic chants and songs in the context of contemporary English football actually reflect genuine anti-Jewish or neo-Nazi sentiments. Although having

racialised overtones, it is more probable that they are used by most participants to signify collective identity and express club rivalry and hostility, especially towards Tottenham Hotspur. While the experience of Tottenham fans is not unique in the context of racism in the UK or mainland Europe,¹ the club is used here as a specific case study to shed light on the wider phenomenon of antisemitism.

A socio-cultural history of Tottenham Hotspur: A ‘Jewish’ club?

Tottenham Hotspur Football Club (nicknamed ‘Spurs’) has a complicated, historical relationship with the Jewish faith and consequently antisemitism. This originates from Tottenham traditionally attracting Jewish fans due to its geographical location in north London, with near-by Hasidic communities, who settled there in the 1930s/1940s after they fled persecution in Europe (Clavane 2012; Holmes 1979; Lipman 1990). In Tottenham Hotspur’s (2014) survey of season-ticket holders, 9.97 per cent of respondents (*n*.11389) self-declared they were Jewish. North London neighbours and arch-rivals Arsenal Football Club also have a significant Jewish following, yet it is Tottenham that is internationally recognised as a ‘Jewish club’.

Tottenham’s ‘Jewish identity’ has been perpetuated by the club historically having Jewish players, coaches, and especially owners/directors, including the last three chairmen: Irving Scholar (1982-1991), Alan Sugar (1991-2001) and Daniel Levy (2001-present). Opposition fans often use this Jewish association as a point of reference. This has led to different uses and meanings of the word ‘Yid’. Many football fans refer to Tottenham and their fans as ‘the Yids’ in a similar way that fans of other football clubs are referred to by such monikers. For example, Arsenal are known as the ‘Gooners’. In this context, there is often no *intent* to cause offence. However, Tottenham’s ‘Jewish identity’ has also led to their fans becoming the target of routinised Jewish stereotyping and antisemitic discourse by some opposition fans. Such

racialised abuse is still in evidence today, as will be illustrated, especially from those associated with Premier League clubs, Chelsea and West Ham (Poulton and Durell 2014; Back et al., 2001). This is despite the fact that Roman Abramovich, a Russian Jew, has been owner of Chelsea since 2003 and David Gold, who is half-Jewish, is West Ham's co-owner.

In the 1970s, many Tottenham supporters began to respond to the incessant chanting from opponents of the racist epithet 'Yiddos!' Their response to this victimisation was to re-appropriate the word 'Yid' as a mark of in-group solidarity and camaraderie and to chant it back at their abusers (Poulton and Durell 2014). Gradually more Tottenham fans adopted the term. Jewish fans joined in. Efron (2006) relays the story of Tottenham fans in the early 1980s reacting to Manchester City supporters singing an adaptation of *Coming Round the Mountain*:

We'll be running round Tottenham with our pricks out!

Singing I've got foreskin, haven't you?

Fucking Jew!

A group of Jewish Tottenham fans responded by dropping their trousers, revealing their circumcised credentials. Since then, more and more Tottenham fans (both Gentiles and Jews) have embraced 'Yid' and use 'Yid Army' as a collective self-referent and badge of honour in an apparent attempt to help defuse its power as an insult through their own songs and chants (Poulton and Durell 2014). These are now a cornerstone of Tottenham's fan culture. For example, Tottenham players are heralded with choruses of 'Yiddo! Yiddo!' – whether or not they are Jewish – to celebrate a goal or good performance. Although no longer prohibited by the club inside their stadium or on official merchandise, some Tottenham fans have adopted Jewish symbols like the Star of David on flags, clothing and tattoos.

There are parallels here with the ‘reclamation’ of other ethnic, racial and gender slurs and the particularly controversial ‘nigger’/’nigga’ by sections of the black community, especially in music, dance and film (Kennedy 2002; Asim 2007). Writing in relation to the use of ‘nigger’ by racists *vis-à-vis* those from the black community, Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007: 8) observe:

[W]hen used by out-group members to address a member of a targeted group, the message recipient may interpret ethnic epithets as threatening or insulting. However, when used by an in-group member in conversation with another in-group member, the word may be viewed as a term of endearment or, in some cases, an expression of respect.

What is different in relation to Tottenham fans is that Jews – or indeed ‘pro-Jewish’ Gentiles – have never previously appropriated antisemitic epithets such as ‘Kike’ or ‘Hebe’ to describe themselves in order to subvert racism.² This points to the specificity of ‘Yid’ as having distinct ethnic and cultural meanings within the context of English football. Yet despite the origins behind this appropriation – and the sustained forms of antisemitism towards Tottenham fans – there have been a series of attempts to rebuke Tottenham fans and prohibit their use of ‘Yid’ as a self-referent (Poulton and Durell 2014).

For example, the euphemistically-titled *The Y-Word* (2011) film from *Kick It Out* (British football’s equality and inclusion campaign group) promoted a ‘zero tolerance’ policy approach to the term. *The Y Word* was developed as an attempt to tackle ‘the other racism’, antisemitism, in British football by Jewish comedian David Baddiel, following an altercation with a fellow Chelsea fan about his antisemitic language towards Tottenham (Wardrup 2011). The 2-minute campaign film features professional footballers who compare the ‘Y-word’ to the ‘N-word’ (‘Nigger’) and ‘P-word’ (‘Paki’). It includes footage of fans chanting ‘Yiddo! Yiddo!’ and singing ‘Spurs are on their way to Auschwitz’, but is unclear which club(s) they are associated with.

The film received a mixed reception in the British mainstream and Jewish media due to its content and message (Poulton and Durell 2014). It is resented by many Tottenham fans as misguided and for appearing to target them, rather than the antisemitic discourse of their opponents (ibid).

Although it backed *Kick It Out's* film, The Football Association (2013) did not engage in the ensuing 'Y-word debate' for a couple of years when it issued a statement warning fans that 'use of the term [Yid] in a public setting could amount to a criminal offence, and leave those fans liable to prosecution and potentially a lengthy Football Banning Order'.³ The national governing body proclaimed the word 'is likely to be considered offensive by the reasonable observer' and is 'inappropriate in a football setting'. Their warning was endorsed by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and London Metropolitan Police, but challenged by British Prime Minister David Cameron and Community Security Trust (Poulton and Durell 2014). Cameron pointed to the legal principle of *mens rea* arguing:

There's a difference between Spurs fans self-describing themselves as Yids and someone calling someone a Yid as an insult. You have to be motivated by hate. Hate speech should be prosecuted - but only when it's motivated by hate (Pollard 2013).

Similarly acknowledging the different meanings and motivations underpinning the use of 'Yid' within the vernacular culture of fans, the Community Security Trust stated: 'Spurs fans' use of the Y-word does not remotely compare with, nor in any way legitimise, the vile and unacceptable antisemitic abuse that is all too often heard from opposing fans' (Dysch 2013). However, the CST said that while Tottenham fans should not be prosecuted for using 'Yid', it remained 'offensive to many Jews both inside and outside the football context', concluding: 'Ultimately, ridding football of antisemitism needs to involve Spurs fans voluntarily dropping the Y-word from their songbook'.

Tottenham fans themselves responded with defiant choruses of ‘We’ll sing what we want’ audible at subsequent matches, followed by their ‘Yid Army’ chant. Public debate on the issue escalated a month later in October 2013 when three Tottenham fans were singled out, arrested and charged with a racially aggravated public order offence for chanting ‘Yids’ inside Tottenham’s stadium. However, on the eve of their criminal trial in March 2014, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) discontinued the landmark case against the Tottenham fans. Their reasons were two-fold: the standard of proof needed for conviction and the *context* in which the word was used. Chief Crown Prosecutor, Baljit Ubhey, explained the CPS’s policy U-turn:

... although the same words used in other contexts could in theory satisfy the criteria for ‘threatening, abusive or insulting’, it is unlikely that a court would find that they were in the context of the three particular cases in question (cited in Davis 2014).

The legal defence team also underlined the significance of *context* and principle of *intent* underpinning Tottenham fans’ original use of ‘Yid’ to ‘combat racist abuse aimed towards them’, pointing to how it has ‘developed into a strong identity status that brought Jewish and non-Jewish Spurs fans together in an incredible show of unity that is admired worldwide. That is what fighting racism within football should be about’ (Cooke, Gurden, Wainwright 2014). These factors underpinning Tottenham fans’ appropriation of the controversial word ‘Yid’ will be further theoretically explained after identifying how antisemitism manifests itself in English football.

Forms of antisemitism in English football fan culture

Despite a large body of work addressing racist fan behaviour in football (Back et al. 1999, 2001; Cleland 2013; Cleland and Cashmore 2014; Garland and Rowe 2001), little focused academic attention has been given to antisemitism. Back et al. (2001), Williams

et al. (1984) and Kassimeris (2008) discuss it, but only very briefly. There is no mention of antisemitism in Carrington's (2012) special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* on 'Sport Matters: Politics, Identity and Culture'; this focuses on the experiences of black and Asian ethnic minority groups. Neither does Burdsey's (2011) edited collection on 'Race, Ethnicity and Football: Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues'.

Outside of sport studies, there is scant acknowledgement of the presence, let alone nature or scale of the problem. For instance, there is no consideration in Meer's (2013) special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* on antisemitism and Islamophobia. This is curious given sport is one of the most culturally important social institutions in all developed countries and is a ubiquitous part of modern life and popular culture. This – together with the partisan complexion of football – makes the sport fertile ground for expressions of racism, including antisemitism, as evidenced by several recent high profile examples in British and European football that have made the mainstream news, not just sports media.

Back et al. (2001: 107-117) emphasise the importance of understanding racism as 'ritual' within the banal routines of football fandom and identified how it broadly takes six different forms. While the main focus of Back et al.'s (2001) research was on black and Asian experiences, their identification of these six situated and nuanced formations of racism can assist us in demonstrating how antisemitism is manifest in the vernacular culture of English football fans. However, though these formations of fan racism are helpful, they are becoming outdated. This is due to the anti-racism campaigns and criminalisation of racism in English football over the last decade (Garland and Rowe 2014), which in turn has led to changes in the nature and prevalence of racial abuse in contemporary football, as well as society more broadly. Since Back et

al.'s time of writing, a new expressive form of racist abuse is increasingly found in new media, such as Twitter and other social-networking sites (Cleland 2013; Cashmore and Cleland 2014; Farrington, Hall, Kilvington, Price and Saeed 2015; Millward 2008). Illustrating this, Liverpool FC opted to delete their 2014 Rosh Hashanah greeting to Jewish fans on their official website after it was met with antisemitic messages.

With this changing context in mind, let us critically review the contemporary currency of Back et al.'s six forms of fan racism, with specific reference to antisemitism in English football.

a) *Racist verbal abuse in stadia occurs in intermittent outbursts.*

Back et al. (2001: 107) observed that racist activity within English football stadia is not consistent and organised, explaining instead how 'racist epithets and slogans are invoked in specific contexts and serve particular functions'. Over the last decade and a half, a raft of equalities law and specific football-related legislation has 'created an environment in which the routine expression of racism in the form of chanting and abusing players and other supporters has become unacceptable' (Garland and Rowe 2014: 94). Racist abuse in football grounds has significantly reduced since the 1990s, but is still apparent: 50 per cent of football fans surveyed had witnessed racist chanting and/or abuse inside stadiums since 2010 (Cleland and Cashmore 2014: 643).

Back et al.'s (2001: 107) observations therefore remain salient: when racial abuse does occur, it is 'often, although not always, connected with high profile games or charged confrontations with rivals. It is within these intense situations that racist slogans and interventions are most likely'. This helps explain the antisemitic abuse directed towards Tottenham fans by their local London adversaries from the Premier League: Arsenal, Chelsea, and West Ham (Scott 2007; Hytner 2012). While antisemitic

discourse towards Tottenham from other clubs' fans is not unheard of, there are more regularly reported incidents at 'derby' matches, when rivalries and tensions are exacerbated. Kelso and Winter (2012) give an insight into the kind of antisemitism Tottenham fans endure:

A West Ham United season ticket holder arrested and cautioned for giving a Nazi salute at White Hart Lane [Tottenham's stadium] was banned by the east London club on Monday ... The supporter was one of two men arrested and cautioned for racially aggravated public order offences after giving the stiff-arm salute during an acrimonious 3-1 defeat to Tottenham Hotspur marred by antisemitic and abusive chanting by West Ham fans... Just four days after 10 Tottenham fans were injured, one of them seriously, when they were attacked in Rome before their Europa League tie with Lazio, the visiting fans taunted the home club about their association to the Jewish community, and the injuries inflicted in Italy. The visiting supporters were heard to chant 'Viva Lazio', 'Can we stab you every week', and, 'Adolf Hitler is coming for you'.

That these chants (and also hissing sounds) were audible, both within the stadium and from television broadcasts of the match, testifies to the fact that several hundred people participated.

b) *Racist activity in unevenly developed within the stadium.*

Back et al. (2001: 108) explain that expressions of racism are usually localised within football stadia, with particular areas where 'racist verbal abuse has been established as permissible and legitimate through informal or implicit agreement amongst fans'. Such an observation is less relevant today with regard to the UK's modern, highly securised, all-seater stadiums, which require fans to have (usually pre-purchased) allocated seats (to identify the occupant) and who are then intensely monitored by CCTV and other police surveillance. However, the observation is still applicable to football stadia abroad, particularly in Europe where notorious fans populate particular areas.

An example of this occurred during a Europa League match between Lazio and Tottenham at Rome's Stadio Olimpico in November 2012. A section of the 'home'

support in the Curva Nord, where the Lazio's traditionally far-right 'Ultras'⁵ congregate, waved Palestinian flags and a 'Free Palestine' banner, while chanting 'Juden Tottenham!' to affront Tottenham's Jewish connection through reference to the Middle East conflict. A similar incident involved a section of fans from Serbian club, Partizan Belgrade, who displayed an antisemitic banner against Tottenham in October 2014. The banner imitated the logo from the BBC comedy show *Only Fools and Horses*, with the words modified to form an offensive slogan: 'Only Jews and Pussies'.

c) *Racist verbal abuse takes a variety of expressive forms or ritual styles.*

Back et al. (2008: 108) identify a range of expressive forms and styles of racist abuse within football stadia, including: 'individual racist slurs' in response to incidents on the pitch and 'proactive racial abuse' aimed at intimidating and affecting players' performance. These are more germane to black and Asian footballers who, for example, are still occasionally subjected to 'monkey' gestures and other racialised abuse. Back et al.'s (2008: 109) observation that 'collective songs and chants [that] use racial meanings to express club identity and are combined with racist epithets producing complex racially exclusive representations of group identity' is more pertinent in relation to antisemitism. While this can occur when 'away' fans visit English cities with large Asian populations and sing 'You're just a town full of Pakis', it also helps to explain how opposition fans respond to the perception of Tottenham as a 'Jewish club', which is the principal means of demonisation.

This can manifest itself through the deliberate use of 'Yid' as an intended ethnic epithet. Sometimes more than one epithet is used to intensify the insult. For example, Scott (2007) reported West Ham fans singing 'I'd rather be a Paki than a Jew' at their

Tottenham counterparts. Illustrative of the most extreme antisemitic discourse that Tottenham fans are subjected to are songs referencing the Holocaust:

Spurs are on their way to Auschwitz! [or Belsen]

Sieg Heil!

Hitler's gonna gas 'em again!

You can't stop them, the Yids from Tottenham,

The Yids from White Hart Lane.

This is frequently accompanied with hissing noises and occasionally Nazi salutes, as previously outlined. Another song is: 'Adolf Hitler, he's coming for you!' Having been roundly condemned for very audibly singing this in November 2012 (Hytner 2012), the following season West Ham fans sang adapted lyrics: 'We're not allowed to say his name, is coming for you'. This was discernible by both those present and television audience, again indicating the numbers involved. Three West Ham fans were also arrested and cautioned for malicious communications after this match. Their Tweets included: 'I have never seen the yids leave ground so quick. Well fuck me, u thought they had turned the gas taps on'; 'Spurs losing to West Ham... another case in history where Jews go to the showers crying' and the lyrics to the 'Auschwitz' song cited above.

d) *Racism is often expressed rhetorically through humour and play.*

It is important to acknowledge that not all racist discourses are linked to extreme forms of fandom perpetrated by some hooligan or 'Ultra' groups. Back et al. (2001: 111) outline how fan racism is frequently expressed *rhetorically*, with wit, 'not always couched within abusive forms of 'hate speech' or harassment'. They argue that 'a

creative and playful dimension to the expression of racist sentiments... enables racist assertions and stereotypes to be normalised... in a legitimate way’.

Millward (2008) – writing about Islamophobia within online fan forums – illustrates how cultural prejudice often precedes a genuine religious intolerance in the context of football, with most fans objecting not to the religion itself, but rather expressing views that have become ‘normalised’ in sport and simply wanting to articulate their rivalry and hatred for opposing teams, often through ‘jokes’, ‘piss-taking’ and stereotypes. This forms part of the ‘cultural performance’ and ‘impression management’ found within football fandom (Pearson 2012). In this way, football provides a distinct arena – both inside/around the physical stadium itself, as well as a wider discursive ‘virtual’ space – that affords a degree of ‘legitimacy’ to ‘soft’ racism, yet where certain fan language and behaviours may not always necessarily *intended* as racist, though they might have this effect. Nor are they likely to be repeated outside the cultural context of football. Rather they are centrally related to the expression of footballing rivalry and taunting or ‘winding up’ opponents.

In this connection, some of the opponents’ songs and chants directed towards Tottenham fans – for example, ‘Does your Rabbi know you’re here?’ – and others that mock Jewish rituals, such as dietary practices and circumcision, or stereotypical traits like thriftiness, might be considered part of the traditional comical ‘banter’ that underpins British football culture, rather than malevolent racialised ‘othering’ with pernicious intent against Jews. Back et al. (2001: 105) highlight an ‘all too easy conflation of racism with people who possess deviant, evil, personal pathologies’; they stress: ‘it is important to position racism with very ordinary lives and develop a more nuanced idea of how racism can co-exist with respectability and the banal routines of football fandom’. As a counterpoint, Waiton (2012) – critiquing the Offensive

Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communication (Scotland) Bill (2012) to regulate sectarianism – objects to the ‘growing criminalisation of football fans’ for being ‘offensive’ in an increasing ‘age of intolerance’, whereby the framework for tolerance is actually *intolerance* of a growing list of words, terms and chants. This of course includes ‘Yid’.

e) *Racist abuse can take on ‘player-specific’ forms.*

This form of racist abuse, which overlaps with Back et al.’s third formation, is less applicable to antisemitism because – compared to other racial and ethnic minority groups – there have been few Jewish players in English professional football (Clavane 2012) and consequently far less reported incidents (Garland and Rowe 2001). While Ronny Rosenthal became something of a ‘cult hero’ for Tottenham fans and embraced as a ‘Yiddo’ (as all popular Spurs players are) – no doubt in part because of his Israeli-Jewish roots – Jewish players at other clubs have not always been so well received. Indeed, Rosenthal did not complete a transfer to Italian club Udinese after protests from anti-Semitic ‘Ultras’ (Kassmeris 2008). In England, Israeli-born footballer Tal Ben Haim was targeted with antisemitic abuse by Queens Park Rangers (QPR) fans on the club’s Facebook page, following his transfer to QPR in January 2013. One user questioned how QPR’s Muslim player, Adel Taarabt, could ‘live playing alongside a Jew?’ (Rashty 2013). Similarly, in May 2013, the then Chelsea and Israel footballer, Yossi Benayoun, revealed the antisemitic abuse directed at him by his club’s own fans was the worst he had experienced in his twenty year professional career, describing how Chelsea supporters yelled ‘Jew and other stuff that was much worse’.

f) *Verbal abuse in and around football grounds rarely escalates into physical violence.*

Back et al. (2001) noted that verbal racist abuse at football rarely escalates into physical violence. While this is still the case in England, occasionally it is more likely abroad. For example, Tottenham fans were ambushed and assaulted by an ‘Ultra’ gang, who gave Nazi salutes and shouted ‘Juden!’ in Rome, Italy (Hytner, 2012) and also in Lyon, France (Meikle and Willsher 2013), while playing in the Europa League.

Despite being a little dated when applied to contemporary English football, Back et al.’s (2001) six formations of fan racism remain useful for illustrating the how antisemitism is manifest in the vernacular culture of fans. However, their typology does not allow for the different subcultural uses and meanings of ‘Yid’ within the context of English football. For them, *all* uses of ‘Yid’ are racist. Instead, I propose a new conceptually-driven continuum that acknowledges the changing nature of language and importance of *cultural context*, as a more comprehensive analytical and explanatory framework to help entangle and map antisemitism in football.

Uses and meanings of ‘Yid’ in English football

Steeped in a history of persecution, ‘Yid’ (literally meaning ‘Jew’) emerged etymologically from the Eastern European language, Yiddish, which mixed German, Polish and Russian with Hebrew into a vernacular associated with Ashkenazi Judaism. In Yiddish, ‘Yid’ has no pejorative connotation and is a term of endearment, salutation and familiarity within Jewish communities. However, when the Nazis started to abbreviate Yiddish speakers to ‘Yids’, the word took on new meanings and became a derogatory epithet employed by anti-Semites. It was used during the 1930s by Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists, who had a strong following in London’s East End. Consequently, many people in Britain today believe ‘Yid’ to be a ‘race hate’ word for Jews (Baddiel 2013; Chakraborti and Garland 2009).

Hughes (2006: 146) defines ethnic insults as ‘the most obvious linguistic manifestation of xenophobia and prejudice against out-groups. They are usually based on malicious, ironic, or humorous distortions of the target group’s identity or “otherness”’. However, the uses and meanings of ‘Yid’ within the vernacular culture of English football fans are much more complex because the word is *not* always used as an insult. Rather, it is used by Tottenham fans as a term of endearment. When seeking to understand how particular words are used, it is vital to recognise the semantics and pragmatics of the potentially slurring term and that the meanings of words can and do change. Back et al.’s (2001) suggestion that Tottenham fans’ embrace and celebration of this ethnic minority label is ‘a playful reaction to opposition taunts’ is too simplistic.

Efron (2006: 237) explains the ‘multiplicity of meanings, intents, goals and rituals associated with the overall phenomenon’ of using ‘Yid’ in English football fandom through Eco’s (1976) semiotic concept of ‘rhetorical code-switching’, whereby the values associated with a word are subverted and alternated by the insider-outsider groups. Similarly, subversion of the term ‘Yid’ by Tottenham fans can be understood as a form of ‘linguistic reclamation’; that is, ‘the appropriation of a pejorative epithet by its target(s)’ (Brontsema 2004: 1). Rejecting the simple binary of support or opposition for linguistic reclamation, Brontsema (2004: 15) argues that there are at least three identifiable goals of such reclamation: 1) *value reversal* (to transform the negative value into a positive one); 2) *neutralization* (to nullify its force); 3) *stigma exploitation* (whereby the stigma is purposefully retained as a confrontational or revolutionary call).

Whilst these objectives are helpful in explaining why Tottenham fans may have appropriated the word ‘Yid’, the changing nature and multiplicity of language – made central by McCormack (2011) with regard to homosexually-themed discourse – is also valuable. He contends that ‘gay’ has multiple meanings in contemporary society,

including: sexual identity; being *passé* or rubbish; a homophobic slur. Importantly for our purposes, McCormack (2011) problematises linguistic reclamation as dependent upon intent *and* reception and argues that *cultural context* is central to understanding these meanings. His premise is that because the *effects* of homosexually-themed language *vary* in their intensity and damage, it is necessary to distinguish them: ‘the intent to wound is a determining factor in the effect of discourse’ (McCormack, 2011: 922).

Figure 1 offers an adaptation of McCormack’s model for comprehending homosexually-themed language to aid understanding of the different uses of ‘Yid’ and map them on a continuum to explain and further distinguish between nuanced forms of ‘antisemitic’ discourse amongst football fans. The model differentiates between different uses of ‘Yid’ by in-group and out-group members, placing an emphasis on the *intent* underpinning its usage and highlighting the specific cultural context of Tottenham Hotspur. When Tottenham fans refer to themselves or their team/players as ‘Yids’/‘Yiddos’, there are four potential intended meanings behind their language:

1. to transform the negative connotation of ‘Yid’ into a positive (i.e. *value reversal*);
2. to expunge its injurious meaning and so render it ineffective (i.e. *neutralization*);
3. to highlight the stigma through a rebellious call to arms (i.e. *stigma exploitation*).

Each of these is underpinned by *positive* intent, as form of linguistic reclamation, to mark identification, solidarity and camaraderie with the in-group. This arguably has a positive social effect in response to antisemitic abusers. Or, 4) they may use ‘Yid’ because a generational shift over the last forty years has rendered the word simply synonymous with Tottenham, with no Jewish (or therefore antisemitic) connotation, so no intent either way. This was implicitly acknowledged by the Crown Prosecution

Service when they dropped the charges against three Tottenham fans for a racially aggravated public order offence (Davis 2014; Cooke et al. 2014).

Opposition fans (out-group members) use ‘Yid’ in three nuanced and situated ways. First, ‘Yid’ can be innocently used in the cultural context of football to refer to Tottenham fans, in the same way other clubs/fans have nicknames; it is what many Tottenham fans call themselves after all. In this context, there is no intent to offend. Secondly, the intended meaning behind the usage can change depending on intonation and the use of intensifiers, such as aggressive prefixes like ‘dirty’ or ‘fucking’. Usually the intention is an expression of footballing rivalry/animosity, but not *necessarily* considered by the perpetrator, nor target, as ‘antisemitic’ or ‘racist’. Sometimes, the use of intensifiers may be more consciously intended to be racially abusive and cause offence. This is also the case for the use of ‘banter’ (i.e. jokes, ‘piss-taking’ and stereotypes) about Jewish rituals and practices by opposition fans: *sometimes* there is a deliberate racist intent, but more often – despite the racialised overtones – there is actually no intent to *racially* abuse, just to ‘wind up’ Tottenham fans by targeting their ‘Achilles’ heel’. Importantly, fans can only exchange ‘banter’ about ‘Tottenham Yids’ if they espouse pro-Jewish attitudes. Otherwise, it has a negative social effect.

The third way in which opposition fans use ‘Yid’ is found within the most extreme antisemitic discourse and behaviour – characterised by hissing, songs about Hitler and the Holocaust, and physical attacks on Tottenham fans for ‘being Jewish’ (whether they really are, or assumed to be) – which is underscored by genuine racial and religious intolerance and malevolent intent. It is perlocutionary intention to slur that is truly reprehensible (Allan and Burrige 2006). This continuum model is used to explain the uses and meanings of ‘Yid’ by many Tottenham fans, in contradistinction to

some opposition fans. The significance of the complexity and contextual specificity of linguistic discourse is an essential analytical consideration here.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the currently brief body of work on antisemitism within football and advances wider sociological debates pertaining to race and ethnicity, religion, language and semiotics, and sport by analysing and mapping antisemitic discourse in English fan culture on a new conceptually coherent continuum to explain and demarcate between the more nuanced and situated forms. Although a little dated when applied to contemporary English football, Back et al.'s (2001) six formations of fan racism remain useful for demonstrating the ways in which antisemitism is manifest in the vernacular culture of fans. However, their classification system does not fully recognise nor allow for the different subcultural meanings and intentions behind the uses of 'Yid' within the context of English football.

The proposed continuum provides an analytical and explanatory framework to enhance our understanding of antisemitism in football, which acknowledges the intricate nature of language, symbolic meaning, and the fluidity and temporality of linguistic reclamation and 'ownership'. For as Brontsema (2004: 7) argues: 'One usage does not disallow others; one group's pejorative use of a word does not prevent another group – indeed, its targets – from using it in new contexts and with differing intentions'. Central to this explanation of the different uses and meanings of 'Yid' by English football fans is the *cultural context* in which the word is used, together with the *intent* underpinning its usage as a key determinant in the effect of discourse. This conceptual framework helps us to distinguish the between Tottenham fans' justified appropriation and continued use of 'Yid' as an expression of their identity and fandom and that of

opposition fans, *some* of whom use the word as part of their wider antisemitic discourse with pernicious intent to offend.

In identifying the complex nature of antisemitic discourse in English football, the article calls for more informed and reasoned attempts to combat antisemitism. As Carrington (2012: 965) notes, ‘sports-related incidents highlight and bring to the fore, arguably more powerfully than any other cultural form, the complexity of contemporary racism and the potential of (and limits to) popular forms of anti-racism’. Thus far, campaigns and policies to tackle antisemitism in English football have misguidedly used the word ‘Yid’ as their starting point, rather than the overt antisemitic discourse that references Hitler and the Holocaust. Furthermore, they do not appear to understand or respect the nuanced uses of ‘Yid’ in football fandom.

Baddiel’s (2013) simplistic contention that ‘the continuing use of the Y-word by Spurs fans informs and sustains the racist abuse aimed at Spurs by other fans’ is comparable to rape myths, whereby a provocatively dressed woman is ‘asking for it’. He and *Kick It Out* (2011) with *The Y-word* film, together with The Football Association (2013), have failed to recognise that words constantly change and evolve in their promotion of a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy. New words are created, old ones die or can take on new meanings, just as new words can develop old meanings. This is dependent upon *cultural context* and the *intent* behind the use of language, which the Crown Prosecution Service implicitly acknowledged when they dropped the criminal cases against the three Tottenham fans.

The experience of Tottenham is not unique in the context of racism in the UK or mainland Europe; this case study has been used to shed light on the phenomenon of antisemitism more broadly. There are implications here for wider debates around racism and antisemitism in popular culture. First, the complexities of an issue such as the use

of ‘taboo’ words need to be acknowledged – as should the fact that it is not always possible to draw simple conclusions – since there are a variety of motives driving people’s self-ascription or ascription of others. Second, we should always try to understand a complex debate from the position of *all* the key actors and stakeholders. Many Tottenham fans believe they have not been listened to (Poulton and Durell 2014). Third, recognition of *cultural context* is essential.

The historical ‘Jewish’ identity of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and its fans must be factored into the debate; it cannot just be positioned by reference to Jewish persecution. Tottenham fans identifying as ‘Yids’ – irrespective of whether or not they are Jewish – is as much a defensive posture or positive assertion, as it might be seen to be aggressive or oppressive by others. Future policies to combat antisemitism in football should focus upon the Hitler-ridden hate speech and hissing of the *real* perpetrators of antisemitic discourse, not Tottenham fans, who are the victims, yet who continue to demonstrate pride, unity and solidarity between Gentiles and Jews in a positive response to racist abuse.

Notes

1. Other European football clubs with historic Jewish associations similarly encounter antisemitism, including: Ajax (Holland), MKS Cracovia (Poland), and MTK Budapest (Hungary).
2. Some Ajax Amsterdam fans self-reference themselves in songs/chants as ‘Super Jews’, but have not appropriated Jewish epithets.
3. Football Banning Orders are a preventative measure issued by courts to stop ‘potential troublemakers’ from attending football matches.
4. ‘Ultras’, usually associated with mainland European and South American fan cultures, are renowned for their ‘ultra-fanatical’ support through elaborate choreographed displays/‘tifos’ using banners and flares. They are sometimes influenced by extreme leftist or right-wing politics.

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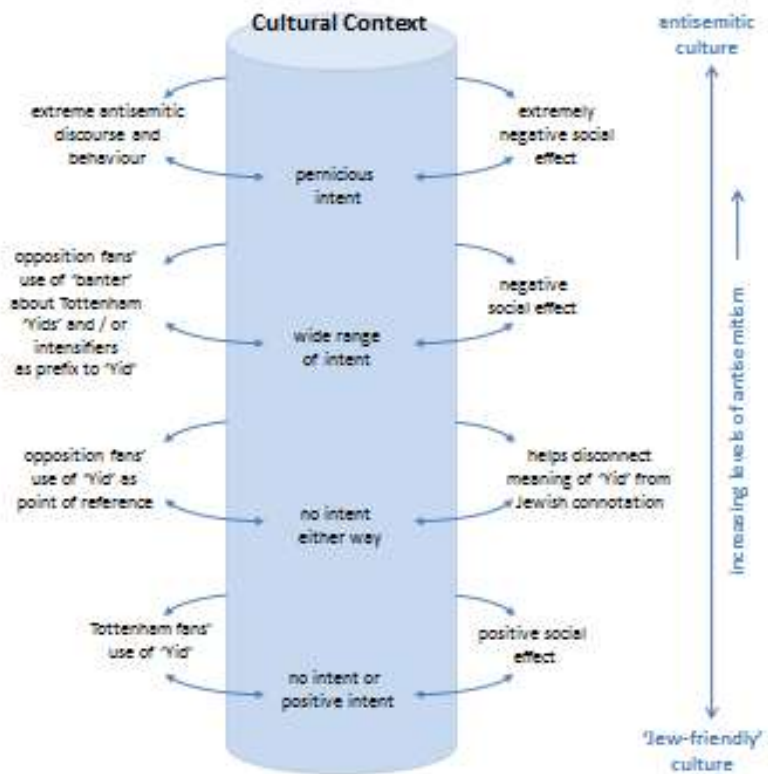


Figure 1: Antisemitic discourse and the different of uses of 'Yid' in English football (adapted from McCormack's (2011) model of homosexually-themed language).