

**'Lions, Black Skins and Reggae Gyals'  
*Race, Nation and Identity in Football***

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# **'Lions, Black Skins and Reggae Gyals'** ***Race, Nation and Identity in Football***

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## **Love and Hate in South East London – 2 May 1998, The New Den**

The sun is shining as I walk through south London's industrial wasteland to watch Millwall Football Club's last home game.<sup>1</sup> It's been another bad season, the club verging on bankruptcy has languished at the bottom half of the English Nationwide League Division 2. Millwall, although never really a successful club on the pitch, has occupied a central and iconic place in English Football. The lack of on field success has more than been made up for by its tradition of passion, sometimes violently expressed, and pride. The club's symbol is the rampant blue Lion and its stadium is referred to ominously as The New Den. Located in the former dockland areas of London, in the seventies and eighties the club and its supporters became branded the quintessential manifestation of football hooliganism, xenophobia and racism. Everyone in football -from the highest ranking Football Association official to the lowliest opposition fan - loves to hate Millwall.

For fans particularly the lure of Millwall is part of why it is loathed, the visitor's aversion to straying into this corner of South East London is more than compensated for by the cache of bar room folklore engendered by those male adventurers who made the journey into this metropolitan heart of darkness and lived to tell the tale. The grudging respect offered to Millwall fans is garnered because they have proved so resistant to the wider changes in English football, including the move to

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<sup>1</sup> The ethnographic interlocutor throughout this paper is Les Back, although the concerns and ideas generated through this argument are very much a three way project involving both Tim Crabbe and John Solomos. The research discussed here is part of a wider project entitled The Cultures of Racism in Football which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (project number R 000 23 5639). We would like to thank the ESRC for their support. Thanks to Michael Keith for his critical comments and John Masouri for sharing his unique insight into the connection between reggae music and football. Also, thanks to Colin King, Sharon Davidson, Lez Henry, Garry Robson and John Curran.

all-seater stadiums, the growing numbers of middle-class fans and the decline in football related violence. For many - friend and foe alike - Millwall is one of the last vestiges of unfettered white working-class male culture. Having said this the Millwall fan community is not only a male bastion. Throughout the club are numerous working-class women of all ages who share the men's passion for Millwall and all it stands for. Before heading for the ground I always stop for a cup of tea at a burger bar set up on Coldblow Lane. Amid the smell of fried onions and the traffic of burgers and hot dogs over the counter, a silver haired woman called Dorothy offers predictions and insightful commentary on the state of the Millwall team. The presence of women like Dorothy and their contribution to football culture has often been eclipsed by the spectacular male rituals of football violence and disorder.

As I approach the walkway to the entrance of the South Stand I notice a T-shirt seller is displaying his wares on the wall of a warehouse. One shirt sponsors a Lion backed by the red Cross of St George and the Millwall supporter's anthem 'No-one likes Us We Don't Care' is emblazoned across the top. Another shirt shows the American cartoon characters Beavis and Butthead in Millwall strip, their shorts dropped and their hairy behinds are 'mooning'. 'West Ham can kiss my Arse!' reads the shirt's caption directed at their hated East London rivals West Ham United. This all stands in stark contrast to the prospect of the spectacle of the World Cup France '98 and its international festival of corporate multiculturalism, at this point just a month away.

But today's game in the south London sunshine marks something more than just the end of the season: it is Tony Witter's last game for Millwall. In his five year tenure at the club, Tony Witter, a little known black centre-half and a journeyman footballer in every sense, has become something of a cult figure amongst Millwall's fans. He started his professional career relatively late in life, he first qualified as an electrical engineer before spending short periods at Crystal Palace and Queen's Park Rangers and then finally signing for Millwall. What he lacked in skill he made up for in passion, commitment and speed. In recent times Tony Witter had fallen foul of successive managers and lost his regular first team place. As I run up the stairs of the South Stand and step out into the brilliant May sun, I see the fans are on their feet giving a

spontaneous ovation. Tony Witter stands in the centre circle and receives an award for making 100 appearances for the club. The crowd strike up with Witter's own personalised song, an honour only bestowed on the most revered of players. Witter's theme tune was coined during a particularly bleak winter in 1995 and it is sung bizarrely to the lyrics of Bing Crosby's *Winter Wonderland*: 'There's only one Tony Witter, one Tony Witter. Walking along singing a song walking in a Witter wonderland.' The chant is repeated over and over again. The voices of 6,000 white fans swirl around the stadium in tribute to the passing of their black hero. Witter's complete acceptance now and perhaps forever in this alleged den of intolerance, complicates the image of racial prejudice associated with Millwall and its status as the exemplary face of English bigotry.

What follows is an exploration of the complex ways in which black players and fans both gain entry to English football culture despite the prevalence of a culture of racism in soccer. The ethnographic encounters with football culture discussed here are from the position of a white interlocutor who has had a longstanding connection with the part of south London and the politics of race found there. In particular, an argument is developed for the importance of examining how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion operate at a level of the local and within the national body politic. Sports is a ritual activity in which the relationship between race, nation and inclusion is repeatedly stated and defined, through representations of the 'us' that is manifest between the team and its devoted supporters. Here, 'race' and 'nation' function not as given entities but social forms that are staged through 'big games' and repeated sporting dramas. Their form and quality are defined through the performance itself and continuities are established through repetition. So, here 'race'<sup>2</sup> is not a given attribute but the process in which 'racial difference' is invoked and connected with issues of identity, entitlement and belonging. Through focusing on the iterative dimension of these processes in sport, it is possible to identify moments in which ruptures occur which may challenge the tenets of racial exclusion. The second half of the article will look at the significance of the qualification of the Jamaican national team for the 1998 World Cup. The reason for focusing on the experience of Jamaican fans - many of whom were born

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<sup>2</sup> Following Robert Miles *Racism* (Routledge, 1989).

in Britain – is that the social qualities of inclusion and identification embodied around the Jamaican team stands in sharp contrast to the nature of English football and its associated supporter cultures. Jamaica played a series of fixtures in the lead up to the finals and generated considerable black support in Britain. The spectacle of black British fans of all ages and genders supporting Jamaica in such numbers raised a whole series of issues about the symbolic weight of football culture as a medium to register identity. In this respect, the paper ends by looking at the World Cup in France and how this event punctuated a significant moment in the relationship between race and nation in football culture. Before coming to these broader issues I want to return to the South East London locality, Tony Witter and Millwall F.C.

### **‘Wearing the Shirt’: Racism, Locality and Masculinity**

Tony Witter was not the first black player to wear the Millwall shirt. That particular honour belongs to Frank Peterson who made his debut on the 21st December 1968.<sup>3</sup> While Peterson never really made an impact, two black players who followed him did, namely Phil Walker and Trevor Lee. Walker and Lee made their debut on 4th December 1975 and throughout the late seventies - when the association between Millwall and hooliganism and right-wing politics were at their height – they reigned supreme. Walker was a midfielder with speed, skill and application. More than anything Millwall fans admired unflinching commitment and passion echoing the wider uncompromising male cultures of working-class dockland. During this time the archetypal representation of this was a Harry Cripps, a blond haired Londoner who came to personify the values of Millwall. Walker and Cripps, while ‘racial opposites’, were galvanised from the same footballing mould and loved with equal passion by the Millwall faithful.

So the scenes of adulation on this May afternoon are not without precedent. But the significance of the moment was not lost on Tony himself. Close to three weeks after the game I talked to him in a restaurant close to his home. ‘The preconceived idea of Millwall is of a quote ‘racist club’ or ‘racist fans.’ So it just doesn’t seem to fit that such

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<sup>3</sup> Ken Chapman ‘Black and Blue: A History of Black Millwall Players’, Millwall Official Match Magazine, 21st February 1998.

an accolade should be given to a black player. It was touching for me and it was nice to be remembered in that way.' What is telling is that the adulation of figures like Tony Witter, Phil Walker and the other black players who have played for Millwall can co-exist with overt racism, particularly when directed at opposition black players. It is often said within football that the general decline in racism in English football is due to the growing numbers of black players within the game. Current black professionals make up between 15-20% of all professional footballers playing in England. However, platitudes like this mask a more complex reality.

When asked about his worst moment playing for Millwall Tony Witter recounted an incident that took place during an F.A. Cup fixture against Arsenal in January 1995. During this game Tony was matched against the England international, and one of the most prominent black English players, Ian Wright. Wright himself was born and bred in south London, he'd played with Witter at Crystal Palace and even had a trial at Millwall at the very beginning of his career. Wright was no stranger to the intense atmosphere at The New Den where he had watched Millwall play as a boy.<sup>4</sup> Here two black players - both Londoners - were pitted against each other: one loved and venerated, the other loathed and vilified. Tony recalls an incident that laid bare these tensions:

Nigel Winterburn played a ball down the line and Ian Wright was just over the half way line tried to turn against me and I tackled him and put the ball out of play. He's gone to get the ball, it's just rolling on the track and he's gone to pick it up. The amount of racist abuse that came from the Millwall fans in the lower stand was incredible: 'black this, black that,' monkey chants and the rest. Basically, I am standing not more 5 feet away from Ian. I sort of looked at them, looked at Ian and Ian shrugged his shoulders. Then I hear this voice from the crowd - 'Not you Tone, you're all

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<sup>4</sup> He writes in his autobiography: 'The only sniff I ever had [from professional clubs] was with Millwall. I was 14 at the time and they were the local team to me and the side I used to worship. A mate and I would bunk in at the old Den at the Coldblow Lane End to watch the Lions, so it was a dream come true when they invited me to the Crofton Leisure Centre for a six-week trial. I know I showed enough skill and ability in that time to warrant something from it; instead I got nothing, and that began a love-hate affair with Millwall that lasts even to this day.' Ian Wright *Mr Wright* Collins Willow, 1996 p. 41

right - it's Wrighty. I think they just see a blue shirt when they look at me. But with Ian Wright they see a red shirt, then they see a black face. But do they not see my colour? Do I wear this shirt over my head? <sup>5</sup>

In his blue shirt Tony's 'racial difference' was somehow dissolved, or seen to be irrelevant. The notion of 'wearing the shirt' summons in football vernacular the deepest levels of symbolic identity and commitment. It captures the embodied meanings associated with the football club as an emblem of locality and identity. This is ultimately manifest in the expected style that players perform within the game. I remember waiting for a coach to take a group of fans to a Millwall away fixture earlier in the season and some disquiet was registered by an older white man about a new signing who was black. His son immediately checked him: 'I don't care what colour he is as long as he wears that shirt.' Tony Witter always played for Millwall with pride, passion and authority. This was his passport to inclusion within the Millwall pantheon. What is telling, however, is that such an incorporation need not unsettle the wider culture of racism within these specifically working-class and often male cultural settings.

Tony commented on the discussion he had with Ian Wright in the bar after the game which ended in a 0-0 draw.

After the game Ian says to me: 'Witts, man, how can you play here, man?' I said to him: 'Ian, they're as good as gold *to me*.' That's the whole thing, I am playing *for them*.

The inclusion of players like Tony Witter are engendered through the embodiment of highly localised working-class values and cultural capital.<sup>6</sup> The shared experiences of class and masculinity offer a terrain in which contingent forms of inclusiveness can be established across the line of colour.

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise referenced all quotes are from interviews conducted as part of the ESRC Funded *The Cultures of Racism in Football Project*, 1995-98.

<sup>6</sup> Here we are thinking of Pierre Bourdieu notion of embodiment. This is developed fully in relation to football in the work of Garry Robson *No One Likes Us: Millwallism, Class, Community and Identity*, PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1998.

This is reflected in the stadium as well as on the pitch. A small but significant number of black men have always followed Millwall largely from the district of Brockley. In fact, some of the most prestigious figures in the 'hooligan firms' are black, indeed one of the most interesting paradoxes at Millwall is that the hooligan networks are often much more multicultural than the 'respectable fans.' This is certainly true at Millwall where the people involved in football violence, acutely aware of the fact that they are being surveyed, remain quiet and laconic inside the ground during the game. Those most commonly indulging in racist name-calling and abuse are shockingly respectable. It is also not uncommon to see black Millwall fans also abusing black opposing players. Trevor Little, a well known black Millwall fan, wrote in the aftermath of the replay victory against Arsenal in February 1995:

As a black Millwall fan, what can I say? arsenal<sup>7</sup> 0 Millwall 2. ian wright can f\*\*k off - there's only one Tony Witter.

ian wright claims Millwall fans are racist. Just ask Tony Witter what he thinks. ian wright is a tosser.

It was the most exciting night of my life, and I was glad to see the many black Millwall fans that were there. The team played 100% out of their skins.

I had Millwall fans hugging me, shaking my hand, jumping up and down with delight - on this great night of glory.

Tell me, does colour really matter? We are called the Millwall Blackskins - Congratulations Millwall.<sup>8</sup>

Accounts like these ought not to be dismissed too quickly as some ethnic equivalent to false consciousness. Rather, Trevor Little points out the depth of inclusion of black fans within the working-class male cultural matrix.

Another issue here is the status of the 'race talk' that is expressed in the footballing context. Within the ritual arena of the football ground verbal abuse takes on an altered meaning. In Bateson's essay on a *Theory of Play and Fantasy* (1978) he outlines the processes by which meaning is transformed by metacommunication in play. He uses material gathered

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<sup>7</sup> In this fanzine it is customary not to give despised enemies the dignity of proper noun capitalisation.

<sup>8</sup> *The Lion Roars*, Issue 62, 1995 p. 30. I'd like to thank Garry Robson pointing out these passages from the Millwall fanzine.

from animal behaviour to show how an act of aggression - like a bite - can have its meaning emptied in the course of play:

Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional.<sup>9</sup>

In this process comments, practices and actions which are invested with non-play meanings are subverted and inverted by collective agreement. Through playing, singing or shouting a negotiated alteration of meaning takes place which modifies a particular practice from what it 'stands for' in wider usage. In the footballing context this doesn't exactly dislocate the efficacy of racist language but it certainly changes its status. A white Lions fan remembers an incident in which this altered quality was betrayed:

... there was an 80s match at The Den (can't remember who we was playing) with a group of thumbheads [skinheads] at the front of the terracing shouting out some racist stuff while about eight rows back, three youngish black guys were rolling their eyes in mock terror and pissing themselves laughing. [This incident] always comes to mind when I hear shit in the news about the 'fascists' at Millwall - yeah it's always there but it's a bit of a bad joke.<sup>10</sup>

The mistake that is all too often made is that such 'race talk' is either read as 'meaningless play' or taken as 'consequential race hate' and the expression of deep felt racial animus. Rather, I would suggest it's true significance is found in the ambivalence between these two positions i.e. within a mode of expression that oscillates between the ludic and the literal. In order to be able to read and ridicule racism as described in the above quotation, it is necessary to be able to explicate these taunts in their context. Such acts of subversion involve participation and proficiency in this highly class-coded and gendered oral culture. A black person who did not share these experiences or anyone else not familiar with this highly specific milieu would not see a 'bad joke' but a grotesque performance of racial zealotry.

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<sup>9</sup> Gregory Bateson 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy'. In G. Bateson *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. London: Paladin Books 1978 p. 155

<sup>10</sup> *The Lion Roars*, Issue 51, 1994 p. 29

This raises important questions about the contingent forms of inclusion that black fans and players experience within football. In many respects the boundaries of this incorporation are circumscribed by the degree of fit or compatibility with the hegemonic white working-class masculinities that form the normative centre of football culture. In keeping with the kinds of negotiation that take place between black and white young people within football culture it becomes possible for 'black cockneys' or 'blackskins' to be included as *contingent insiders*.<sup>11</sup> Such forms of inclusion are always contingent upon the absence of a specifically anti-black racism within the fan culture. These fraught inclusions mirror the same processes that operate with regard to black players. In both cases racism stands on the 'side-lines' as a potential resource to be used strategically to exclude or undermine the belonging and legitimacy of black fans and players. 'Blackskins' can be assimilated within the Millwall fan collective, but depending on circumstances and context they can be transformed into vilified 'black bastards'.

From the perspective of Millwall's white fans, high profile black figures became almost totally assimilated, gaining notoriety and unquestioned respect. They became majestic figures within the symbolic dominion of the white fan collective and when they attended games this respect would be embodied through highly ritualised patterns of acknowledgement in the form of verbal and non-verbal greetings. This, however, does not preclude the same figures being targeted by opposing fans in a racialised fashion. Equally, white peers and even friends can indulge in the mirror opposite forms of racialisation when directed towards black fans who support Millwall's rivals. While other groups, most strikingly Britain's south Asian communities, are completely excluded and reviled through a whole range of anti-Asian songs.<sup>12</sup>

What is established is a racialised hierarchy. In order to understand this process it is important to cross the analysis of racialised identities with an understanding of how these intersect with gender relations and

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<sup>11</sup> Les Back *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* UCL Press, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Les Back, Tim Crabbe & John Solomos 'Racism in Football: Patterns of Continuity and Change. In Adam Brown (ed.) *Fanatics!* (Routledge, 1998)

masculinity. Commensurable class-inflected ideals about black and white masculinity provide a common ground within black-white peer groups. Where young white men are forming alliances and friendships with black peers it is important to question the constructions of blackness they may be finding attractive. For young white men this may be located around racialised definitions of masculinity. In this sense the image of black masculinity as invulnerable, 'hard' and 'terrace tough' is alarmingly similar to racist notions of dangerous/violent 'black muggers'. At the moment when racist ideas are most vulnerable, in situations where there is intimate contact between black and white men, stereotypical ideas can be reproduced as positive characteristics to be emulated. This equally can operate in the sphere of sexuality revealed here in a story of inter-racial fraternity offered by a white Millwall fan. This incident took place in the aftermath of a game at Chelsea in the eighties:

Coming out of that game some black bloke fainted in the crush getting through the poxy stupid gate. Immediately a group of other (white) Millwall supporters shouted for order while they tried to lift the unconscious geezer to his feet. He could have literally been trampled to death in half a minute. Even so it was hard to get him upright, he seemed to weigh more than Ken Bates' head [the Chelsea Chairman]. Then I heard one of the other lifters offer an explanation - 'it's his bloody knob [penis] innit?'<sup>13</sup>

This example of terrace humour shows that racialised constructions around black men's sexuality may underpin the affiliations established between black and white fans. The point here that these stereotypical ideas like black men have 'big dicks' and a 'penchant for violence' may be undisturbed while black peers are integrated within the fan culture. These formulations may even be reinforced through inter-racial banter and friendship. The parameters of black inclusion in this class-defined cultural milieu are relatively narrow. It excludes black women or black men who adopt other versions of black masculinity more centrally placed within the rituals of London's black alternative public sphere. Before addressing how the advent of the Jamaican team has shifted the boundaries of participation in football spectating, I first want to look briefly at black support for the English national team.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Lion Roars* Issue 51 p. 29

## **‘Ain’t no black in the Union Jack’: England and the politics of race and nation.**

The English national side has been the context in which the most extreme form of racially exclusive nationalism has been harnessed to football culture. During the seventies and eighties England fans would regularly sing ‘There ain’t no black in the Union Jack, send the bastards back!’ This was also combined with Unionism and opposition to Irish Republicanism where England fans would sing ‘No Surrender to the I.R.A.’ with equal venom. More recently this was brought into focus during a match between the Republic of Ireland and England in Dublin in February 1995, which led to the eventual abandonment of the game, in the midst of scenes of violence in the crowd. The events in Dublin focused attention on the supposed influence of organised racist groups, such as C18,<sup>14</sup> over sections of football supporters, particularly those that follow the national team. While the impact of C18 is debatable, the prevalence of racist rhetoric within the subculture of England support is without question. As one of the England supporters interviewed after the Dublin events showed:

You’ve got to show pride in your team. It’s fucking pride. It’s England we follow. I mean, I know two blokes who are in Combat 18 because they believe in the English, no black in the Union Jack and all that. I mean I’m really there for the football, but I do agree with them.<sup>15</sup>

There is little doubt that a small proportion of fans with ultra right-wing political leanings attempt to attach themselves to football culture. In the ethnographic work conducted with England fans for this research, a minority of fans showed a clear interconnection in their accounts between English nationalism, Ulster Unionism and popular racism. Here the racism was much more ideologically defined when compared against

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<sup>14</sup> C18 stands for C = Combat; 1 = A (i.e. first letter of the alphabet); 8 = H (i.e. eighth letter of the alphabet): Combat Adolf Hitler. It is a violent neo-Nazi group established in the 1980s to defend organised neo-fascist political interest. Recently, C18 has been racked by implosive division with the imprisonment of its leader Charlie Sargent for his part in the murder of another neo-Nazi Chris Castle.

<sup>15</sup> *The Guardian*, 17 February 1995

the local forms of neighbourhood nationalism evident amongst clubs like Millwall.

During the European Championships held in England in 1996 there was a concerted attempt to whip up jingoism by the tabloid press. This was particularly evident in the run up to the semi-final match between England and Germany.<sup>16</sup> The Euro '96 tournament was significant in other ways. It marked a real attempt to assert a benign patriotism. One of the more incredible spectacles of Euro '96 was the thousands of English fans with their faces painted with the red cross of St George. This image is the lasting legacy of tournament. The significance of this has not been lost on the racist right in Britain. John Tyndall, leader of the neo-fascist British National Party, wrote in the aftermath of the tournament:

...What was noticeable in the demonstrations of crowd patriotism ... was the overwhelming whiteness of those taking part.<sup>17</sup>

Tyndall goes on to lament reports that during the dramatic semi-final against Germany, which ultimately resulted in England's defeat by a penalty 'shoot out,' that more than half of a poll of Afro-Caribbean football enthusiasts were cheering for Germany. Tyndall's article is written from the perspective of a racial nationalist wagging his finger at liberal multiculturalism. However, there were signs during Euro '96 of shifts which Tyndall would be less comfortable.

Vince, a black England fan, recounted a series of incidents he experienced during the tournament which suggested that small scale re-negotiations were occurring around issues of race, nation and belonging. He describes the atmosphere outside *The Globe Pub*, West London, prior to the England versus Scotland game. This pub is a common rallying point for England fans on their way to Wembley. It seemed as if all the serious 'hooligan firms' had turned out for this game. Dotted amongst these groups were perhaps a half a dozen Black England fans. Vince described the acceptance with which these black

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<sup>16</sup> This was particularly evident in the *Daily Mirror* (see 25th & 26th June 1996), although this was largely out of step with the mood of English fans and the nation as a whole.

<sup>17</sup> John Tyndall 'Euro '96: faces of nationalism,' *Spearhead*. No. 330, 1996 p. 7

fans were greeted. This integration even went to the point where total strangers approached Vince and offered him support: 'you get any trouble here today, we're going down with you.' The open recognition by some of the white England fans of the issue of racism and how it might affect Vince is striking given the wider prevalence of racism within the subculture.

The presence of black fans during the tournament forced a grudging acknowledgement even from politically committed extreme right-wing fans. Vince recounts here the moment when the police lead a group of C18 football fans away from The Globe :

I'm right on the kerb - this is mad - I'm right on the kerb [outside the Globe Pub and C18] are walking past, I'm with my mates and all that, and then they just walked past me. But one guy stopped and clocked me, it was the weirdest thing - total skinhead as well, it was really weird, and he just looked at me and like he nods. I've got a little English rose, a red rose on my lapel. He looked at me, looked at my badge and just nods, and he just looks at me and goes: 'Yeah, right'. And I just held my own, it was just like eye contact... It was just in the eyes, it was so fucking mad. It was just like, you know: 'Today we're on the same team, yeah, England. Any other day it'd be different, but today it's about the fucking Jocks' [Scotland]. Then the Police moved him on and everyone's just like looking around and I was like fuck, and it was so frightening! It was an acknowledgement, it was just all in the eyes though, it was brilliant, it was, in a weird way, in a perverse way it was brilliant. We had a conversation with the eyes in like two seconds... and I sort of said: 'Well listen, I know you're a racist cunt, but nothing's gonna happen today, is it, 'cause it's about Scotland?'

Clearly, notions of race and nation were being negotiated in an explicit way. Perhaps this was only confined to a situation where there was a collective and shared adversary in the shape of England's old footballing enemy - The Scots.

These fraught acknowledgements were carried in into the stadium itself. Vince described an incident that took place in the toilet at Wembley Stadium during the half-time interval. Vince is a well known fan, he appears on a Sky TV football fan programme, so in addition to being

one of the few black English fans he is also conspicuous because of his involvement in the media:

I'm in the toilet - right - and I've gone in the cubicle and I've locked the door. Then these two white Villa fans come in behind me and they obviously don't know I'm in the cubicle. They go: 'Did you see that fucking cunt from Sky [TV] upstairs, he's a cunt.' Then they just started singing: 'English, white and proud of it, English, white and proud of it.' Then I come out the toilet - right. And they looked and they just looked at me and sort of like stared. It went totally silent 'cause there were loads of people in there, and then I answered them: 'English, black and proud of it, English, black and proud of it'. And they just, and all just laughed ahhhhhhha!

This incident could have quite easily had a very different outcome. Vince could have been attacked but he wasn't. In that micro-political moment the racial circumscription's around Englishness was opened so that Vince could legitimately be 'English, black and proud of it.' In these lived interactions the meanings of race and nation are prised open, revealed and momentarily transcended. Such forms of acknowledgement and racial inclusion are perhaps more temporary and contingent than those describe in the local context. It is entirely plausible that the inclusion of black fans like Vince can occur simultaneously with complexly articulated forms of racist culture. The shifting meanings of race and nation are also being profoundly registered within the England team itself. In a pre World Cup 'warm up' game against Morocco in Casablanca England fielded four black players. With the teams lined up on the pitch the stadium manager lost the tape with the recording of the English national anthem. A moment of silent chaos ensued. Quickly, the players led by Ian Wright and captain Paul Ince sang 'God Save the Queen' at the top of their voices and the travelling England fans – almost all of whom we white - joined in. The following day *The Sun* newspaper showed a picture of three black players including Ince, Wright and Campbell and Paul Gascoigne as national heroes singing their hearts out.<sup>18</sup> The presence of black players in the England side has been an enduring feature of the national game since 1978 when Viv Anderson made his debut against

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<sup>18</sup> *The Sun* Thursday May 28 p. 1

Czechoslovakia.<sup>19</sup> However, what has been striking recently is the degree and variety of black internationals playing the game at the highest level. But despite the presence of considerable numbers of black players in the England team comparatively few black supporters actively support the national team.

This brings into focus the complex iterative relationship between race, nation and inclusion. Clearly, there are different things at stake when black and white people lay claim to icons of Englishness,<sup>20</sup> or add their voice to the song of national stirring in sport. Paul Gilroy, perhaps more than anyone else, has pointed to the difference made when black people identify with Englishness and/or Britishness and in so doing establish new possible vectors of contingent racial inclusion.<sup>21</sup> This is a phenomenon of European states with colonial histories that brought citizens from the colonial margin to the metropolitan centre through pre-established imperial networks and routeways. The sentiment embodied in the English fan's football song common in the seventies and eighties – 'There ain't no black in the Union Jack – send the bastards back' is a stark reminder of the intense articulation of race and nation. This is the context in which struggles over the possibility of 'black' and 'English/British' being repositioned in a relationship of inclusive mutuality takes on a political resonance. The situation in the United States is very different because these struggles over national belonging took on a very different form, where white supremacy has endured in a situation where people of colour are awarded the status of being 'American' without ambiguity.<sup>22</sup>

Equally, black identifications with Englishness are not necessarily viewed as transformative. This is where the elision between notions of Englishness and Britishness is most acutely significant because these two ideas can be coded differently in terms of racial exclusion,

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<sup>19</sup> Brian Woolnough *Black magic: England's black footballers* Petham Books, 1983

<sup>20</sup> See Phil Cohen 'Beyond the missionary position: anti-racist strategy and racial violence in white working-class communities,' *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, forthcoming

<sup>21</sup> Paul Gilroy *Small Acts: thoughts on the politics of black cultures* Serpents Tail, 1993

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Roger Hewitt for this point. See also John Hoberman *Darwin's Athletes: how sport has damaged black America and preserved the myth of race* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997

citizenship and belonging. During the game between England and Argentina in which resulted in England's exit from the tournament by the inevitable penalty shoot out, Ian Wright, who missed the finals because of injury was pictured on UK television wrapped in a St George Cross flag. Lez Henry - a black fan - commented in the aftermath of the game: 'I looked at him [Wright] on the screen and I thought 'What the fuck is he doing – has he lost his mind completely! I mean the St George Cross! That's the worst thing for a black person because according to them people you can't be black and English. Maybe Britishness would be something else because you can be 'black British' but English? Never.' The notion 'British' is widely held to be less racially or culturally exclusive and such identification can be sustained alongside associations with Caribbean and the African diaspora.<sup>23</sup> The relationship between these identity registers was brought into sharp focus through the Jamaican national team debut at the World Cup finals in France 98.

### **'Reggae Boyz, Reggae Boyz, Reggae Boyz'<sup>24</sup>: Blackness, Diaspora and the Jamaican National Team**

While the negotiations around the politics of Englishness have only affected partial changes within domestic football, the World Cup qualification of Jamaica's Reggae Boyz has probably done more than any of football's anti-racist campaigns to attract black people as spectators inside football grounds.<sup>25</sup> They were dubbed the 'Reggae Boyz.' No one really knows where the name comes from but the Jamaican Football Federation acted quickly and in March 1998 they registered the 'Reggae Boyz' as a trademark in 11 countries. The official story is that the Zambians coined the name during a Jamaican national team tour in 1995,<sup>26</sup> but in large part the name has stuck because of the pre-match concerts fused football and dance-hall culture where reggae stars like Dennis Brown and Jimmy Cliff performed. The

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<sup>23</sup> Les Back *New ethnicities and urban culture: racism and multiculturalism in young lives* UCL Press, 1996 p. 148-152

<sup>24</sup> One of the main songs sung by Jamaican fans repeated the teams nickname to the tune of John Phillip Sousa 'Marching through Georgia.'

<sup>25</sup> Thanks to Colin King for this observation.

<sup>26</sup> Earl Bailey and Nazma Muller *Jamaica's Reggae Boys: World Cup 1998* Ian Randle Publishers and Creative Communications Inc, 1998 p. 56

road to the World Cup finals for Jamaica was followed keenly within the diaspora. This was made possible by global communications technology often associated with nascent European techno-imperialism.<sup>27</sup> In south London a small pub called ironically *The Union Tavern* was the place where a packed house of black fans saw their team draw 0-0 with Mexico and earn their trip to Europe. These events in Kingston, Jamaica had a distinctly local resonance given that this part of the metropolis has such a long standing Afro-Caribbean and specifically Jamaican community.

Elsewhere in London black fans watched the game on Sky Sports amid a carnival atmosphere. Alister Morgan, writing in *The Independent* newspaper, told of the scenes at York Hall in East London where the game was watched by 2,000 Jamaicans. One of the revellers told him:

It's not just a question of that round ball and 22 men. We're talking about the position of Jamaica and the efforts of a poor people. It's beyond football - in this country we live four and a half thousand miles from home and have been suffering for 40 years. Now Jamaica have qualified all Jamaicans will be uplifted.<sup>28</sup>

This event provided a means for people within the diaspora to identify with Jamaica but also it offered black football fans a possibility to participate in football on their own terms. Equally, in the Caribbean Jamaica's qualification generated something of a partial processes national healing. Black music journalist John Masouri summed this up:

Everyone I've spoken to remarks upon how a new sense of togetherness has swept the country since the team qualified for France... the Reggae Boyz success has helped heal a fractured nation by instilling hop for a better future amongst their supporters. Crime rates have dropped and patriotism is back on the agenda, with the black, green and gold flag of Jamaica now to be seen fluttering everywhere. Even many Rastas are beginning to glow with a little nationalistic pride these days...<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> see Doreen Massey 'A Global Sense of Place,' *Marxism Today*, 1991, June p. 25-

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<sup>28</sup> *The Independent*, 18 November 1997 p. 31

<sup>29</sup> John Masouri 'Funkin for Jamaica,' *Echoes*, 13 June 1998 p. 12

Football provide both a means for domestic renewal and to reanimate connections within the diaspora.

The Jamaican team - coached by the Brazilian Rene Simoes - itself featured 'English' black players like Deon Burton of Derby County, Wimbledon's Robbie Earle and Paul Hall and Fitzroy Simpson, both of Portsmouth. The inclusion of players 'from foreign' caused some initial disquiet in Jamaica, where the *Daily Observer* ran an article on 17 March 1998 with the headline – 'No, we won't cheer for a team of British rejects.' Millwall's Tony Witter had been approached to play but had not made the trip because the Jamaican Football Association could not afford to pay the medical insurance that Millwall made a condition of his release. Despite some disquiet in the Jamaican Press, Horace Burrell, head of the Jamaican Football Association was keen to assert the rights of any member of the diaspora to claim Jamaican heritage. In response to questions about the 'English contingent,' he told a journalist:

'Well, first of all let me correct you. It's not English players. They are Jamaican players whose parents came here [England] or they were born here, but we still regard them as Jamaicans. Our aim is to parade on the playing field in France the best 11 Jamaican players. That is our aim, and whether they live in England, Italy, the United States or Jamaica, if they've been able to parade the skills in the way Rene Simoes wants, then certainly they will be a member of the team.'<sup>30</sup>

For Burrell an inclusive diasporic sensibility made perfect footballing and commercial sense.

As part of their pre-tournament preparation the Reggae Boyz played a series of friendly games in England. The first was a testimonial for the journeyman white player Simon Barker at Queen's Park Rangers on Sunday 22nd of March. Unprecedented numbers of black people attended the game. Of the 17,000 fans packed into the stadium on that sunny afternoon probably all but a few hundred were black. Paul Eubanks, a journalist for the Caribbean newspaper *The Gleaner*, wrote:

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<sup>30</sup> John Masouri Ibid. p. 13

Never ... had I seen so many black people inside one [football] ground. Generations of Jamaicans had come to watch the game. The most emotional moment for me was witnessing grandmothers at a site they would have never dreamed of entering, but they were getting ready to support their beloved team. The weather was consistent with its surroundings of Jamaicans: steel band and reggae music blaring out of the PA system, Jamaican patties on sale and even the odd 'FUNNY' cigarette being passively smoked.<sup>31</sup>

The significance of this event is hard to overstate. It marked not only the emergence of unprecedented numbers of black fans actively going to watch live football but also a shift in the nature of supporter culture. What this event revealed was the ethnocentrism of English football and its class-inflected and gendered nature.

One of the striking things about the culture of Jamaican support was the transposition of the rituals associated with Jamaican musical cultures to the footballing context. There should be no surprise in this given the level of fanaticism about football both in the Caribbean and in London's black communities. English Premier league football is followed closely in Jamaica given the prominence of figures like John Barnes during his career at Liverpool and also Ian Wright at Arsenal. Football matters are debated each Saturday over the counter at virtually every black music record shop in Britain and in Britain there are plenty of football fans inside reggae music business itself.<sup>32</sup> Earl Bailey and Nazma Muller commenting on the long association between football and music particularly in relation to Bob Marley, conclude:

Every DJ worth his salt knows how to kick a ball... Given the chance to marry both Jamaican loves, many entertainers turned up at the National Stadium and away matches to rally fans behind the Reggae Boyz. From Beenie Man to Bounty Killer, Yellowman to Jimmy Cliff, they came out to support the national team.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *The Gleaner* 1-7th April 1998 p. 30

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to John Masouri for this observation.

<sup>33</sup> Earl Bailey and Nazma Muller *Jamaica's Reggae Boys: World Cup 1998* Ian Randle Publishers and Creative Communications Inc, 1998 p. 88

In the aftermath of qualification the reggae music industry set about the task of creating a theme tune for its footballing success. The first Reggae Boyz tune was recorded by the London reggae band The Black Astronauts, although this record was not widely distributed.<sup>34</sup> Jamaica Unlimited's *Rise up* featuring Toots Hibbert, Diana King, Ziggy Marley and Maxi Priest amongst others was the official Reggae Boyz anthem. One of the best tunes was actually recorded by members of the team called *Kick It* released under the name Reggae Boyz. *Kick it* featured DJing from Donald Stewart – himself musician - and vocals from Paul Hall and Fitzroy Simpson over the Willie Williams' Studio One classic rhythm *Armagideon Time*. The tune has the distinction of being perhaps the only truly plausible pop record ever to be recorded by footballers. A flood of releases followed and singers and DJs gave lyrical tributes at live shows between November and the World Cup finals be it at high profile concerts or sound-systems strung up in Kingston, New York or Birmingham.<sup>35</sup>

The fusion of music and football garnered around the Jamaican team meant that the experience of going to games was quite unlike anything experienced in Britain before. John Masouri reflected in *Echoes* on the carnival atmosphere and sense of togetherness found in the English grounds where Jamaica played. 'Many of us had never experience such warm, friendly vibes at football matches before' he wrote<sup>36</sup> Football was also being opened publicly to black women in ways that were - in Britain at least - unprecedented. Plenty of black women had followed football privately and from afar but here they were watching football live. Marlene, a young woman born in London of Jamaican parentage, commented on her visit to Loftus Road:

It was good to go to football. I've never been to a game before but it wasn't really like the football you see on the TV, it was *just like going to a dance with the music and everything*. It was funny because I think the QPR players were a bit confused when they came out and saw all us black people and so few white faces in the crowd. [my emphasis]

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<sup>34</sup> Masouri *op cit*.

<sup>35</sup> John Masouri – personal communication, 15 September 1998

<sup>36</sup> Masouri *op cit*.

The participation of black women in football showed parallels with some of the broader patterns of female expression in Jamaican popular culture. In the context of the reggae dance-hall women have used music and to engender female power through dancing and 'extravagant display of flashy jewellery, expensive clothes, elaborate hairstyles.'<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Cooper has argued, these performances embody complex gender politics in which women's power lies in the control over their own bodies and sexuality. Through dance-hall culture women have achieved high levels of autonomy and self-affirmation.<sup>38</sup> Equally, their presence within football grounds raised parallel issues with regard to those discussed previously in connection with the construction of black men within white masculinities in football. The range of representations of black femininity within football pose similar questions and we will address these in what follows. But clear traces of dance-hall culture are present amongst Jamaican football fans both in terms of their style and the significant numbers of young women in attendance at games.

The second game arranged for Jamaica in the UK was at Ninian Park against the Welsh national team on 26th March 1998. Paul, a black south London entrepreneur, brought 1,000 tickets and organised a fleet of 11 coaches to ferry the London's Reggae Boyz and Reggae Gyals to the match from the Capital. 'I want to give people a whole experience. You can get a coach to the game and then stay in Cardiff for an 'after-party' reggae dance' he told me over the phone as I booked my ticket. Midday outside Brixton Town Hall was an extraordinary sight as hundreds of black people assembled to make the long trip to Cardiff under the grey London skies. One man was dressed head to foot in black, green and gold like a walking Jamaican flag. Another was draped in a flag with the picture of Bob Marley in the centre and beneath embroidered the word 'Freedom.' Two young black women boarded the coach dressed in full Reggae Gyal style. One wore a green wig with a Jamaican team shirt and yellow pants. While her friend had a Jamaican flag coloured into her hair, wore a Jamaica scarf around her neck and a yellow and green leisure suit.

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<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Cooper *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* Macmillan Caribbean, 1993 p. 155

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Miller 1991. 'Absolute Freedom in Trinidad,' *Man*, 26, 1991 p.323-41; see also Isaac Julien *The Darker Side of Black*, BBC TV, 12.2.94.

Sitting in front of me was a young woman call Pam. She was 17 and had come to the game on her own, something that would be unthinkable under any other circumstances. A night game at Ninian Park - home of Cardiff City - is a daunting place to visit even for the most seasoned football fan. Pam - who lives in Brixton - said:

Well, I knew that I'd feel safe because I am travelling with all Jamaican people. It might be very different if it was another match. I like football but the first time that I have been to a game was when Jamaican played at Queens Park Rangers. I really liked it so here I am, and I get to go to a dance as well and I don't have to go to work tomorrow- do you know what I mean!

The whole experience of travelling with the Jamaican fans was so different from the usual football excursions to away games. Buju Banton and Beenie Man was played over and over on the sound system, fried chicken and bun was served as we sped down the motorway. But, this contrast was more profound than just the quality of the music and the food on offer. The whole social basis of Jamaican fandom was much less tightly scripted than its English counterpart. Older women and men travelled with young people, fans travelled alone safe in the knowledge that they would be amongst their own. Black people who would not ordinarily step inside a football ground attended with the confidence of veterans.

The reality of the game against Wales was dismal in footballing and supporting terms. By the time that the coach arrived the rain was pelting down. The game was an uneventful 0-0 draw. The largest section of Jamaican support was located in the away stand which had no roof. The Jamaican performance was poor to say the least but there was something inspiring in the fact that here was over 5,000 black fans braving the wind and rain to watch their team. Behind me a black man in his sixties shouted 'Come on, Reggae Boyz.' The ball ricocheted off Ricardo 'Bibi' Gardener's shin, going out of play ending another aimless run at the Welsh defence. He said, in a voice that was half growl and half whispered: 'The man play like cabbage.' This was a turn of phrase that I'd never heard inside a British football ground before but some how it captured the moment perfectly. On the one hand this small comment registered a new presence, black people coming to football on their own

terms with their own unique way of voicing frustration. On the other, it was the all too familiar *crie de coeur* of a disappointed fan, a phenomenon universal to people who share a passion for the game the world over.

So much nonsense has been written about the apparent unwillingness of black fans to attend English football matches.<sup>39</sup> The reasons offered vary from the out and out racist to claims about 'extenuating cultural and economic factors': - 'Black people don't watch football they follow basketball,' 'They don't like to have to stand out in the cold,' 'They can't afford to pay the high ticket prices.' Looking out on the legion of Jamaican fans that night in Cardiff, draped in black, gold and green with the rain trickling down their necks it became all too clear. The reason why they were here in these terrible conditions was because they felt this to be *their* team and *their* game. As the mass of black fans looked out onto Ninian Park and the Jamaican team, on this cold wet night they saw themselves. The experience of English racism and the racially debarred nature of British spectator sports is what prohibits an equal commitment and emotional bind being established between black fans and the England team and local clubs. This is true despite the fact that black players are playing at all levels of English football. One of the biggest cheers of the night was at half time when it was announced that England were losing 1-0 at Wembley.

Three months later at a sun drenched *Parc des Princes* the setting was altogether different at Jamaica's second fixture of the finals against Argentina. The stadium was a patchwork of Jamaican gold shirts alongside the pale blue and white stripes of Argentina. The atmosphere was heavy with anticipation. Jamaican fans of all ages and of both sexes alongside pockets of Argentinean fans. Two young female Jamaican fans dressed in classic dancehall queen style held court for the cameramen at the front of the stand. Later after the match the two women told me that they'd grown up in America: 'But we're Jamaican! Our parents came to New York from the Caribbean' said Debbie, who had her hair bleached and styled up in a kind of bouffant on top of her

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<sup>39</sup> Particularly The Football Task Force *Eliminating Racism from Football: A Report by the Football Task Force submitted to the Minister for Sport* The Football Trust, 1998 p. 28

head. She wore a green leather top with green and yellow hot pants and big platform boots and one of her eyebrows was pieced with a silver ring. Her friend – Paula – was equally striking in her dance-hall style, her hair was permed and ironed so that it was straight up with red sunglasses resting on the top. 'It's been incredible coming to Europe to see the football. We've met so many Jamaicans in Paris and before that we stayed in London but here we are thousands of miles from Jamaica and it's like a big family reunion,' she said after the game.

These two female fans were probably the most photographed women in Paris that day. Relentless waves of Argentinean and later Jamaican men had their photographs taken with them. One portly Argentinean wearing a national team shirt, a false moustache and a kind of wide brimmed gringo hat, posed with Debbie and Paula to the delight of the hordes of paparazzi. On the pitch there must have been 100 photographers in an arc around this spectacle. An important question here is the degree to which these gendered performances are being re-inscribed as the pack of press photographers focused their lens? Or, equally how are these women being viewed by the male football fans who flocked to have their pictures taken with them? Sexual carnivalesque is part of the transgressive power of these styles of black femininity and the football stadium provided a new arena for their exposition. But part of Paula's and Debbie's allure - so evident amongst the Argentinean and other European men - may have been informed by dubious racialised ideas relating to black women's sexuality or racial biology. Here, the transgressive potential of the dance-hall queen performance, may in turn be re-inscribed by a male footballing audiences which reduces these women and their agency to mere sex objects. The other danger of focusing too much the dance-hall queens is that the substantial numbers of black women of all ages in the stadium is eclipsed because they followed the Jamaican team in a less stylised way.

The period before kick off was charged with anticipation. This reached a kind of fever pitch about 10 minutes before the start of the game when the guitar lick from the opening bars of Bob Marley's 'Could this be love' struck up on the stadium sound system. The whole place erupted with Argentinean and Jamaican fans alike singing and dancing. In an

attempt to find a suitably 'Latin' equivalent to Bob Marley the French stadium manager immediately followed the reggae rhythm with 'La Bamba.' The choice of Los Lobos' version was somewhat ironic given this tune is a Mexican folk song, made famous in the fifties by the Mexican American rock'n' roll singer Richie Valens! Regardless, the packed stadium swayed, danced and sung together with equal intensity.

The game itself became almost a side issue as Jamaica slipped to a 5–0 defeat. Martin Thorpe wrote in *The Guardian* the following day of the Jamaican side 'for all the infectious joy of their singing and dancing fans, the team simply could not match the high standards demanded on the global stage.'<sup>40</sup> The Jamaican team were certainly treated like second class citizens in the lead up to this fixture. Robbie Earle recounted the shoddy treatment that they received from the FIFA officials, the teams pre-game warm up on the pitch was shortened to suit the Argentineans and they were ushered away despite Simoes's objection so that the ground could be prepared for the corporate spectacle.

'Incidents like these highlight the fact that we are not yet looked upon as equal. FIFA have based much of their promotion on fair play – it is time that they applied it across the board. Is it not the mentality of a bully to identify its weaker targets and pick on them? We have enough work to do on our own to climb the soccer ladder without any obstructions from the game's administrators.'<sup>41</sup>

Off the pitch FIFA treated the Jamaican team as a footballing 'poor relation.'

Maybe the Jamaican team were out of their depth on the field, but something significant happened within the stadium itself. The Parc des Princes is the home ground for Paris St Germain a team with a reputation for a racist following amongst its fans. A black friend who'd lived in Paris told of an experience watching Liverpool F.C. there in the European cup in 1996: 'It was an incredible atmosphere and the racism was very open. It was funny in a way because we were standing with

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Thorpe 'Batistuta dances around bewildered Reggae Boyz' *The Guardian*, 22 June 1998 p. 3

<sup>41</sup> Robbie Earle 'Bully boys pick on the small fry' *The Observer*, 28 June 1998 p. 5

the Paris St Germain fans and one of the skinheads came up to me and advised me to go and stand somewhere else for my own safety!

At half time and along with a stream of Argentinean and Jamaican fans I made for the toilets. Descending down a long staircase, bordered by grim grey concrete walls this throng of multi-racial fans was confronted with the inscriptions of hate which laid claim to the ground and registered its history. Racist graffiti was plastered over virtually every surface of the toilets area. Above the sinks where a black man was washing his son's hands, read the inscription 'SKINHEADS' alongside scribbled Celtic Crosses and Swastikas. Elsewhere, FN stickers with a flame coloured red, white and blue were plastered on the cubicles, SS and Swastikas scratched into the surface of the metal doors. The fans seemed on the surface to ignore these racist outpourings. As I watched the little boys hands being washed, I noticed the Jamaican motto on the back of his gold and green shirt: 'Out of many, one goal!' Here a multi-cultural footballing reality was confronted with the subterranean traces of racist football culture. Turning to leave I looked up and daubed in English on the open door was the slogan 'WHITE POWER.' Ascending the stairs this image was etched on my mind and provided a stark reminder that the transformations manifest around this fixture and considerable numbers of black fans present was both a temporary and conditional phenomenon.

Jamaican support during France 98 provided a pretext for the diaspora to gather in one place. What was striking was that people of Jamaican descent had converged on Paris from a range of itinerant homes be they in New York, London or Birmingham. The other thing that was striking was the range backgrounds that Jamaican fans demonstrated in terms of age group, gender and class background. As we boarded the bus for the long drive back Calais and then via the channel tunnel to London, a man in his late forties sat down next to me. He hadn't been part of the outward journey which had been something of a carnival atmosphere, laced with duty free Remy Martine & Coca Cola, reggae music and fried chicken. The scene now after the match was altogether more subdued. The man sitting next to me seemed more than just a bit dejected from the 5-0 trouncing. He appeared a little remote and aloof and just sat there making no gestures towards conversation wearing a Jamaican

team shirt with a beaten up full size football on his lap. Occasionally, he'd lift his Jamaican team baseball cap off his head, then tug it down firmly and then rub his eyes. We sat together without passing a word as the bus cruised down the now dark motorway.

After about an hour and a half, I decided it was too long a journey to suffer alone in silence. We started to talk. My travelling companion's name was Walter, and his outward aloof appearance was for good reason. To my surprise he told me that he was one of Jamaica's 18 High Court Judges! Walter lived outside Kingston and he'd travelled to France to see the World Cup with a package deal, taking the opportunity to see Europe including Belgium, Luxembourg and Amsterdam. I told him that I couldn't imagine an English judge going to France to watch England play. 'Well they think of me as a bit of a radical back at home' he said. I asked him how many people had made the trip to from Jamaican to France. 'Quite a few, quite a few,' he replied. 'Probably about 5-600 and that's quite a lot when you consider what a small island Jamaica is compared to European countries.' We shared friendly conversation all the way to London about everything from the morality of coach Simoes's choice to take the controversial player Walter 'Blacka' Boyd to France, to Walter's knowledge of sociology and exposure to 'Haralambos' the A Level students' text book and bible. Here I was sitting discussing such things with a High Court Judge in a football shirt! The remarkable diversity found amongst Jamaican football fans seemed to be epitomised in this one unexpected moment.

### **'Noir, blanc et bleu?': France 98, nationalism and the return of Roland Barthes**

In an increasingly globalised world, sporting spectacles like the World Cup offer one of the last vestiges in which nationalism can be expressed ritually and celebrated. The sportswear companies, media corporations and the merchandising moguls set out their wares too, all vying for a piece of this festival of corporate multi-culturalism. It seemed apt that the final itself between Brazil and France, also staged a confrontation between the finalists' respective sponsors, sportswear giants Nike and Adidas. Before a ball was kicked Nike edged its superiority in the product placement stakes. Nike overtook Adidas in the Financial Times

World Cup sponsors index, which measured brand exposure through the teams wearing the various companies' kit.<sup>42</sup>

The World Cup tournament provided the ultimate stage for the 'world game' and the world was watching as the host nation triumphed. But something else beyond corporate fortunes was also at stake that merits serious attention. What makes football interesting is that it provides one of the few spheres in which ideas about identity, ethnicity and race can be expressed, embodied and performed. It offers the possibility for nationhood to be represented through, either: a grotesque pageant of fixed archetypes; or, as a carnival in which the circumscriptions of the national body politic – particularly in terms of race - can be breached, even partially dissolved giving life to new possibilities.

The potential of national sport to possess a recombinant potential was particularly relevant in the aftermath of the French victory. Two years prior to *la Coupe Du Monde*, National Front leader, Jean Marie Le Pen famously rebuked the French team – particularly those whose family origins lay outside of France - for their lack of zeal when singing the Marseillaise. Arguing against the presence of these players, he said: 'It's unnecessary to bring players in from abroad and baptise them as the French team.'<sup>43</sup> The French national team displayed an incredible diversity and many of its stars were born outside of metropolitan France, including Marcel Desailly (Accra, Ghana), Christian Karambeu (New Caledonia), Patrick Viera (Dakar, Senegal) and Lilian Thuram (Pointe a Pitre, Guadeloupe). Still others would qualify as what Le Pen would call 'Francais de souche recente' meaning that such players were not 'real Frenchmen' because their parents were too recent migrants.<sup>44</sup> This list included Alain Boghossian (Armenia), Vincent Candela (Italy), Bernard Diomende (Guadeloupe), Youri Djorkaeff (former Yugoslavia), Thierry Henry (Guadeloupe) and the goal scoring hero of the victory over Brazil Zinedine Zidane (Algeria).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Both Nike and Adidas passed the 1,000 point mark with their closest rivals Umbro at 313. On the eve of the final Nike had were ahead with 1150.4 points with Adidas trailing with 1083.8 *Financial Times*, 11 July 1998

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Nick Fraser 'Cup of Joy' *The Guardian G2*, 15 July 1998 p.2-3

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p 2

<sup>45</sup> Paul Webster 'United they Stand' *The Guardian*, 14 July 1998 p. 3

The victory itself seemed immediately to be a triumph over Le Pen's version of racially exclusive nationalism. Philippe Jérôme, correspondent for the French Communist Party paper *l'Humanité*, wrote:

The two goals of Zidane in the world cup final did more for the equal rights of citizens than a thousand speeches from the left denouncing racism and the policies of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front.<sup>46</sup>

Jérôme was not alone in claiming the victory marked the arrival of a multi-racial French nation. A host of people from the pantheon of French cultural and academic celebrities lauded the triumph as the moment of imminent togetherness. This included people as diverse as film stars and musicians like Catherine Deneuve, Gerard Depardieu and Johnny Hallyday to the likes of Isabelle Huppert and Jacques Chirac. Nick Fraser wrote of an incident he overheard near the Hôtel de Ville in which an elderly white French woman said gratefully to two Arab girls: 'If we win it will be because of you... we should have had blacks and Arabs in the team earlier. If we had done we would have won more matches.'<sup>47</sup> Equally, it would be wrong to dismiss the presence of Arabs and black citizens among the celebrating crowds, given that the French had suburbanised urban poverty and confined its immigrant populations to the desolate *Banlieue* ring of Paris. The visual presence on the Champs Elysées of these otherwise urban outcasts was significant in that it registered their presence in the national imagination.

In the aftermath of the French victory one could almost sense the excitement of cultural critics on the Left as the pages of the liberal press turned and quivered each morning in Paris and London. However, such new found enthusiasm shown in both Britain and France runs perilously close to a kind of shallow *Zeitgeist* hermeneutics, a syndrome that cultural studies – especially that inspired by literary criticism - has all too often been guilty of. One detail quickly dismissed was Le Pen's response. 'I claim this victory for the National Front who designed its framework' he said. Le Pen's apparent change of tack was thought by many to be evidence of a deceitful and fickle opportunism. But perhaps this

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<sup>46</sup> Philippe Jérôme 'Zizou's two goals did more for the equal rights of citizens than a thousand speeches denouncing racism' *The Guardian* G2, 15 July 1998 p. 3

<sup>47</sup> Fraser *Op cit.* p. 2

apparent change of heart is not as complete as it might seem, and Le Pen's views need not be necessarily in direct opposition to the nascent celebration of French diversity in sport. Le Pen argued that France could be 'composed of different races and religions'<sup>48</sup> so long as they were French first and foremost. Such a discussion recalls the observations of another famous Frenchman, Roland Barthes.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes' classic study in semiology, he recounts being handed a copy of *Paris Match* in a barber shop:

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great empire, that all her sons, without colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.<sup>49</sup>

The connection here between the black French soldier and black athletes recalls Norbert Elias' famous discussion of the 'civilising process' and the key role that sport has played in what he referred to as the internal pacification of Western societies.<sup>50</sup> But here sport might play a significant role in transition from colonial to postcolonial government. In fact, one might read the fervour generated over the multi-racial French national team as the return – albeit in a neo-colonial form – of a Barthesian myth.

For Barthes, a mythical concept derives its power not from didacticism or propaganda, but rather from its ability to naturalise what is essentially an ideological relation. It is through such an embodied implicitness that its mythic definitions work. So, the picture of the Negro soldier saluting the Tricolour conjures the concept of French imperialism without naming it, or announcing its arrival. Rather, it is presented as a natural state, 'as if the signifier *gave foundation* to the signified.'<sup>51</sup> Similarly we might

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes *Mythologies* Paladin Books 1973 p.116

<sup>50</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning *The Quest for Excitement: Sports and Leisure in the Civilising Process* Blackwell 1969

<sup>51</sup> Barthes *op cit.* P.130

think of the spectacle of a multi-racial French team as the embodiment of a mythical concept. 'For no man or woman really believed in a multi-cultural France,' wrote Nick Fraser. 'They left what they considered to be a grotesque illusion to Americans, British and Dutch... French people probably merely wanted foreigners to be *more like themselves*'[emphasis added].<sup>52</sup> The French version of diversity amounted to little more than an assimilationist nationalism that insists on a sovereign French identity above all else. It is perhaps not surprising that its new hero, Zinedine 'Zizou' Zidane is the son of an Algerian soldier - a 'harki' - who came to France after fighting alongside the colonialists *in opposition* to Algerian independence.<sup>53</sup> Multi-racial France – as a mythical concept - embodies within the theatre of national sport complex combinations of national transcendence and neo-colonial accommodation.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the intersections between gender, nation and class that police the boundaries of acceptance in soccer culture. Football provides a key context in which racial exclusions and negotiations are manifest both within the local and the national body politic. These issues have been explored through looking at the growth in black participation within the English game. The support garnered by the Jamaican national team from black metropolitan communities has indicated a potential for English football to move in other directions. Equally, they point to the scope of black inclusion in football and its limitations, be it by the defining centre of English football fan culture or the variegations of French racism. Jamaican fans, in contrast, utilised the rhetoric of nationhood that confounded any simple notion of its borders. This provided a stark contrast to assimilating European nationalisms for whom passports to entry for black citizens are always issued with specific terms and conditions.

The support garnered by the Jamaican national team from black metropolitan communities showed the vital and animate the resonance of Caribbean belonging within the diaspora in Europe. As one of the

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<sup>52</sup> Fraser op cit. p. 3

<sup>53</sup> Webster *Op cit.*

hostesses said as the bus drove through Brixton in the early hours of the morning returning from Cardiff: 'We're all Jamaicans, ain't we?' The itinerant belonging to England - often challenged by popular racism both in football and outside – coexisted with a strong commitment to the vibrant diasporic registers of Jamaican football. Uniquely, it fused the dancehall and the football stadium engendering a supporter culture that was open and inclusive regardless of gender, age, class or even colour. No doubt the Jamaican Football Federation made the best of the situation financially through sponsorship, paid appearance and friendly games. But equally, football momentarily gave a glimpse of unity to this fractured Caribbean nation best expressed in the utopian tones of reggae music. Tony Rebel chants these telling lines in Jamaica Unlimited's *Rise Up*:

Because of you.

Progress.

I have seen oneness and difference in this country.

Don't be intimidated, even when tested.

Small axe can fell a big tree.

Corporate football has little room for 'small acts' like the Jamaican national team, who may never be able to fell name-brand sponsored footballing giants like Brazil (Nike) or France (Adidas). But the significance of football as a form of popular culture is in the identifications and definitions it allows to be articulated and defined ritually. This is expressed in space that lay between the fan collective and their team's iconic status. It is important to look at these encounters for they show how the micro-politics of race and nation is lived.

This paper is drawn from a book that will be published by Berg next year entitled *The changing face of football: racism, multiculturalism and identity in the English game*.