



## Rivalries and Racisms: 'Closed' and 'Open' Islamophobic Dispositions Amongst Football Supporters

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### Abstract

Racism in football has been the topic of much academic discussion. However, the issue of Islamophobic racism has received very little attention. This article looks at Middlesbrough FC and Newcastle United FC fan discussions around the 'Mido affair' in August 2007 to consider the issue and uses this evidence to discuss the effectiveness of the football Faith Summit's policy suggestions to combat Islamophobia in football. The unfolding argument is that Middlesbrough FC and Newcastle United FC both use 'open' and 'closed' Islamophobic positions opportunistically to express their feelings of rivalry toward each other and the emergent policy suggestions are that the football authorities should seek to work with football fans, rather than potentially punish them, in order to reduce anti-Muslim sentiment in spectator football.

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**Keywords:** *Football Fandom; Islamophobia; Rivalry; Racism; E-Zine; Frame Analysis*

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### Introduction

1.1 On 26 August 2007, Middlesbrough Football Club (FC) hosted a football match against local rivals Newcastle United FC. The game finished in an entertaining draw, however the event was particularly noteworthy because a large number of Newcastle United fans had repeatedly chanted that Middlesbrough's new star signing, the Egyptian forward, Ahmed Hossam Hussein Abdelhamid (known as Mido) was a terrorist bomber. This is interesting because it is believed that this abuse was probably not personally about Mido but provided a conduit to an Islamophobic conflation of Muslims with terrorism. Two days later, on 28 August 2007, *The Guardian* newspaper displayed the front-page headline 'Islamophobia: a new racism in football?' which led to an article that discussed the Mido affair. Later that week, the same newspaper argued that Newcastle United and its fans should be severely punished for the incident and subjected to police intervention (Hyde 2007). Talk of coercive punishments continued in the months that followed, as it was reported that the English Football Association (FA) met with delegates from the Metropolitan police, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the National Association of Muslim Police at football's first Faith Summit. The aim of this meeting was to stamp out religious abuse – particularly aimed at Muslims and Jews - in football (Butt 2008). The emergent policy implications were that clubs with fans found guilty of such abuse would face either league point deductions – mirroring moves in France – or the possibility of playing a set number of matches 'behind closed doors' (Butt 2008).<sup>[1]</sup> This article will look at Middlesbrough and Newcastle United fan discussions about the event to argue that football supporters both use and attack racisms – such as Islamophobia – in order to (re)invigorate sporting rivalries. The claim is made that such issues are centrally related to rivalry but do take on racist forms which may potentially present problems in the context of football (and beyond) and this evidence will be used to critique the suggested policies which emerged from the football Faith Summit.

### Football, Racism and Religious Intolerance

2.1 It is well established that football grounds have – at least in the past – provided an arena in which prejudiced values have prospered (see for instance Back et al. 2001, Garland and Rowe 2001, Robson 2004 and Jarvie 1991). However, Williams et al. (1992 [1984]) have pointed out that it is uncertain whether such problems emerge in society and are brought into the football stadium or are developed in the highly passionate – though often prejudiced – football environment. Thus, spectator racism has long been conceived as problem within football in both the UK and abroad. It is important to follow Back et al. (1999)

by recognising that not all racist discourses are linked to extreme forms of fandom, such as hooliganism. Rather, many take many banal forms embedded into normalised supporter practices and discourses. Thus, there is often a need to unpick the 'racist/hooligan couplet' and, if necessary, differentiate between the two (Back et al. 1999). Studies which have explored notions of religious intolerance in football have often focussed upon anti-Semitic dispositions. This form of research has explored both 'everyday' and extreme forms of prejudice. At the 'everyday' level, Williams et al. (1992 [1984]: 57) tell the story of many young English fans at the 1982 World Cup joining in anti-Semitic songs 'for a laugh', whereas at a more explicitly socially problematic level, the National Front, who reportedly started many of these chants, used the situation to gain support for their party.<sup>[2]</sup> Also, Merkel's (1997) research suggests that the Heysel disaster provided an opportunity for Italian and English neo-Nazi groups to develop a trans-European network of anti-Semitic parties. In Germany, some 'foreign' and Jewish players have been consistently verbally attacked through abusive terrace chants (Merkel et al. 1997: 156). Arguably two of the most common ways in which prejudices are normalised in sport are through 'jokes' and stereotypes. For instance, Crolley and Hand (2002; 2007) argue that the newspaper press in Britain, France and Spain draw upon unflattering stereotypes to denigrate national team opponents in their reportage of football news events. Similarly, King (2006: 342) argues that 'jokes' about Asians in the US '(dis)figure Asians and American-Asians, simultaneously effacing and defacing them [by] reinforcing dominant ideas about Asian (American) masculinity' and Hill (2001 [1989]: 151) reports that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Liverpool FC's first black player, Howard Gayle repeatedly had to endure his teammates' (including the white Zimbabwean goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar) culturally ignorant 'humour'. Explicitly addressing the issue of religion in sport, stereotypes and jokes do confer levels of prejudice. For instance, Long et al. (1997: 256) show how, when questioned about the lack of Asian-origin players in professional Rugby League teams, a club chairman 'joked' that 'Asians can't wear turbans in a scrum'. The Mido incident brought the issue of Islamophobia, or at least anti-Muslim racism, in football to a public debating point after the way in which Newcastle United fans stereotyped him as a terrorist bomber. Despite this, Burdsey (2007: 57) argues that identifiable Islamophobia in English football is a relatively recent phenomenon which has received relatively little academic attention. This article will begin to fill this void by principally comparing Middlesbrough and Newcastle United fan views about the Islamophobic abuse given by the latter group to former's Egyptian centre-forward, Mido.

## Islamophobia in Sport

**3.1** Burdsey (2004; 2004a; 2006a) convincingly argues that it is highly unlikely that clubs deliberately set out to exclude Muslims and other British-Asian football players but points out that their policies and procedures do provide this result. Instead, Burdsey (2006) suggests that football clubs draw upon a range of 'commonsensical' popular discourses to account for the lack of British-Asian professionals. This claim could be evidenced by the football 'pop-writer' Dougie Brimson's (2006: 180) question:

[D]oes anyone believe that they [football clubs], along with every other club in the land, haven't considered the impact a twenty-goal-a-season, British-born Asian striker would have on their balance sheets? Are the anti-racists so arrogant that they continue to believe that clubs located in the middle of predominantly Asian communities, such as Bradford, Leicester and Luton, haven't even thought about the commercial possibilities a locally born player would provide?

**3.2** Instead of looking for the underlying and structural reasons, Bains and Johal (1998) argue that 'commonsense' reasons prevail, such as the idea that British-Asians cannot play football, consume the wrong foods or have a lack of 'natural' enthusiasm for the game: Brimson (2006: 180-182) offers all of these suggestions when answering his question. Viewed in this way, an 'everyday' level of racism can be found in the way sport-related groups do not question the reasons why there are apparent progression problems for British-Asian athletes. At an amateur level, Burdsey (2004a) states that British-Asian football players are forced to assimilate into white hegemonic 'lad' culture in order to fit in with their team-mates. Back et al. (2001: 139-140) substantiate this claim with a vignette which recalls how a British-Pakistani amateur football player in Manchester was made to feel uncomfortable by teammates after he took them to his family's 'dry' curry house in the Rusholme district of the city: in short, Back *et al.* are inferring that the only way Muslim players are accepted into British, non-Muslim sports' teams is if they are to be subsumed by white, masculine values.

**3.3** Many of these themes find resonance in Burdsey's (2007a) study of the Bolton-born British-Pakistani boxer Amir Khan. Burdsey points out that Khan has been accepted by the British public because he – through his hair style, clothes and speech patterns (2007a: 618) – is presented as a non-traditional Muslim. He argues that Khan symbolises more hybrid, diasporic identities amongst many young British-Asian Muslims who fuse elements of global, British and Asian cultures to produce new forms of identification. So, for instance, Khan regularly speaks of his British pride but is unashamed of his Islamic heritage and faith whilst also denouncing terrorism. Indeed, Burdsey also points out that the 'Khan army' of supporters combine English football and Pakistani cricket attire whilst his father publically wears a Union flag waistcoat. Burdsey suggests that this cultural hybridity allows the British media to stress non-Islamic dimensions of his personality and as a result some believe that Khan and his father have created a degree of (extremely conditional) cultural harmony in an era in which Islamophobia has become a widespread prejudice (Burdsey 2007a: 620).

## Unpacking 'Islamophobia'

**4.1** Rana (2007: 148) argues that the term 'Islamophobia' has a fairly recent origin, after it emerged as a neologism in the 1970s to explain pre-existing racism felt by Muslim populations in Western societies. Miles and Brown (2003: 26-30) agree that whilst the label is new, prejudice against Muslims has been evident in European societies since the at least the Middle Ages. Still, Vertovec (2002: 33) argues that Islamophobic attitudes have massively increased in the post 9/11 era and are 'sold' by drawing upon pre-

existing xenophobic perceptions which unproblematically conflate Muslims with 'asylum seekers' (see also Larsson 2005: 39; and Meer 2006: 46). These claims are strengthened by Miles and Brown (2003: 164) who argue that many white non-Muslim citizens in Britain object to changes in 'their' country which have been made in order to accommodate (British or non-British) Muslim 'outsiders'. Islamophobic values are also transmitted through the conflation of Muslims with terrorism. In the post 9/11 era, many scholars have argued that the right-wing media and far-Right political parties have used the threat of bombings as a pretext to develop prejudices against Muslims (see for instance, Larsson 2005; Marranci 2004: 103; McDonald 2002 and Sheridan 2006) and Abbas (2007) argues that this has increased both the volume and level of anti-Islamic sentiment in Western societies. However, as a counter to this point, Meer (2006) and Modood (2005) both argue that the dynamics of racism against Muslims have changed – in some ways for the better – in the post 9/11 era with such people becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere and problematising such confluences. Additionally, a related way in which Islamophobia may have grown is suggested by both Halliday (1999) and Marranci (2004), who argue that the perceived level of 'Muslim aggression' has created Western fears and anxieties. All of these points highlight Poynting and Mason's (2007) suggestion that 'Islamophobia' means different things - with different victims and consequences – across the world.

**4.2** In 1996, the Runnymede Trust<sup>[3]</sup> established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia and published its report, *Islamophobia: a Challenge for Us All*, a year later. A key influence of the report was that it devised eight distinctive features in which Islamophobic actions could be felt. Each of these potential issues contained 'closed' and 'open' views toward Islam. The common reading was that the closed views should be interpreted as prejudiced, whereas the open views should not. However, Larsson (2007) argues that whilst this taxonomy does have some uses, it is not particularly helpful in solving the methodological problems to the measurement of Islamophobia in society. Further, Allen (2007) argues that because the Runnymede Trust's report focussed upon 'closed views of Islam', it suggests that those who wanted to detract from, or dismiss, Islamophobia could do so with a suggestion that 'open views to Islam' equalled 'Islamophilia'. Thus, an argument emerged that the only solution being put forward by the Commission was an abnormal liking for Muslims/Islam. Therefore Allen suggests that the report unintentionally reinforced a duality of the love/hate of Muslim and ignored all moderate opinions. So, the report gave all 'grey' opinions the opportunity to gain momentum and form the basis of indirect forms of Islamophobia, which are not detected as 'racist' (Allen 2007). Halliday (1999: 896) also criticises the report by suggesting that whilst 'there is such a prejudice as denoted by the term of "Islamophobia"', the label is misleading, because contemporary prejudices exist against Muslims (the people) rather than Islam (the religion). Further, Richardson (2005) has argued that the validity and usefulness of 'Islamophobia' to analyse and account for discrimination suffered by Muslims is open to debate. Indeed, Richardson (2005) contends that the Runnymede Trust's 'closed' views on Islam imply culturally inflexible, religious reductionist assumptions. He also states that this argument entails a clear aversion to any religious expression that would deny the accumulation of rights, such as the inequality Muslim women experience compared to women of most other religions (Richardson 2005). This rejection does not attack 'Islam' as such, but rather some Islamic beliefs. Typically, this discourse would align itself against Islamic fundamentalism but those who draw upon this idea are equally keen to dismiss any other religious violence.

**4.3** There is much debate over what racist dispositions Islamophobia constitutes. To begin to explore these notions, it is important to differentiate between various definitions of the disposition and to do this an analysis of the literature suggests that 'narrow' and 'broad' definitional positions can be adopted. Halliday (1999) exemplifies the narrow definitional perspective by arguing that Islamophobia should be seen as solely a fear of the religion of Islam and that any racism or exclusion experienced by Muslims should be termed 'anti-Muslimism' (Halliday 1999: 898). However, taking on a broader definitional position, Modood (1997: 4) argues that Islamophobia is more a form of cultural racism than a religious intolerance. He argues that cultural racism is a form of 'new' exclusion which, should be taken as seriously as 'traditional' racism (Modood 1992; 2007). Traditional forms of racism relied upon prejudices which could be justified by the categorisation of groups of people into biologically defined races, from which individual characteristics could be said to be reducible to genetic differences (Barkan 1992). However, Gilroy (2005 [1987]) and Miles and Brown (2003 [1989]) argue that contemporary racism has moved beyond this to be largely defined in terms of insurmountable cultural differences between ethnically defined groups. Barkan (1992) and Meer and Noorani (2008) suggest that biologically racist claims have become untenable in the post-Holocaust and post-colonial era. Thus, racist dispositions have tended to move away from biology and towards culture, even though some forms of cultural racism predate this period. Today, cultural racisms are often propelled by conceptions of (and threats to) national belonging which both blur the distinction between race and nation and rely upon semantic ambiguity. Viewed this way, Gilroy suggests that the excluded are not always conceived as a rival nation, but can be any 'other' group. He points out that British-born 'Asians' often constitute this group in the UK and are therefore viewed as a threat to 'Britishness' (Gilroy 2005 [1987]: 45). Hence, Meer (2006: 36) states that Islamophobia incorporates a confluence of traditional (biological) and new (cultural) racism. These general points are backed by Werbner (2005), who argues that Islamophobia is a particular kind of racism that is ground in the fears of social and economic deprivation drawn from the long-standing relationship between Islam and the West. The position adopted here is similar to those adopted by both Modood (1997) and Werbner (2005) in viewing Islamophobia as a broad form of cultural racism rather than a prejudice which is necessarily restricted to an objection to the perceived values of Islam. Nevertheless, whilst broad, this definition has clear limits to its elasticity in so far as only including prejudice against Muslims, meaning that the broadest of all positions, offered by Marranci (2004: 115-6), who defined Islamophobia as a phobia of multiculturalism, has not been assumed. Therefore, this article looks at the potential resonance of both 'closed' attitudes (viewed by the Runnymede Trust as negative and potentially hostile stereotypes) and also 'open' views (i.e. those seen by the Runnymede Trust as not prejudiced) toward Muslims in English football, by exploring Middlesbrough and Newcastle United fans' opinions about the abuse given to Middlesbrough's Egyptian striker Mido at the match played between the two clubs in August 2007.

## Methodology

**5.1** Middlesbrough and Newcastle sit just over 30 miles apart in north-east England. Middlesbrough, which lies to the south of the River Tees in north-east England, has a population of 140 849 residents of whom 6219 (4.4 percent) are from ethnic minority groups; 3646 (2.6 percent) are of Pakistani origin, the largest ethnic minority group in the borough (OPCS 2002). Webster et al. (2004) argue that Middlesbrough has experienced significant social, economic and cultural change over the last few decades resulting from the decline of heavy industry (particularly steel-making and chemicals) and has an unemployment rate of almost double the national average (Webster et al. 2004). The local service sector's domination of the local economy largely explains the relatively high proportion of women who work full-time, against a background of declining male full-time employment. Webster et al. (2004) argue that this makes some of Middlesbrough's 25 wards amongst the most deprived in the country, with the town the ninth poorest local authority district in the UK. Middlesbrough FC, the only professional club in the town, resides in the Premier League (the highest division in English football) and was formed in 1876. It won its only major trophy, the League Cup, in 2004 and has arguably experienced its greatest success in the post-Bosman era,<sup>[4]</sup> in which many football teams have been composed of players from a number of countries outside the UK.

**5.2** Newcastle, informally regarded as the capital of the north-east, is situated on the northern bank of the River Tyne and has a population of 259 537 (OPCS 2002). The non-white population of the city is 17 852, which accounts for 6.88 percent of the local population; 4842 (1.87 percent) are Pakistani/British-Pakistani, which is the largest ethnic minority group in the city. It has an unemployment rate of 4.68 percent: higher than the national average of 3.35 percent (OPCS 2002). Newcastle United is well renowned for its large, passionate fan base (Williams 1996) but has not won a major football trophy since 1955, when it attained the FA Cup. Despite a number of 'runner-up' prizes, it last won a major league title in 1926/7, but due to its supporters (its average attendance is around 50000 people per game, compared to Middlesbrough's 27000 supporters) it is widely regarded as the 'biggest' club in the north-east. Interestingly, BBC Sport (2001) point out that – at over 80 percent – both Middlesbrough and Newcastle United have amongst the highest percentages of locally born fans in the English Premier League, drawing the vast majority of their fanbase from their immediate localities.

**5.3** Fan discourse was collected through 'e-zine messageboard' comments. E-zines are best considered as a developing part of fanzine culture, in that they are the electronic editions of paper fanzines, or are online fanzines in their own right. Fanzines initially burst into football culture in the 1980s, largely as a response to widespread conflation of football support with right wing hooliganism. Many fanzine editors saw a need for football fans to develop their own voices to express dissatisfaction at such allegations (Jary et al. 1991). According to Nash (2000), a major reason why fanzines are sociologically interesting in the study of football fandom is that they offer a democratic arena for supporters' socio-cultural and political concerns to be aired. E-zines heighten the discursive dimension of fanzines by providing online messageboards which any fan can leave comments on and debate with his/her fellow supporters. Although there are some e-zines which are almost exclusively used by non-match attending fans (for instance those which have been setup by fans who do not live in the UK) there are also fanzines produced by such supporters. This type of e-zine was avoided because I wanted to look at only *traditional* supporters: therefore e-zines where fans talk about match-day experiences were chosen. Giulianotti (2002: 33-4), King (2002 [1998]: 91-5), Redhead (1997) and Sandvoss (2003) all agree that *traditional* forms of fandom principally exist through match day attendance and are different to *consumer-type* supporters who show looser attachments. Thus, as Nayak (2003; Nayak 2003a) found in his study of 'real Geordies' in Newcastle, football support plays a big part in traditional fans identities in social contexts which are not immediately related to sport.<sup>[5]</sup>

**5.4** Throughout the research, data was drawn from two unnamed e-zines – one associated to each team - which are the electronic versions of the two clubs' best known fanzines. Although the original purpose of the research was to explore fan perceptions of the incident, given that some of the discourse could be termed Islamophobic, both the e-zine and the individual posters' identities remain confidential. This is felt to be necessary, given that e-zine moderators – that is the people who control the messageboards – would regularly delete Islamophobic posts to reduce possible offence and controversy caused on the forum. Indeed, many of the comments used in this research (especially those which were particularly hostile to Muslims, beyond the context of sport, in July 2005) were removed from the messageboard very shortly after they had been posted. Given that the purpose of this research is not to 'name and shame' those who make controversial claims but to try to look to the motivations and structural reasons why such beliefs are held, it was decided that a completely confidential approach should be adopted.<sup>[6]</sup>

**5.5** E-zine data was principally collected in late August 2007. The data is therefore mainly drawn from fan discourse surrounding the Mido incident, using a purposive sampling strategy which involved taking into account only messageboard threads which related to the incident. This data was analysed using a frame analysis technique. In 1974, Erving Goffman pioneered this method with his book *Frame Analysis: an essay on the organisation of experience*. In this text, he outlined a methodological need to look at the ways in which individuals organise their experiences into meaningful activities and settle on a clear definition of *their* reality. To do this, he focussed upon letters published in news articles and viewed culture/identity as emerging from performative discourse. Goffman argued that discursive 'frames' were used by individuals to define and talk about situations, rendering 'what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful' (1974: 21). This allowed the research to develop both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, by looking at the incidence of frame repetition, while also including and discussing individual pieces of text.

**5.6** Following Goffman, 'master' and 'sub-ordinate' frames were devised. Master frames were the widest and most imprecise discourses which described the fan groups' attitudes. However, such master frames were so broad that they did not include the reasons why such broad positions had been taken. To access this data, master frames were broken into their sub-ordinate frames, which uncovered the reasons *why* fans

developed these positions. The developmental framing strategy epistemologically borrowed from Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded approach, in that initial frames were deductively formed using existing theories regarding the way politicians and everyday people articulate 'new racism' before inductively modifying the approach on the basis of the evidence.

## Data

**6.1** The match against Newcastle United was only Mido's second game for Middlesbrough – his first at the club's home of the Riverside Stadium – following his £6 million move from Tottenham Hotspur. He had scored on his debut and would later repeat the feat during the discussed match. Upon scoring, Mido turned to the Newcastle United fans and placed his finger to his lips to hush the abuse which was being directed at him.

**6.2** As a result, he received a yellow card, which signified a warning to him about his on-the-pitch behaviour.<sup>[7]</sup> The following thread, entitled 'At last we have a hero' gives some indication of how Mido had been accepted by Middlesbrough supporters:

Middlesbrough Fan [3]: Mido. Workrate, passion, fan interaction, goals. To me he is your typical sunday league footballer but with the class. A real roy of the rovers character.<sup>[8]</sup>

Middlesbrough Fan [4]: And he hates the Geordies. Just hope he keeps it up.

Middlesbrough Fan [1]: I concur ! Love the attitude, just what we need - Thumbs up !

Middlesbrough Fan [2]: As I said to the lad next to me after Mido's celebration in front of the Geordies 'hero is born'.

(All comments articulated on 28/8/2007)

**6.3** It is clear from this online exchange that Mido had been well-received by Middlesbrough supporters, for both his perceived dislike of Newcastle United (known as Geordies) and playing quality.<sup>[9]</sup> Cashmore (2002; 2003) and Chung (2003) argue that sports icons can change perceptions of other social groups and, with this in mind, it is reasonable to think that – at least whilst Mido is a hero amongst Middlesbrough supporters – fans will be less likely to act in racist ways toward Muslims. However, this notion must be problematised by looking to work offered by Gardiner (1998), who looks to the example of the French former Manchester United player, Eric Cantona. Although Cantona was hero-worshipped by the fans of clubs he played for, supporters of other clubs targeted him for abuse because he was not British. This culminated in Cantona retaliating with a 'kung-fu kick' on Crystal Palace fan, Matthew Simmons in 1995 (for further elaboration, see also Back et al. 2001: 185-92) and bears definite similarities to the way Newcastle United supporters goaded Mido, only this time the focus shifted from nationality to religion. It is interesting to note how Middlesbrough fans reacted to the situation. A clear indication of this is demonstrated in Table 1.

	<b>Master frame</b>		<b>Sub-ordinate frame</b>	
	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)
<i>Islamophobic</i>	1	0.39		
<i>Muslims are terrorists</i>			1	100.00
			1	100.00
<i>In Defence of Muslims</i>	2	0.79		
<i>The vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists</i>			2	100.00
			2	100.00
<i>In Defence of Islamophobic comments</i>	48	18.90		
<i>Just a joke/football banter</i>			36	75.00
<i>Racism exists all over the country</i>			7	14.58
<i>People are allowed to have their own views</i>			1	2.08
<i>Chants were no worse than those about overweight people</i>			2	4.17
<i>Only a minority of Newcastle United fans sung chants</i>			2	4.17
			48	100.00
<i>Attacking Islamophobic comments</i>	203	79.92		
<i>Verbal attacks by fans are the result of ignorance</i>			70	34.48
<i>Chants were the result of an ignorance that is particular to Newcastle United fans</i>			118	58.13
<i>Chants are an untruth: Mido is not a terrorist</i>			15	7.39
			203	100.00
	<b>254</b>	<b>100.00</b>		

**Table 1. Middlesbrough Fans' 'Mido Affair' Frames**

**6.4** Table 1 draws upon four crucial master frames. These include: a 'Islamophobic frame', which openly attacks Muslims and Islamic culture; a 'defence of Muslims frame', which operates as reasons to defend against the previously referenced discursive bracket; a 'defence of Islamophobic comments frame', which offers reasons why the Islamophobic frame discourse should be defended, and a 'attacking Islamophobic comments' frame which shows why the defence of Islamophobic sentiment should be discredited. The most readily used frame attacks Islamophobic discourse, accounting for almost four out of five comments (79.92 percent). The next most commonly used frame defends Islamophobic discourse and accounts for almost all of the remainder of the discussion (18.90 percent).

**6.5** Given the dearth of anti and defending Muslim frame discourse (the other two master frames), the two discursive brackets which will be analysed in this sub-section are the defending Muslim comments and the attacking Muslim sentiment. It is interesting to note that the attacking Muslim comments master frame was broken into three sub-ordinate brackets. The most common of these, accounting for 58.13 percent of comments within this frame claimed that the Islamophobic chants directed at Mido were the result of a form of ignorance which is particular to Newcastle United fans. A given example is provided by Fan [5], who argued:

It's amusing in that it speaks volumes about the mentality of their support. Utterly pathetic. The mindset of a 15 year old.  
Middlesbrough Fan [5] (27/8/2007)

**6.6** This condemnation of the prejudiced discourse tells us as much about football supporter rivalries as it does about opposition to racism. To explain, there are two types of stories which a member of a group, such as a fan of a football team, can tell: first, those that are *about us* and, second, those that are *about others*. Elias and Scotson (1965 [1994]) argue that the stories *we* tell about *ourselves* exaggerate positive events when compared to the way we report events which involve *'others'*, which are shown in a negative light. By Middlesbrough Fan [5] (and 117 separate other accounts) telling readers that the Islamophobic chants 'speak volumes about the mentality of their support', a clear link has been drawn between an undesirable form of behaviour (racist chanting) and the football 'enemy' of local rivals Newcastle United. According to Elias and Scotson's (1964 [1994]), this helps in-group members (i.e. Middlesbrough supporters) imagine themselves as superior to their out-group opponents (Newcastle United fans). In this way, Middlesbrough fans can imagine themselves as superior to Newcastle United followers whose 'racist' actions are to be condemned. This is especially the case given that the local and national media often

refer to Newcastle supporters as the 'best in the country' on account of their large fan base: this is a way of attacking such people that is likely to gather public empathy.

**6.7** The second most popular way of attacking the chants was to dismiss them as ignorant. In essence, this frame is similar to the previously discussed discourse but does not directly attach any sort of racism to Newcastle United fans (even though this is sometimes implied). It is interesting to note that whilst this discourse expressed disapproval of the chants, and in many cases Islamophobic racism, it was very rare that structural or underlying reasons were offered to explain the existence of prejudices. Indeed, one of the very few instances where such accounts were offered is given:

Newcastle United Fan [1]: The Mido chants on the whole were wrong, but this isn't an isolated incident like most think.

I blame the media..... here's why: The media always portray Muslims in a bad light. Everything regarding Muslims in the British media is negative. I have Muslim friends and they are nothing like the people shown on the news.

My point being is that this Anti-Muslim propaganda is being shoved down people's throats in the media daily. Thus causing people to stereotype. Is it true to think people associate Muslims with terrorism and suicide bombings?

Middlesbrough Fan [6]: So it wasn't Newcastle's fault but society's....

I suppose its society's fault your team is trophyless for 40 years too.  
(All comments articulated on 28/8/2007)

**6.8** Here, Newcastle United Fan [1] has entered the Middlesbrough fansite to apologise for his fellow supporters' actions and to explain why they acted like this. His argument is that the media is an ideological tool which influences the way many people think and the presence of the centre right media – with encoded Islamophobic and anti-Muslim views - have shaped the thoughts of his fellow Newcastle United fans. He is implying that many people in Britain – irrespective of their football allegiance or city of residence – are affected by the mildly racist media who have wrongly portrayed Muslims as potential terrorists and suicide bombers. However, this argument is immediately recast by some Middlesbrough supporters, such as Fan [6], by refusing to place blame onto any form of widespread ideological conditions, instead preferring to believe that this type of prejudice is typical of Newcastle United supporters. Middlesbrough Fan [6] compounds his claims by also mocking Newcastle United for not having won a major trophy since 1955 by suggesting that supporters like Newcastle United Fan [1] might also believe that this problem is society's rather than his team's. However, despite such rejections, the following virtual conversation makes clear that there are underlying reasons which influence many people's views:

Middlesbrough Fan [7]: I was at a Boro game once when we played Spurs and Boro fans were singing songs about Mido and his terrorist ways so we cant say much.

Middlesbrough Fan [4]: "his terrorist ways". You could have worded that better.

Middlesbrough Fan [7]: Reading it back it sounds worse than it was meant to be.  
(All comments articulated on 28/8/2007)

**6.9** Despite Mido's position as an idol amongst Middlesbrough fans, Fan [7] shows the depth of widespread Islamophobic racism between many UK citizens by referring to Mido's religion as a 'terrorist way'. This is interesting given that it is extremely likely that Middlesbrough Fan [7] wants to feel affection for his team's new key player, but still uncritically conflates Muslims with terrorists and even when challenged, fails to see how this attitude is wrong by arguing that it 'sounds worse than it was meant to be'. Discourse like this shows the extent to which, for many in the UK in the age of the 'war on terror', Muslims have automatically become cast as potential terrorists. Mido's failure to reverse the dispositions of his fans suggest that for some people, Islamophobic values are so deep seated that unless extensive cultural intervention programmes be developed in the wider society, there is a very real risk that an entire generation may absorb such values.<sup>[10]</sup> The final way of attacking the chants is to claim that they are an untruth, given that Mido is not a terrorist. This is a fairly minor discourse, accounting for just 7.39 percent within the 'attacking anti-Muslim discourse' master frame. A typical use of this frame is to respond to the chants, with the argument that Mido 'hasn't even done anything' (Middlesbrough Fan [8] 26/8/2007).

**6.10** Islamophobic discourse is defended with five sub-ordinate frames, which are the idea that: such Islamophobic sentiment is just a joke or part of football banter; racism exists all over the country; people are allowed to voice their own views in a liberal society; the chants are no worse than other discriminatory chants such as those about 'over weight' people, and, the chants are wrong but are given by only a minority of Newcastle United fans. Of these, merely the first two are used with any frequency beyond the occasional comment and so only these will be discussed. The claim that Islamophobic discourse is just a joke or part of football banter is the most frequently used defence, accounting for 75 percent of debate within this master frame. On one level, this frame appears to be a defence of Newcastle United fans actions by arguing that racism in the context of the football ground does not constitute 'hard' racism, merely dismissing it as football 'banter' (that is, an exchange of good humoured and playful remarks). Middlesbrough Fan [9] provides an example of this by referring to the Mido chants as a 'wind up' and part of the 'thrill of the game'. However, a second interpretation of this frame suggests that it has been flavoured by a dislike of the current ways in which football is consumed. To elaborate, prior to the inception of the Premier League in 1992/3 season and the Hillsborough disaster (on 15 April 1989) in which 96 Liverpool supporters died, football stadiums had a reputation of providing 'raw', passionate and, often, prejudiced arenas in which football supporters inhabited. Since then, football stadia have become 'all

seater' (removing the passionate all standing 'terrace' atmosphere) and a new, more affluent 'type' of football fan was created through both the way in which *Sky Sports* marketed football and subsequent huge rises in admission costs which priced many working class fans out of football stadiums (King 2002 [1998]). The change of the fan demographic – as well as the set up anti-racism intervention movements (such as *Let's Kick Racism Out of Football* which was established in 1993) - meant that, on a positive note, football stadiums have become less discriminatory and family orientated places, but also left many 'traditional' fans longing for less 'intolerably restrained ... [and] restrictive' atmospheres (King 2000: 424). Although the fanzine movement (which e-zines are part of) has largely left-wing/liberal political foundations, many of its consumers are amongst the most highly committed and traditional fans (Haynes 1995; Jary et. al 1991). This has left some of those who contribute to the Middlesbrough e-zine longing for a return to a volatile football atmosphere, even if this comes with the cost of widespread racism's re-emergence. These comments are hinted at by Middlesbrough Fan [9], who wishes for a time before 'the game was turned poncy' (26/8/2007) but are also found in the discourse provided by Middlesbrough Fan [5]:

Overall, I think it's pleasing that this kind of chanting doesn't happen like it used to. Now it makes the headlines when it does happen. I think we can be positive about the direction footy in this country is going - I reckon the premiership is a flagship of decency and civilised behaviour, though there is always room for improvement. Just hope the PC brigade don't go silly and start to ruin what is genuine terrace banter adding to the beautiful game.  
Middlesbrough Fan [5] (28/8/2007)

**6.11** Here, Middlesbrough Fan [5] is very clear that he does not want to see a return to an era where racist chanting is commonplace in a football ground, but he does add a definite stipulation at the end of his communication that he 'hopes [that] the PC [politically correct] brigade don't [doesn't] go silly and start to ruin what is genuine terrace banter adding to the beautiful game'. It is interesting that further analysis of this comment reveals a number of defensive positions: first, he clears up his position of supporting 'terrace banter' (even if this is racist) by suggesting that the 'PC brigade' are spoiling football humour, which may be slightly racist, and, second, he refers to football as 'the beautiful game' which is in stark contrast to racism which is often referred to as 'ugly'.

**6.12** The second commonly cited way of defending Islamophobic comments is to suggest that the racism or ignorance toward Muslim culture exists all over the country and is certainly not exclusive to Newcastle United fans. In most instances, this is offered as a counter defence to the claim that the abuse directed at Mido is the result of an ignorance that is particular to Newcastle United supporters (as suggested within the previously discussed master frame). This discourse is not aired as often as some sub-ordinate frames (7 comments, accounting for 14.58 percent of discourse within this master frame) and tends to be self-reflective by acknowledging that some Middlesbrough fans can be prejudiced. A common theme in this frame is to uncritically acknowledge that racism exists whilst not looking for underlying reasons to explain these prejudices.

**6.13** This makes an interesting comparison to the way in which Newcastle United supporters framed the same issue, as demonstrated in Table 2 (below).



	<b>Master frame</b>		<b>Sub-ordinate frame</b>	
	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)
<i>Islamophobic</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>In Defence of Muslims</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>In Defence of Islamophobic comments</i>	141	96.58		
<i>Just a joke/football banter</i>			24	17.02
<i>Racism exists all over the country</i>			23	16.31
<i>People are allowed to have their own views</i>			2	1.42
<i>Chants were no worse than those about overweight people</i>			5	3.55
<i>Only a minority of Newcastle United fans sung chants</i>			11	7.80
<i>Discussion around the chants is boring</i>			27	19.15
<i>Middlesbrough fans are using the chants to unfairly attack Newcastle United supporters</i>			38	26.95
<i>Mido is a bad character and deserves taunting</i>			11	7.80
				100.00
<i>Attacking Islamophobic comments</i>	5	3.42		
<i>Verbal attacks by fans are the result of ignorance</i>			3	60.00
<i>Chants were the result of an ignorance that is particular to Newcastle United fans</i>			1	20.00
<i>Chants are an untruth: Mido is not a terrorist</i>			1	20.00
				100.00
	146	100.00		

**Table 2. Newcastle United Fans' 'Mido Affair' Frames**

**6.14** Data in Table 2 clearly points out that the overwhelmingly dominant master frame used is a 'Defence of Islamophobic comments' (96.58 percent). This is not surprising, given that the chants are made by a selection of Newcastle United fans and the nature of supporter rivalry means that the comments are made as a way of defending their fan culture.<sup>[11]</sup> However, within this master frame, it is interesting to note that the most often drawn upon sub-ordinate frame is one which attacks Middlesbrough fans on account of them using the opportunity as a form of one-upmanship on Newcastle United supporters. Fans [2] and [3] illustrate this argument:

Who appointed smoggies as guardians of standards to come on here and take the moral high ground?

They don't want a sensible debate at all, they rake up an incident that in no way reflects the overwhelming majority of NUFC supporters, and then stand back with this smug tone, shaking their heads and making themselves out to be some kind of self appointed voice of reason when their deliberately passive aggressive posts are designed to purposely wind people up.

Self important morons.  
Newcastle United Fan [2] (27/8/2007)

'New kings of victimhood' - complaining about incidents of abject racism. If we are the kings of this crusade then I am actually proud of that.  
Newcastle United Fan [3] (27/8/2007)

**6.15** In both examples there is a clear Newcastle United supporter resentment toward the way in which they perceive Middlesbrough fans to be opportunistically using the incident to present their club as the victim of racism, which is likely to gain them wider public empathy and generate anger toward Newcastle United. Fan [3] even stretches this point to refer to Middlesbrough supporters as the 'new kings of

victimhood', whilst Fan [2] shows an unease in which 'Smoggies' – a nickname for Middlesbrough FC – appear to appoint themselves as 'guardians of standards [in order to take] the moral high ground'. This frame is interesting because the Middlesbrough fans equivalent – that Newcastle United fans show a form of ignorance that is particular to only them – is their most common frame. The quantitative breakdown of the discourse clearly shows that although the insults are Islamophobic in substance, they are about fan rivalry in form: this is consistent across the comparison of both supporter groups.

### **Middlesbrough Fans' Acceptance of Mido: An 'Open' Position?**

**7.1** The discourse situated around the Mido affair begins to tell us about rivalries, consumptive fan practices and Islamophobic prejudices within both football and, marginally, the wider society. At the core of much of this debate is Middlesbrough fans' rivalry with Newcastle United. To understand this, such enmity is based upon 'us' versus 'them' dualistic struggles which often become voiced in supporter chants. The Newcastle United fans' abuse of Mido - although Islamophobic in substance – is an example of how fans verbally attack the opposition. If Mido was not Muslim, other ways of verbally attacking him and, by association Middlesbrough fans, would have been found. This does not condone the Newcastle United fans' actions for two main reasons. First, the chants and discourse within a football ground may become accepted by many Newcastle United fans who hear them, which could, unless widely challenged, create Islamophobic cultures. Second, it would be extremely unpleasant if such abuse became normalised, as football grounds might become increasingly exclusive spaces and further develop tensions from white British people towards all 'others'.

**7.2** By the same token, the defence offered by Middlesbrough fans does not mean that anti-Muslim prejudice is non-existent. Indeed, Middlesbrough supporter discourse collected in 2005, when four explosives were detonated by Muslim suicide bombers on public transport vehicles in London and a further four were thwarted,<sup>[12]</sup> showed a high degree of Islamophobic prejudice with some supporters even talking about vandalising Mosques and recounting dreams in which Muslims were killed. Whilst the same Middlesbrough e-zine was used to collect data in both 2005 and 2007, it must be noted that some individuals left comments in 2005 but did not appear to in 2007 (and visa-versa). This could invalidate any result comparison over the two time periods. However, this potential criticism is resisted for two reasons: first, the vast majority of fans posted at both points in time and, second, the research follows Eliasoph and Lichterman's (2003) argument in believing that a community principally exists through its prevailing culture (rather than as merely individual members) therefore allowing a collective identity to be captured at different moments over time, despite potential changes in individual group membership. Therefore, results in Table 3 (below) make an interesting comparison to those offered earlier in Table 1

	Master frame		Sub-ordinate frame	
	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)	Number	Percentage (to 2 d.p.)
<i>Islamophobic</i>	76	64.41		
<i>Muslims are terrorists</i>			34	44.74
<i>Islamic beliefs are not conducive to a peaceful society</i>			10	13.16
<i>Muslims have inherently violent temperaments</i>			9	11.84
<i>Muslims drain the state</i>			12	15.79
<i>Muslims are leading to a loss of 'Britishness'</i>			6	7.89
<i>Muslims should assimilate</i>			5	6.58
			76	100.00
<i>In Defence of Muslims</i>	22	18.64		
<i>The vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists</i>			12	54.54
<i>Global capitalism has created extreme Muslim terrorism</i>			1	4.55
<i>Muslims do not overwhelmingly drain the state</i>			1	4.55
<i>War on Iraq has developed conditions which create terrorist behaviour</i>			8	36.46
			22	100.00
<i>In Defence of Islamophobic comments</i>	12	10.17		
<i>Just a joke</i>			3	25.00
<i>Racism exists all over the country</i>			5	41.67
<i>People are allowed to have their own views</i>			4	33.33
			12	100.00
<i>Attacking Islamophobic comments</i>	8	8.78		
<i>Verbal attacks by fans are the result of ignorance</i>			8	100.00
			8	100.00
	118	100.00		

**Table 3. Middlesbrough Fans' '7/7' London Bombing Frames**

**7.3** The table shows that the Islamophobic frame is by far the most heavily drawn upon, accounting for 64.41 percent of fan comments. The frame which defends Muslims proved to be the second most heavily utilised master discourse amongst Middlesbrough fans, yet this accounted for just 18.64 percent of the distribution of discourse. Within the Islamophobic master frame, the dominant reason for anti-Muslim sentiment is the conflation of Muslims with terrorist bombers (44.74 percent). Other frames which are regularly utilised included the idea that: Muslims 'drain the state' of vital resources which could be better utilised on 'national' citizens, who are assumed to be white British people (15.79 percent); that Islamic beliefs are not conducive to a successful British society (often with the implied intention that Islam produces uncivilised or violent cultures), accounting for 13.16 percent of the master frame, and that Muslims have inherently violent temperaments (11.84 percent).<sup>[13]</sup> Indeed, the consistent theme through the Islamophobic frames is the perception of Muslims/Islam as enemies within Britain. Muslims are consistently seen as non-British (irrespective of birthplace), eroding socio-cultural rights and resources from 'British' people, and in the mildest form, having split loyalties between a sense of morality and terrorist ties. Muslims are overwhelmingly conflated with terrorism and typecast as 'bad'. This position is likely to have been adopted in response to a perceived threat to a nostalgic image of Britain, which as well as being overwhelmingly white is remembered in fond, trouble-free ways (see Rojek 2007). Hence, this discourse is typified by pointing a finger of blame at individuals/alien cultures at unnamed 'others' (defined as Muslims) in order to make sense of social wrong-doings. Evidence presented here clearly does not suggest that, contrary to what Middlesbrough supporters would like to suggest after the Mido taunt, an 'open' position toward Muslims has been enduring developed.

**7.4** It is also worth considering Millward's (2007) findings from when he looked at fans' attitudes toward 'foreign' players employed by the teams they support. His evidence suggested that a sense of cosmopolitan acceptance emerged when their club was enjoying a run of successful results. However, once such fortunes took a downward turn, it was 'foreign' players who were first to be 'blamed' by fans. It is sensed that Mido may be referred to as a 'lazy' or temperamental Arab (as he sometimes was at his previous club, Tottenham Hotspur) or, worse still, invoking other potentially Islamophobic frames (i.e. terrorist, lacking 'British spirit', taking a local player's job) should the team go on a losing run. Thus, even

within the context of sport, it is far from certain that the emergence of anti-Islamophobic – or given the nature of fan rivalries, in the case of Newcastle United supporters, their racist - values are anything more than notional. Indeed, an interesting comparison can be drawn with Burdsey's (2007a: 626) work on Amir Khan, in so far as he argued that the boxer's cross-cultural acceptance 'does not signify the end of racism or Islamophobia ... [and is] extremely conditional'; similar conclusions could be drawn here.<sup>[14]</sup>

**7.5** Perhaps one discursive pattern which may have suggested an 'open' position toward Muslims might have engaged in a discussion about the structural and cultural conditions which create Islamophobic dispositions. However, Middlesbrough fans were generally extremely loathe to do this because they found it more comforting to prefer to call the Newcastle United supporters 'bad' (given that racism appears to be an indictment of character). Crucially, when the structural and cultural arguments were suggested to them by a Newcastle United supporter (who claimed not to condone the Islamophobic chants), they were promptly dismissed. Indeed, it must be remembered that Middlesbrough Fan [7], in his condemnation of 'racist' Newcastle United supporters, actually referred to Mido's 'terrorist ways' (when he actually meant his religion). Together this evidence suggests that Newcastle United supporters (rather than the ideology of racism) were seen to be the culturally defined enemy and the Islamophobic tag merely became a stick to beat them with. Thus, Islamophobic opinions merely became wound up in football supporters' attacking opposition teams and fans. Earlier in the article, it was pointed out that Meer (2006) and Modood (2005) have both argued that in the post 9/11 climate there have been a growth in Muslim representation in the British public sphere, and such demonstrations have made many aware of the fact that Islamophobia is a form of racism as well as problematising the conflation of Muslims with terrorism. It is uncertain whether the Middlesbrough fans have internalised such ideas but it is likely that they are aware of such discourses. Thus knowing that, as Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) point out, to be viewed as racist is an indictment of character, they have attacked Newcastle United supporters – who research conducted by the Football Fan Census (2005) suggests they see as their fiercest rivals – on account of them being 'Islamophobic'. This is especially the case given that the target of the Newcastle United fans' disposition was a Middlesbrough football player. Thus, Newcastle United fans could be painted as the perpetrators of racism, with Middlesbrough FC seen as the victims. This makes an interesting comparison to King's research, in which he argues that football fans will find 'some externally identifiable characteristic' of their rivals and seek to berate them for this (King 2003: 223). King (2003) sees that race or other cultural/social factors are found and used in the form of 'banter', which then sometimes becomes offensive. Therefore, to apply this idea, Newcastle United fans have found Mido's religion – particularly in the post 9/11 climate – as something by which Middlesbrough football club can be verbally attacked: thus, a typical form of racism in football emerges. However, a noteworthy twist is applied, in that the way Middlesbrough fans subsequently attack Newcastle United supporters is to label them racist – in doing so, at least temporarily, adopt an open position toward Muslims - and use that as a form of one-up-man-ship.

**7.6** One reading of the evidence suggests that Muslim players may be, for the supporters of the clubs that they represent, eroding Islamophobic values. However, the argument presented here is that such anti-racist dispositions are opportunistic ways of attacking rival fan groups and this is evidenced by two key issues which emerged in the data. First, a truly open view toward Muslims would not ignore the existence of Islamic terrorism but would possibly look toward structural reasons to account for such actions. Those who have sought to sympathetically explain the current political climate have suggested that issues related to the 'war on terror' fought in the predominantly Muslim states of Iraq and Afghanistan may be developing a resentment toward the 'West' (see for instance, Mythen 2007 and Rai 2006 for just a few examples) and the uncritical criminalisation of many British Muslims are alienating many of Asian-descent in the UK (Kundnani 2001; Mythen and Walklate 2006). In the case of the Mido abuse, when one Newcastle United supporter came on to the Middlesbrough fansite to apologise for his fellow fans' disposition and blamed the way in which the media regularly frame Muslims as 'outsiders' or 'terrorists', his case was immediately rejected by supporters who preferred to label Newcastle United supporters as racist. Second, a Middlesbrough supporter, who was attacking Newcastle United fans' chants at Mido, referred to his 'terrorist ways'. Whether this was – as claimed – a case of clumsy expression or not, it certainly does not suggest that an open attitude toward Muslims, which is free of unfair stereotypes, is being developed.

## **Conclusion: 'Unfriendly Banter', Rivalries and Racisms**

**8.1** In the aftermath of the Faith Summit in April 2008, Alex Goldberg from the Board of Deputies of British Jews argued:

There is no such thing as friendly banter, it's abuse, and this action plan is a long time coming. There need to be more effective mechanisms when dealing with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and we want strict liability, with clubs being held responsible for the actions of supporters  
Quoted in Butt (2008: 1)

**8.2** Newcastle United fans did not chant abusive songs at Mido to endear themselves to Middlesbrough supporters; rather they did it to insult and goad. So, Goldberg is correct that such banter is not friendly and, uncomfortably, does sometimes take racist forms when charging existing rivalries: racism and anti-racist stances opportunistically become metaphorical sticks to verbally beat opponents. Yet, the results in this article suggest that fans do not want unfriendly banter eliminated from the game. Also, Islamophobic mockery, such as that detailed in this article, is likely to have been shaped by the wider societal prejudices – Newcastle United fans' chants would not have developed without the 9/11 and 7/7 bombings – but it is less likely to immediately affect judgements away from the football ground. Despite this, the concern with Islamophobia in football should not be downplayed for a number of reasons. First, although Islamophobic chants might not immediately create widespread societal prejudice, unless they are stamped out there is a risk that they may begin to seep into mainstream culture. Second, the unpleasantness of such chants for Muslims and other liberal people at football games – whether such individuals are participants or fans – may be considerable and the continued existence of such behaviours could further pronounce football

grounds and training pitches as non-Muslim spaces.

**8.3** The answer to such problems is not likely to come in the coercive measures of point deductions or widespread fan lock-outs as suggested at football's Faith Summit (Butt 2008). It must be remembered that many contemporary racisms grow from the perception that non-white British citizens receive preferential treatment from authoritative organisations (see Copsey 2004; Richardson 2005; Rydgren 2003; 2004) and it is likely that punishing an entire set of supporters for the actions of a sizable minority may reinforce such attitudes. This is especially the case as the results back up King's (2000) argument that many fans do not want football ground atmospheres to be further 'sanitised'. So, it is possible that such punishments, while appearing to treat the dispositional symptoms (i.e. Islamophobic chants), will not address the underlying wider social prejudices that are used to berate football opponents and may even accidentally deepen such prejudices. Instead, the FA and football clubs should work with, rather than potentially punish, fan groups to genuinely change public stereotypes of Muslims. This may be a slow process but is far more likely to be enduringly successful than draconian methods. Without wishing to downplay the damage that Islamophobic abuse may have upon English football culture, the development of such values should be part of a wider framework to combat social prejudices. Football support is the manifestation of societal values and, at least by origin, Islamophobia is probably not football's problem, even though it is sometimes used in an unsavoury way to attack opponents. Yet, the influence of the FA, its member clubs and the relatively small band of Muslim players could play a modest role in the success of meaningful anti-racist strategies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A game played 'behind closed doors' is one which is conducted without any supporters in stadium attendance.

<sup>2</sup>The National Front (NF) was formed in 1967 with the merger of the first incarnation of the British National Party (BNP) and the League of Empire Loyalists and can be considered as a far-Right political movement. It dissolved in 1995, after the re-emergence of the BNP in 1992.

<sup>3</sup>The Runnymede Trust was founded in 1968 as an independent charity concerned with research and policy making on issues surrounding race and ethnicity with the stated aim of challenging racial discrimination, influencing legislation and promoting multi-ethnicity in the UK.

<sup>4</sup>The European Court of Justice's 'Bosman' ruling, set in December 1995, had two major impacts: first it ordered that the Belgian footballer, Jean-Marc Bosman, was entitled to leave his club RFC Liege, where his contract had expired and sign a new deal at the French club US Dunkerque without any compensation or transfer fee being paid. This marked a profound change from the existing transfer system (which was not entirely consistent across Europe) that often involved the exchange of players for vast sums of money. Second, the ruling deemed the existing directives which stated that all European clubs were banned from playing any more than 'three foreigners' (plus two 'assimilated foreigners'<sup>1</sup>), as illegal. Therefore, the 'Bosman' rule pointed out that restricting the number of foreign nationals from other EU member states contravened the principles outlined in the Treaty of Rome which were strengthened by the Maastricht Treaty (Greenfield and Osborn 2001: 84-85; Magee 2002: 217; Simmons 1997: 14). Hence the restriction was removed which lubricated a transnational European-centred transfer market.

<sup>5</sup>Nayak (2003; 2003a) found that, in an era of de-industrialisation, the meaning of an 'authentic Geordie' amongst the working-class populations of Newcastle (who are 'nicknamed' Geordies) shifted from production in the field of heavy industrial employment (such as working in the colliery, shipyard or factory) to the arena of consumption in which football support, alongside the social drinking of alcohol, became a defining point. Furthermore, Nayak's case study 'real Geordies' created a hierarchy of 'real' football fandom activities when defining authentic working class masculine youth cultures in the area. At the top of this was 'physically supporting the team on the terraces and beyond' (Nayak 2003: 64; repeated on Nayak 2003a: 16) which involved attending football matches and joining in with collective rituals such as drinking, cheering on the team and possibly fighting with opposition fans. These actions were accepted by their group as they argued that their fathers had carried out similar actions when they were younger (Nayak 2003: 64; Nayak 2003a: 16). Nayak reports that individual members of group also showed tremendous memories for recounting facts associated to the teams that they had witnessed first-hand but were less than impressed with football 'anoraks' (Nayak 2003a: 17) who discovered the same information second-hand. At the bottom of the Geordies authenticity hierarchy lay 'armchair' supporters, who the group did not perceive to be fully investing – in either the financial or emotional sense – in the team, whereas those supporters who could not afford to attend the games but collectively watched Newcastle United matches together in packed public houses were viewed as a 'compensatory' middle ground supporter (Nayak 2003a: 17).

<sup>6</sup>Overall, I found that the e-zine user details could not be checked to any level of certainty, which Ruddock (2005) also found in his study of e-zine West Ham United supporters. That said, during the sample period, many supporters gave clear indications about their personal lives and from this, it is reasonable to assume that fans were similar in that they were active supporters, often male and mostly either from the same city as the football club, or keen to stress that they had historical/cultural roots in the urbanity. Also, some

months after the data collection had ended a short survey was posted on the messageboards asking supporters for their demographic details. Although not all of the fans who have been recorded in this research responded to the request, the data collected from this clearly suggested that fans on the website tended to be white, male and of varying ages. Additionally, whilst the use of e-zines as a data collection method carries the definite strength of a high level of reliability created by 'unobtrusive measures' (see Webb et al. 1966) and the transcription of notes at the moment of inception, there are also shortcomings associated with this data, not least because the relative anonymity of cyberspace makes it easier for football fans to exaggerate and lie about their offline lives. The unobtrusive measures also carry the disadvantage of not allowing the researcher to fully probe at responses, which may increase the chances of inaccurate data analysis (for full details see Millward 2008).[0]

<sup>7</sup>In a similar way, Hill (2001 [1989]: 130) points out that when Gayle complained about the way he was oppressed by the white values of Liverpool FC, he was deemed to have 'a chip of his shoulder'. Indeed, Hill (2001 [1989]: 137) was left to conclude the story about Gayle by arguing that to be successful in football, black players must follow three rules. These are: 'Rule One: don't retaliate when opponents bait you. The ref will send you off, not the other guy. Rule Two: don't lose your rag with the crowd when they shower you in spit as you back away to take a corner kick, when they goad you with monkey chants and throw bananas on the pitch just to let you know that they think you are no better than an ape. Rule Three: don't get upset when your own team-mates behave in exactly the same way. Break any of these rules, and they say you've got a temperament problem.' Although Mido is not black (see Figure 1. ), the way he understandably reacted to the crowd's distasteful behaviour reinforced the opinions of many non-Muslim that, like Gayle in the 1970s and 1980s, he had a 'chip on his shoulder'.

<sup>8</sup>Roy of The Rovers is a fictional British cartoon character who is the 'all action' hero of the team, Melchester Rovers.

<sup>9</sup>Although as an outsider, it is difficult to see how asking a large number of opposing fans to be quiet (by raising fingers to lips) when they are shouting seemingly personal abuse constitutes a real dislike. Rather, it seems that Newcastle United fans do not like Mido, but we do not know his feelings toward them.

<sup>10</sup>An alternative interpretation of this evidence would be to argue that Fan [7] was referring to the label Mido was given by his fellow supporters whilst he played for Tottenham Hotspur. This interpretation could be validated by fact that Fan [7]'s online contributions are often grammatically poor. So, if the fan had placed 'terrorist ways' in inverted commas, it may have cleared up this confusion. This potentially shows up a further weakness of e-zine messageboard communications as a data source. However, the fact that he did not try to rescind the comment when he was challenged helps to substantiate my interpretation of his discourse.

<sup>11</sup>It is worth pointing out that Newcastle United employs Emre, a Turkish Muslim player. Emre's career in England has been chequered by allegations that he has racially abused black opponents.

<sup>12</sup>These incidents killed 52 civilians and injuring a further 770 people.

<sup>13</sup>The key difference between the final two frames is the stress on individuals in the latter (i.e. Muslims) and the cultural system of beliefs in the former (i.e. Islam).

<sup>14</sup>Further comparisons between Khan and Mido are interesting, given that Burdsey (2007a) points out that one reason why Khan gained widespread acceptance was because he donned himself in clothes which highlighted an overt link to Britishness, whereas Mido, as an Egyptian Muslim cannot realistically gain such mainstream approval in this way (remembering of course, that Mido does not represent England or any of the other British nations).

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