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Title:

‘Yid’ as an Epithet and Term of Endearment in English Football: A Case Study of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club

Abstract:

This paper explains the contested uses and meanings of the controversial term ‘Yid’ in English football fan culture through a case study of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. Tottenham fans have a historically complicated relationship with ‘Yid’. The origins of this complexity stem from Tottenham traditionally attracting Jewish fans due to its location to nearby Jewish communities. As a consequence, Tottenham Hotspur is perceived as a ‘Jewish’ club and their fans have suffered anti-Semitic abuse from opposing supporters who have used ‘Yid’ as a racial epithet to refer to them. In response, Tottenham fans have appropriated and embraced the term as one of endearment for some forty years by identifying themselves as the ‘Yid Army’ in chants and songs.

The paper maps the different uses of ‘Yid’ in football fandom on a new continuum, making central the cultural *context* in which it is used, together with the *intent* underpinning its use. Empirical research findings suggest that there were – and remain for some Tottenham fans – different intentions behind the linguistic reclamation of ‘Yid’: *value reversal*; *neutralization*; and *stigma exploitation*. Furthermore, some Tottenham fans are de-sensitised to the socio-historical meanings associated with the word ‘Yid’ and do not associate it with Judaism, nor as a racial epithet; it is simply a word synonymous with ‘Tottenham’. Consequently, this paper rejects the ‘zero tolerance’ policy on the use of ‘Yid’ in English football and calls for an appreciation

of the intricate nature of language and the fluidity and temporality of linguistic reclamation and 'ownership'.

Key words: antisemitism; football; Judaism; linguistic reclamation; Tottenham Hotspur; Yid.

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Biographical Notes:

Dr Emma Poulton is a Lecturer in Sociology of Sport within the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. Her research interests centre upon media representations of sport, in particular national identity, football-related violence and football fan culture; antisemitism in football; and forms of crime and deviance in the context of sport.

She is co-author (with Laura Kelly and Peter Millward) of a forthcoming book *Sport and Crime: A Critical Perspective* (Routledge) and co-editor (with Martin Roderick) of *Sport in Films* (Routledge, 2008). She has also published in a range of peer-reviewed journals including: *Sociological Research Online*; *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*; *Sociology of Sport Journal*; *Sport in Society*; *Media, Culture, Society*; *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* and *Internet Journal of Criminology*.

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