

# Tony Blackshaw

## Community by Virtue of the Media and the Spectacle? Deconstructing Anti-Racism Campaigns in English Professional Football



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# **Football and its Communities 2003-2005**

- **Football Foundation Funded Project**
- **Leeds United, Manchester City and Sheffield United**
- **Researchers from Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University**



# Aim of the Research

**...to provide the Football Foundation... and the wider football industry with a new vision and understanding of how to engage with ‘communities’ of various types**



# Football and its ‘black communities’

 Caryl Phillips on supporting Leeds United in the 1960s and 1970s:

*‘The same people who would hug you when Leeds scored (which we often did), would also shout ‘nigger’ and ‘coon’ should the opposing team have the temerity to field a player of the darker hue’.*





**Yet.....**

**Black figures still cut peripheral figures  
even amongst supporters of clubs in the  
most ‘multicultural’ of British cities and  
towns**



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‘We are Leeds...’



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# Anti-racism campaigners



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# FURD: Anti-racism campaigner at Sheffield



**football  
unites  
racism divides**



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# In my view:

**On the whole anti-racist campaigning has hitherto been poor at including football supporters as active participants in anti-racism campaigns through community action**



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# National Anti-Racism Week of Action in Football



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# Leeds United versus Blackburn Rovers match during the National Anti-Racism Week of Action



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# **Selling the idea of successful ‘community integration’...**

**Or the idea that community life is not  
just outside *your* door, but it is also  
right there in *our* stadium.**

**But.....**



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# Main focus of anti-racist strategies

Two strategies:

- vocabulary of community through the writing of a variety media discourses
- anti-racist spectacles in the hope that supporters will respond by repudiating discrimination and prejudice based on ethnic difference



# **The idea being that...**

**it is at the very of heart football's community - the stadiums - that the rhetorical effectiveness of media persuasion can be effectively combined with the spectacle of manipulation, which together will prevail against the irrationalities of racism in the game**



# The Match Day

- **Kick it Out' flags**
- **Black Referee**
- **Programme: Leeds United used the 'voices' of its players to speak up against racism & ran two features on Albert Johanneson, the club's black star from the 1960s**
- **Lucas Radebe: Leeds United & Kaiser Chiefs**
- **High school projects in Leeds and Durban**



# The Spectacle (Debord, 1967)

***‘The world the spectacle holds up to view is at once here and elsewhere; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience. The commodity world is thus shown as it really is, for its logic is one with men's estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce’ – Thesis 37.***

***‘The spectacle exists in a concentrated or a diffuse form depending on the necessities of the particular stage of misery which it denies and supports. In both cases, the spectacle is nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil center of misery’ - Thesis 60***



# The Mighty Zulu Nation



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# The metaphor

was ostensibly the link between and the 'local' and 'global' in the fight against racism in football as students from a local school and two Durban schools joined the Mighty Zulu nation in an altogether now chorus of the world community as one



# However,

.... what this created was the spectacle of manipulation based on a kind of manufactured 'exoticism' that operated as a contradictory, or more precisely ambivalent, form of cultural 'imperialism', which ended up 'creating' stereotypes of those who were performing, to the extent that it rendered a distorted reality about what it means to be 'black' and 'African'



# A 'performative' community

which was not only staged managed rather than organic, but which was also shot through with a profound anxiety about political correctness, and at every level, irony



# **As Baudrillard might have put it:**

**at Elland Road the spectacle replaced the deluded revolutionary idea of trying to find a utopian community with ‘the ‘fateful’ strategy of escaping from the world of...phenomena into the world of simulation, into an artificial world that was, potentially, virtually perfect’ (quoted in Turner (2005: 12)).**



# And...

- **The principal absentees from the larger performance were local black people in all their ‘Leedsiness’**
- **In the absence of the ‘real thing’, the palette of this performative community had to brighten its colours and deepen its textures with something staged**



# **In a nutshell, what was performed**

- **Had no large meaning for football supporters & as a community intervention it had little effect**
- **A staged portrayal of ethnic stereotyping - albeit concocted and performed by 'authentic' Zulus.**
- **Treated to a spectacle of simulation that was not only culturally blinkered in its struggle for political correctness, but which also perpetuated the very racism it was attempting to alleviate**



# Conclusions

- **The event dealt with things largely outside football fans day-to-day experiences and as a consequence the moral themes hovering over the issues associated with racism remained merely part of the spectacle itself**
- **Should we not be surprised that football supporters have stereotypical assumptions about ethnic minority groups when faced with such a candid exhibition of cliché?**



# What football needs are:

- Initiatives that deal in the *density* of the game's collective relationships, not in their epic scale
- And which allow football's traditional constituencies to assert themselves in their time-honoured loud ways at the same time as allowing entry to those claiming hitherto unimagined rights to space in the game, in the process going some way to helping it find for itself a new kind of dignity

