

Football and the sounds of the Black Atlantic

Abstract

This article maps and analyses the relationship between football and black sound cultures. Employing a chronological and thematic approach, specifically it examines the inclusion of football in post-Windrush Calypsos, the appropriation of black music forms in football stadia, Reggae as cultural critique of English football and British society, and the connections between transnational sounds and a diasporic footballing consciousness. Theoretically, this article draws on – and places in dialogue – Paul Gilroy’s concept of the ‘Black Atlantic’, Josh Kun’s notion of ‘audiotopia’ and Les Back’s emphasis on ‘deep listening’. This framing illuminates how music forms travel back and forth along diasporic roots and routes between Africa, the Caribbean, the US and the UK. Critically, the article locates the relationship between football, music and race as providing the context and capacity for progressive change; and foregrounds its role as an important medium and method of cultural resistance to the marginalisations within Black Atlantic diasporas and football itself. The article concludes by looking forward, in an era of Black Lives Matter, to consider the spaces and practices of fandom and consumption that might open up as a result of listening and responding sociologically to the relationship between football and black sound cultures.

Key words

Audiotopia; Black Atlantic; Diaspora; Football; Music; Race

Prologue: absence, sound and space

During the summer of 2020, as English football returned to action after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, something remarkable emerged. Premier League footballers organised and sustained an unofficial anti-racism campaign in response to the killing of George Floyd and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Building on the activism of NFL star Colin Kaepernick, the majority of players (and officials) silently took the knee at the start of each Premier League game and continued their actions into the following campaign. Against the televised backdrop of empty stadiums, this mediatised activism drew attention to the critical potential of sound, and silence, *inside* the stadium environment.

The actions of these players and the support of the rights-holding broadcasters demonstrated that a more inclusive representation of elite football had some currency. One year earlier, modern televised football had taken a less heralded, but still significant, turn towards a more progressive and inclusive vision and soundscape for the game. With all matches shown across the various BBC terrestrial and digital platforms, supporters watching the 2019 women's World Cup saw music performed by a black woman artist take centre stage in the coverage. The star of the opening credits was Ms. Banks, a British rapper of Nigerian and Ugandan heritage from south London, who provided a specially reworked version of US Hip-Hop outfit Fort Minor's *Remember the Name*. Banks' selection as the face and sound of fans' televised experiences of the tournament provided a symbolic subversion of the racialised and gendered manner in which football has been framed and represented in the UK. In particular, it provided a welcome and timely counterpoint to the dominant "football's coming home" soundtrack which continues to accompany the men's national team. This refrain – which derives from *Three Lions*, a hit song recorded by comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner with the band The Lightning Seeds to coincide with England hosting the 1996 men's European Championships – has been

perceptively critiqued for its celebration of a backward-looking, whitened (sporting) Englishness and ethnocentric view of football's historical development (Carrington 1998). Banks' rendition of *Remember the Name* spoke to more inclusive practices and spaces – both sonic and physical – of experiencing and consuming football, including those that occur *outside* of the environs of the stadium.

The sounds of the Black Atlantic and the 'beautiful game'

Cultural connections between English football and popular music are well-established in the popular imagination and academic studies alike. Various songs, including 1960s and 1970s Pop hits, Folk ditties and nursery rhymes, continue to form the basis for bespoke terrace chants. Football has also been connected to classical and commercial music, from World Cup songs to references within popular music itself (Mason 2019, McLeod 2011). Academic research into this relationship has been led by the influential thinking of Steve Redhead (1987, 1991, 1993, 1997), namely his edifying twin conceptualisation of 'musicalisation of football' and 'footballisation of music'. However, to date, scholarship on football and music in the UK has concentrated almost exclusively on the consumption and celebration of a narrow range of whitened genres, such as Post-Punk and Indie. Specific considerations of the dis/connections between black musical forms and football remain few and far between (Ashraf 2020, *Football and Music* 2020). By way of a corrective, in this article we insert race and everyday multiculturalism into the intellectual conversation. This approach both illuminates the importance of the relationship between music, football and blackness; and illustrates how music reveals *exclusions* as well as inclusions. In this regard, while simultaneously foregrounding music, this article implicitly offers a critique of the dominant cultures and industries of English football. Critically, we also locate the relationship between race and football as providing the context

and capacity for progressive change, and underscore its role as a powerful medium and method of cultural resistance to these marginalisations within Black Atlantic diasporas.

We begin this article with Ms. Banks as a contemporary point of departure to trace and analyse the shifting and contingent relationship between English football and black sound cultures since the arrival of the Windrush Generation from the Caribbean in 1948. Whilst we acknowledge the much longer historical black British presence, we start here as these travellers commenced the large-scale immigration to the UK from the territories of the British Empire, and they are synonymous with the growing influence of black music on British lives, both black and white (Chambers 2017, Connell 2019, Gilroy 1987, Henry and Worley 2021, Onuora and Heneghan 2020). It is, accordingly, at this point in time that connections between blackness, music and sport begin to coalesce in sociologically significant ways, shedding light on the changing dynamics of popular culture in Britain.

Theoretically, this article draws on – and, crucially, places *in dialogue* – Paul Gilroy’s (1993) concept of the ‘Black Atlantic’, Josh Kun’s (2005) notion of ‘audiotopia’ and Les Back’s (2007) emphasis on ‘deep listening’. This framing allows us to illuminate how music forms travel back and forth along diasporic *roots* and *routes* between Africa, the Caribbean, the US and the UK. Furthermore, we also demonstrate that it is in particular places, times, cultural spaces and conditions – i.e. football and the context of racism in post-war Britain – that these diasporic and syncretic sound forms take on particular meaning and power (Burdsey 2020; see Melville [2020] on black music and space more broadly).

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993: 19) articulates the potential of a cultural and political configuration that ‘can be defined, on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the

structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity'. He argues persuasively that the linkages between African, Caribbean, American and European people and cultures, and their colonial and (post)colonial experiences, have created a shared Black Atlantic culture which has particular resonance for diasporic communities. Gilroy (1991) argues that music is one of the varied forms of cultural expression that define the Black Atlantic, making its politics literally audible, and foregrounding alternative realms and forms of knowledge.

In this article we address the relationship between English football and what we define as the 'black sound cultures' emerging from this Black Atlantic configuration. We use the term black sound cultures to refer to forms of music (together with associated cultures and stylistic practices) that derive from, and have been developed within, the black African diaspora. These are forms of music that are as collective as much as personal, often manifest in shared expression and public performance such as Blues dances, sound systems and carnivals. In talking about 'black' music forms and their take up (or not) in various communities, including the majority white British one, we are mindful of the dangers of essentialising black and white cultures. Thus we advocate Gilroy's (1991) rejection of any sense of racially discrete practice, production, marketing or consumption of music within them (see also Ware and Back 2002). As Kun (2005: 20), drawing explicitly on Stuart Hall, articulates, 'popular music, like all forms of popular culture, is hybrid, synchronized, and the result of multiple convergences, compromises, overlaps, recordings and appropriations'.

In addition, although our analysis situates aspects of popular sound culture in black Britain, it necessarily locates these musical phenomena within the *travelling* of sound within, and outside, the black African diaspora too. We trace the movement of music in and across various sites,

and on local, national and global scales. As we show here, the journeys that black sound cultures take in relation to football means that their 'arrival' on the terraces, and in the other spaces and places in which the game is practised and consumed, is the outcome of multiple cultural influences and im/mobilities. As Kun (2005: 21) notes, 'music is, after all, a spatial practice, evoking, transcending, and organizing places along spatial trajectories'. It is in particular spaces (and times) that new hybrid forms of sound, football culture and diasporic life are forged. In this regard, we locate both football and black sound cultures as spatial as well as sonic practices. To be more precise, the spaces we are interested in are the playing field, the dressing room, the stadium terrace and the pub; and the studio, the dancehall and the street. This movement of music forms across space (and time) poses challenging questions. Gilroy (1993: 80), for instance, asks:

How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes that, although they may be traced back to one distinct location, have been somehow changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through wider networks of communication and cultural exchange?

This is something we seek to explore within the context of football, in terms of how black sound cultures inhabit 'safe' spaces within the wider football culture, but also provide evidence of exclusion both inside and outside the stadium.

Together with using the realm of black music to highlight the racialised exclusions inherent to football, we use it to flag up more dynamic, inclusive possibilities for new forms of football fandom and consumption as well. In this vein we draw on Kun's (2005) notion of audiotopia. For Kun, an audiotopia is a 'space within and produced by a musical element that offers the listener and/or the musician new maps for re-imagining the present social world' (ibid.: 23).

Moreover, the audiotopia represents space(s):

where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together, not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and the mapping of geographical space that music makes possible as well (ibid.).

Likewise, Tara Brabazon (2012) talks about soundscapes as the melding of landscape and sound which can be indiscriminate and unplanned. Focusing on music and football in this sense, ‘the audiotopia is a musical space of difference, where contradictions and conflicts do not cancel each other out but coexist and live through each other’ (Kun 2005: 23). Football and music become points of contact where distinct forms of culture and consumption come together as interchanges, networks and co-operations with a range of possibilities and outcomes that are still undecided.

Philip Kasinitz and Marco Martiniello (2019: 862) note that ‘there is a common aphorism that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture”...There is still something slightly absurd about trying to understand the meaning of musical expression based on words printed on a page’. We recognise this position in our own research, namely the difficulty of conveying the richness of the content we analyse from its sound form to the written pages of a journal article. This does not limit the potential for listening as a sociological tool, not least in relation to race and multiculturalism. Les Back (2007: 8) argues that ‘thinking with all our senses can change our appreciation of ethics in a multicultural society...social investigations that utilize a “democracy of the senses” are likely to notice more and ask different questions of our world’. This has particular resonance, he argues, in English football, in that ‘listening to football culture enables us to think differently about it. It is within these sonic landscapes and the melodies of plainsong that the traces of history and identity are registered’ (Back 2003b: 323). We strive to follow Back’s (2003a: 274) method of ‘deep listening’, which comprises ‘the commitment to taking musical and sound form seriously, to search for ways to represent and transpose sound and music’. This approach underscores the symbolic dimension, and facilitates an appreciation, of the confluence of meaning, affiliation, belonging and identity through musical form and performance (Daynes 2013, James 2020). Our analysis is driven by our own attentive listening

– *at* and *of* football and music, individually and together – and embodied involvement in locations where ‘music is made, felt and enjoyed’ (Back 2003a: 274) as much as our formal ethnographic training.

In this article, employing an approach that is both thematic and largely chronological, we explore the following areas: the inclusion of football in post-Windrush Calypsos; the appropriation of black music forms in the spaces of men’s professional football stadia; Reggae as cultural critique of English football and British society; and transnational sounds and a diasporic footballing consciousness. We acknowledge that our themes and selections are illustrative rather than exhaustive: we emphasise particular examples, genres and languages, and there are undoubtedly omissions (not least in relation to gender and its intersections with black music [Rosenior-Patten and Reid 2021]). Furthermore, our exploratory analysis focuses primarily on the *consumption* of sound cultures, and we note the necessity (beyond our remit here) of analysing the *production* of these music forms as much as their reception (*ibid.*; see also James 2020a, 2020b; Saha 2018, White 2017). We end the article in the present, looking forward: considering the spaces and practices of fandom and consumption that might open up as a result of listening and responding sociologically and socially to the relationship between football and black music.

Football Calypso: the sounds of the Windrush Generation

As Gilroy (1991) demonstrates, music is a means of bridging diasporic communities, and various musical forms have provided a unifying force for communities across time and space. Calypso, which developed in Trinidad before spreading to other islands, is one manifestation of the African oral storytelling cultures that endured throughout slavery, the colonial period and the (post)colonial independence movements in the Caribbean. Calypsonians told stories

that often touched on contemporary politics and society across the Caribbean, and the music had particular resonance for islands emerging out of colonialism (Hall 2002).

The late twentieth century experience for many people of Caribbean descent was also one of migration, with substantial movements of Caribbean migrants to Europe and North America. Music was a unifying force to connect migrants and their descendants to the Caribbean (ibid.). Indeed, three Calypsonians – Lord Beginner, Lord Woodbine and Lord Kitchener – travelled to the UK on the Empire Windrush ship, and their songs reflected the enthusiasm and experiences of the new settlers. The *London is the Place for Me* Calypso by Lord Kitchener was famously captured by Pathé News when the Windrush docked at Tilbury on the River Thames (Bradley 2013, Hall 2002, Kenneally 2020). These Calypsonians impacted musical cultures beyond the boundaries of their form. Lord Woodbine moved to Liverpool and influenced the early career of the Beatles (Alibhai-Brown and McGrath 2010). Lord Kitchener opened a nightclub in Manchester in 1958 before returning to Trinidad four years later, where he continued to document the West Indian experience through his Calypsos (Mason 2000).

Sport, and cricket in particular, was another unifying force for Caribbean diasporas. In *Beyond a Boundary*, C.L.R. James (2005) detailed how cricket was central to the formation of a shared cultural identity and a vehicle for uniting diasporic people. Calypsonians reflected the centrality of cricket in the culture of England and within Caribbean communities, with Lord Beginner writing the *Cricket, Lovely Cricket* Calypso to celebrate the West Indies' victory over the England team in 1950.

From very early in the British Caribbean experience in the UK we see examples of black sound cultures and football cultures merging. The first football Calypso we have traced appears a few

years after the arrival of the Windrush, and it was recorded by two separate artists. King Timothy recorded this song as the *Football Calypso*, and Edmundo Ros and his Orchestra released it as *Exotic Football Calypso of 1953* (Football and Music 2020, Wilmer 2000). In the King Timothy version, after an introduction of recorded sound from a football match, we hear a Calypso about English First Division football clubs, famous players of the era and British pub culture. This is also evident with Lord Kitchener and the Fitzroy Coleman Band's celebration of Manchester's football culture in 1956 with the *Manchester Football Double Calypso*, which celebrates the League and FA Cup wins of the city's two professional clubs (City and United). Perhaps the most famous and enduring Calypso that references football is Edric Connor's recording of *The Manchester United Calypso* from 1957. This is significant in a couple of respects. First, it celebrates the Busby Babes a year before many of them were killed in the Munich Air Disaster. Second, the enduring appeal of this song means it is still occasionally heard, both at Old Trafford and at the fan-led offshoot club FC United of Manchester. The increasing popularity of chanting at football games also saw the incorporation of Calypso into football culture through the 1964 *Leeds Calypso*, a pastiche of the Calypso form created by a musician from Hull called Ronnie Hilton to celebrate Leeds United's promotion to the First Division (Football and Music 2020). These early examples of Black Atlantic sound cultures being incorporated into football subcultures continued throughout the 1960s, as Skinheads and Mods adopted certain aspects of black style and assimilated aspects of Reggae and Ska into terrace culture. It is to this phase that we now move.

Black sounds, white spaces: the appropriation and assimilation of black music in professional football stadia

The relationship between black music and English football fandom has historically been selective and provisional. A brief, illustrative review of the fan chants found in English football

stadia uncovers traces of black music forms, albeit, tellingly, often imitation versions rather than those drawn directly from the repertoire of black artists themselves. Reference points include historic African American spirituals, classic US Soul tracks, and commercial, Disco-infused Pop songs. *When the Saints Go Marching In* is sung by Southampton supporters and, with “Spurs” substituting “Saints”, followers of Tottenham Hotspur. Fans have drawn on 1960s and 1970s black America to create paeans to their players: The Chi-Lites’ *Have You Seen Her* becoming “Yerry Mina! Whoa, Yerry Mina!” at Everton; and Earth, Wind and Fire’s *September* turned into “Ba-dee-ya, Abdoulaye Doucouré!” for Watford’s erstwhile player. Liverpool fans adopted the melody from *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Boney M to sing “We are Liverpool! Tra, la, la, la, laa!”; *D.I.S.C.O* by Ottawan was spelled out as “D.I.CAN.I.O” for Paolo Di Canio by Celtic followers; and *Go West* by The Village People famously became “One Nil to the Arsenal!”. 1980s Pop hits continue to form the basis of popular songs two decades into the twenty-first century. *Papa’s Got a Brand New Pigbag*, performed by the primarily white Dance-Punk instrumentalists Pigbag, has been used by Middlesbrough and Queens Park Rangers as goal celebration music, and has echoed around Crystal Palace’s Selhurst Park as the chant of “Do, do, do, do! Andy Johnson!”. The catchy chorus of *Give It Up*, by Florida’s multi-racial KC and the Sunshine Band has been applied to many players, including ex-Everton cult hero Nikica Jelavić: “Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, naa! Jela, Jelavic, Jelavic! Jela, Jelavic!”.

Black music has never become a central facet of the public practices and displays of mainstream fan groups in the stadium though. Indeed, sound and music have themselves contributed to racialised marginalisations. As part of the broader exclusion of minority ethnic fans from England’s professional stadia, the role of racist chanting and songs in creating

exclusionary atmospheres and reaffirming the whiteness of fan groups is well-noted (e.g. Back 2003b, Back et al 2001, Burdsey 2021). Back (2003b: 311) points out that:

the corporeal nature of the fan culture needs to be represented in all its sensory dimensions. Particularly important here is the culture of sound, the songs that are sung and the acoustic quality of the noises in the crowd. It is primarily through sounds and banter that a structure of feeling is produced in football stadiums.

In this section, our specific concerns are not with the racialised, and sometimes overtly racist, content of fans' chants (as problematic as they are). Instead, we direct our analysis to the music that is played over the public address systems in stadia – before, after and at half-time – providing a particular soundscape that reflects and validates the predominantly white crowds in the stands. While the music played in English football grounds rarely extends beyond classic Rock, Pop and Indie, we focus on Reggae and Ska. Although largely peripheral to the match day soundtrack, we explore their uptake and impact here because their fleeting and conditional presence tells us something important sociologically about the contested relationship between English football, black music and white supporters. We argue that the use of black music in a football context is inexorably political, modifying the effects and readings of the songs, through processes of whitening, silencing and appropriation.

Visitors to Chelsea's Stamford Bridge will be familiar with the powerful instrumental track that accompanies the teams' arrival on the pitch at the start of each game: Winston Wright's soaring, stomping organ riff from *The Liquidator*, recorded in 1969 by the Jamaican group Harry J Allstars (including musicians that would later become the mainstay of Bob Marley's rhythm section). *The Story of Trojan Records* reports that Chelsea played a series of matches in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad in 1964, taking on local teams and English rivals Wolverhampton Wanderers alike. The players apparently enjoyed the contemporaneous Ska hit, *Sammy Dead*, by Eric 'Monty' Morris so much so that one player bought a copy and, predicting it would be well-received by the fans back home, gave it to the Stamford Bridge

match day disc jockeys. Building on this trend, twenty-five copies of *The Liquidator* were subsequently given away as free gifts in Chelsea match programmes (Cane-Honeysett 2018). Proving popular with supporters, the track is still played at Stamford Bridge and occasionally elsewhere (such as West Bromwich Albion) over 50 years later. *One Step Beyond*, another instrumental with a frenetic Ska beat, is also played at Chelsea (and other clubs), where it is boomed over the public address system to celebrate a home victory. It is noteworthy, however, that rather than Prince Buster's 1964 original (the B-side to *Al Capone*), it is the faster, punkier – and altogether *whiter* – 1979 cover version by Ska revivalists Madness that receives airplay.

Reasons for the popularity and longevity of *The Liquidator* and *One Step Beyond* are partly prosaic. They are easy to move and sing along to: their cadences are perfect for the 'up and down' arm-pumping and pogoing of jubilant football fans, with catchy, crescendo-like choruses and no words to remember; and they are primed for hand-clapping and the insertion of one's team name (or abuse towards another). The songs' take up extends, we argue, beyond their melodic appeal though. Critically, they are also more accessible and permissible, culturally, for white football audiences. In short, notwithstanding their original performance and production, the Jamaican tracks we highlight here have no obvious element of black voice, history or subjectivity within them. As such, they do not challenge the whiteness of supporter groups. They are characteristic of the sub-genre of Skinhead Reggae, a fast-paced, harmonious (often instrumental) and consciously apolitical form of music, which gained popularity among – and was later purposely targeted at – that subculture in the mid to late 1960s (Marshall 1994, Stratton 2014). Many Reggae-listening Skinheads saw no contradiction in the consumption of Jamaican music alongside acts of violent racism; and these songs' reverberation in football stadia existed alongside racist exclusions and active National Front recruitment (Garland and Rowe 2001). Reggae lost popularity among many Skinheads in the 1970s as the subculture

took a turn towards organised Far Right politics; and Jamaican music developed a more Afrocentric and Rastafari inspired 'roots' style, which was culturally distinct from its predecessors: sonically, lyrically and *politically*.

Football is a realm where the contingent veneration of black footballers has existed, paradoxically, alongside other racisms (Back *et al* 2001, Burdsey 2021). Through the soundscapes of the stadium, the game also reflects the broader, selective appropriation of black style by white working-class communities, and the fluid, inconsistent and fleeting ways in which they engage with everyday multiculturalism (Back 1996, Nayak 2003). These complex, and frequently contradictory, relationships highlight the difficult coming together of the sonic space of black music brought into direct contact – and conflict – with the physical space of the football terrace, which has long been out-of-bounds to black and other minority ethnic communities. In this way, the use of music has also been about power, ownership and control – creating a boundary on the inclusion of blackness in the space of the stadium, reduced to sonic rather than actual presence. The response of young Black Britons to this exclusion is addressed in the next sections.

Football inna Babylon: Reggae as diasporic critique of sporting exclusions

The exclusion of minority ethnic fans from the stadium has not inhibited their interest in the game more broadly. As a generation of black Britons came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, and a number started to play the game professionally, it became a major part of their lives. Yet societal racism (and its gendered intersections) meant that their experiences of fandom were inevitably different from white communities. For instance, family and neighbourhood ties were less available for minority ethnic fans when forging affiliations with professional clubs. In fact, negative local experiences (inside and outside grounds) created attachments to clubs elsewhere;

whilst Arsenal and Crystal Palace's selection of talented black players, and Liverpool's reputation as a cosmopolitan outfit because of their regular successes in European competitions, were contributing factors in fan affiliations too (Burdsey and Randhawa 2012). Moreover, while the sight of black fans wearing England shirts and waving St. George flags is now increasingly common (Burdsey 2021), the latter part of the twentieth century saw black communities choose the multi-racial, (post)colonial symbolism of Brazilian brilliance, or the diasporic attachments of, say, Jamaica or Nigeria (Back *et al* 2001), as antidotes to the whiteness England fandom.

It is unsurprising that the topic of football, as a central part of everyday urban life, found its way into the popular black music of the 1970s and 1980s. This represents a continuation of the role of the original post-Windrush Calypsonians, telling stories that reflected the lived experiences of black British people, and the power of Reggae, in particular, in critiquing systemic racism (Henry and Worley 2021). In an echo of the early Calypsos, sporadic references to football were incorporated into Reggae, perhaps most notably with 1972's *Football Reggae* by the Clement Bushay Set. *No No Way* by Daddy Rusty from 1984 mentions West Ham United beating Arsenal in the 1980 FA Cup Final – demonstrating that, while blackness was absent from the stadium, football was consumed in different ways and still formed part of the wider black London experience. Later in the 1990s, as football started to market itself more expansively, black music was incorporated in official cup final songs by professional clubs. For example, Arsenal's 1993 FA Cup song *Shouting for the Gunners* featured Tippa Irie and Peter Hunnigale, and the team's 2000 song was a bespoke cover of Donna Summer's *Hot Stuff*. These trends offer a reminder that the stadium is just one site for the consumption of modern English football. Like alternative practices of fandom that operate

outside the ground and mainstream fan groups, music forms have emerged in novel cultural ways and from marginal social positions.

Two Reggae tracks recorded in the 1980s are especially noteworthy. In 1981, the legendary Jamaican artist Dennis Alcapone recorded *World Cup Football* (with the B-side *Dub It Football Style*). After a general celebration of a number of international teams, such as Argentina and Brazil (“If you want to see some skill, Come watch the team Brazil”), the song then changes tack completely. The lyrics call for the England manager, Ron Greenwood, to pick black British footballers such as Cyrille Regis and Garth Crooks for the national team:

If England want to do some good (repeat)
Here me now, Here me now, Ron Greenwood (repeat)
Forget your pride and your prejudice
And carry the man Cyrille Regis

Regis’ inclusion is particularly edifying. Born in French Guiana, his involvement with the England team speaks to wider racist exclusions of the time in Thatcher’s Britain. When he was picked to play for England in 1982 – becoming only the third black player to represent the men’s full national side – Regis infamously received a package in the post. There was a bullet inside, with an accompanying note threatening that Regis would get something similar in his leg if he stepped onto the turf at Wembley Stadium (Back et al 2001). 1982 also saw the release of the foundational Dub album *Scientist Wins the World Cup* by Scientist which, although an instrumental LP as per the genre, further illuminated the connections between football and music within the black Caribbean diaspora.

With the emergence of a distinctly British inflection within Reggae – as epitomised by the Greensleeves sub-label UK Bubbblers, which put out records by Lovers Rock artists and sound system MCs – there was a shift in tone to reflect both the everyday life of being young and black in Britain, and the resistance of communities to violent and institutional racism. Rob

Waters (2019: 829, emphasis in original) argues that by the late 1970s/early 1980s there was a widespread ‘sense that black political mobilization in Britain was *making history*’ and consequently it was captured on many records of the time. For example, *13 Dead (Nothing Said)* by Johnny Osbourne and *New Craas Massahkah* by Linton Kwesi Johnson – both about the New Cross fire in London, which killed thirteen young black people at a house party in 1981, and for which no one has ever been charged – and Johnson’s *Di Great Insohreckshan* about the Brixton uprising the same year (ibid.) highlight how the music of the Black Atlantic has been ‘indelibly marked by the British conditions in which it grew and matured’ (Gilroy 1991: 115).

Asher Senator’s *The Big Match* from 1985 follows Alcapone from this black British orientation. This track could be situated as the first musical critique of racism in English football and the institution of the FA from within Britain’s black communities. The record tells the story of an imagined England team, comprising eleven, contemporaneous real black players, which plays against long-standing rivals West Germany. The lyrics contain a veritable ‘who’s who’ of black British football stars of the time:

The Football Association wanted to beat Germany
They wanted a winning team so all blacks was the key
Them select Alex Williams to be the goalie
Along with Regis, Crooks and [John] Barnes to play the front three
They picked Paul Davis, Ricky Hill and John Chiedozie

The verse is followed by the ‘terrace chant’ chorus (to the tune of *Bread of Heaven*) of:

England all blacks, England all blacks, We’ll support you ever more!

It then goes on to enunciate a clear and powerful call to action:

So football fans, Hear my plea
And Association listen to me
We can take this game from fantasy
And turn it into reality

As Joseph Heathcott (2003: 187, emphasis added) states:

In coming to terms with the emergence of transoceanic, working-class cultural forms, we must pay close attention not only to the flows of people and ideas across borders but also to *the urban spaces in which these ideas are generated, absorbed, reworked, and exported.*

Both *World Cup Football* and *The Big Match* reveal how black sound cultures shifted from a focus on the celebration of black life to a critique of the racist structures of football governance, and created a sonic space of resistance that imagined and demanded a different English football team – and by extension, a new England. These are key musical moments but also essential signifiers of changes in football. Black footballers – some British born in the black diaspora, others born in former outposts of Empire – were taking their place in the British cultural consciousness. Asher Senator presents a different way of listening to propose a different way of *being* – an audiotopia. The extent to which this has been realised is currently varied. The success of black players within the England men’s squad is clear to see, but their inclusion in the women’s national team remains far more limited (Burdsey 2021).

The centrality of football within Reggae-based critiques of coloniality and racism has further significance. It challenges some popular and academic orthodoxies about the reliance on cricket as the context for black British sporting resistance during this period. Watching the West Indies cricket team thrash England in Leeds, London or Birmingham in the early 1980s provided huge (post)colonial symbolism. As well as the power of black victory, it offered the opportunity for (male) black Britons to find a ‘home’, albeit contingent and heavily policed, in sporting stadia – and, critically, to dominate its spaces and soundscapes. Football was different. Racial exclusion from football grounds, few black players in the England team and international opposition drawn mainly from continental Europe meant football did not offer a similar launchpad for resistance. Hence the political value of creating *musical* critiques which lay the power dynamics of systemic racism bare, speaking out against the racist structures of the country’s football governance, and its refusal to recognise and select black sporting talent.

Transatlantic sounds and a diasporic footballing consciousness

Kun (2005: 23) points out that music has an ‘uncanny ability to absorb and meld heterogeneous national, cultural, and historical styles and traditions across space and within place’. The notion that diasporas think globally and live locally (Clifford 1994) is well-established, and formative diaspora theorists have emphasized concepts of heterogeneity, fluidity, creolization, syncretism and hybridity (Brah 1996, Gilroy 1993, Hall 1990). Within this approach, diaspora challenges dominant discourses about authenticity, belonging and citizenship, and illustrates how the formation of ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall 2000) often renders national borders redundant. In particular, it enables a disentangling of the relationship between place(s) of ‘origin’ and place(s) of ‘settlement’, and a nuanced consideration of the respective meanings and values attached to them. As Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2010: 211) states, ‘diaspora is a state of being and a process of becoming, a condition and consciousness located in the shifting interstices of “here” and “there”, a voyage of negotiation between multiple spatial and social identities’. The currents between ‘homeland’ and ‘diaspora’ are, he argues, ‘often simultaneously covert and overt, abstract and concrete, symbolic and real, and their effects may be sometimes disjunctive or conjunctive’ (ibid: 212).

While the songs in the previous section reflect the black British experience during that historical period, the wider cross-continental, pan-African Black Atlantic links articulated by Gilroy are illustrated by two later recordings by British-Jamaican Reggae artist Macka B. These demonstrate both the way sound travels throughout the Black Atlantic diaspora and how British Reggae’s connections with football have also forged a more global, diasporic consciousness. As Heathcott (2003: 183) notes, ‘cultural forms may be grounded in local spaces of production and consumption, but the very material basis for that production, and indeed the ideologies that underpin meaning, often knit together people and processes across national boundaries’. More

specifically, Caspar Melville (2020: 23) argues that ‘Black music has been one of the key resources for developing forms of affiliation and notions of belonging that exceed the narrow boundaries of the nation state’.

Echoing the previous sentiments of *African* by Peter Tosh in connecting blackness with African identities and subjectivities (“Don’t care where you come from, As long as you’re a black man you’re an African”), Macka B’s *Pam Pam Cameroun* from 1990 celebrates the success of Cameroon (the first African nation to reach the quarter-finals) at the 1990 men’s World Cup. Referencing legendary players Roger Milla and Cyrille Makanaky at the very beginning, the song’s message is clear:

I wanted Cameroon to win the World Cup
But they put Africa on the football map

The artist then goes on to pronounce:

No matter where you’re born
No matter where you come from
If you’re black then you’re an African

Macka B followed up this song with *Allez the Reggae Boyz*, a tribute to the Jamaican team’s qualification for the 1998 men’s World Cup. As Josh Kun (2005: 20) states:

Popular music is, by its nature, a post-nationalist formation. While it may take root in national formations, impact national audiences, and impact the creation of national ideas and politics, music is always from somewhere else and is always en route to somewhere else.

This dynamic post-nationalism is reflected in admiration of Cameroon’s participation in the 1990 tournament from British fans in diasporic communities. It is also evident in celebration of Jamaica’s qualification within a new generation of fans eight years later, especially given that a large number of players in that Jamaican squad had been born in Britain to Jamaican parents (Back et al 2001). Macka B’s songs signify wider cultural shifts and the complexity of black identities, demonstrating how ‘new hybrid identities are created by the spread of musical

sounds...while musical sub-cultures and sites can be politicised and subject to scrutiny as part of struggles for local spaces' (Connell and Gibson 2003: 16).

“Those absent from the stadium are always right”

Redhead's (1987, 1991, 1993, 1997) formative theorisations remain highly influential in the academic literature on music, football and place, albeit primarily through the prism of white musical forms. Redhead's later work, influenced by Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, evolved to explore contemporary media cultures, technology and speed, and the impact of these forces on football cultures outside the stadium. He described how:

the “absent” spectators watching on live television (or via the Internet) are treated to the spectacle of spectators within the grounds, watching not only the replays of incidents on giant screens but also the game live on screens on their mobile phones (Redhead 2007: 238).

Similarly, as we have outlined here, although black fan cultures have often been absent – excluded – from the stadium, references to football have long been present in forms of black sound culture. This continues to be evident in more contemporary musical genres such as Hip-Hop, Grime and Drill.

Whether it is Loyle Carner referencing his love of football while performing in classic football shirts or Slowthai describing his first trip to a football match, the relevance of football to contemporary music artists has rarely been greater. Grime and Drill artists have mentioned footballers in their lyrics, in songs such as Cadet and Deno's *Advice* which namechecks the Tottenham Hotspur player Dele Alli, while a range of other artists have celebrated various players in their raps and bars. Some professional players have reciprocated by incorporating dance moves from Drill subcultures into their goal celebrations, reflecting a connection with contemporary youth subcultures as well as the shifting demographics of Premier League footballers and an increasing visibility of black culture in football stadia. Video games and E-

sports now provide virtual spaces for music and football to cross-fertilise on Twitch, while YouTube provides new spaces for black sound cultures to emerge (James 2015, 2020a, 2020b).

Moreover, alongside the substantial participation of black footballers in the British game, black popular culture has had a sizeable influence on the consumption patterns of professional players – of all ethnic backgrounds – and associated occupational cultures: for instance, players arriving for games wearing Beats headphones, Adidas using Grime superstar Stormzy to announce Paul Pogba’s arrival at Manchester United, and, latterly, Marcus Rashford’s selection as the face of British fashion designer Burberry. Of course this is not an exclusively sporting phenomenon. As we have made apparent throughout this article, connections with broader cultural trends are always apparent – in this time period, music forms R’n’B, UK Garage and Dubstep were heralded for their melding of multiracial, working-class youth cultural attributes and practices (Melville 2020). This connection between music and professional player cultures – in this instance as a source of diasporic politics of sound – suggests that there may well be spaces outside the stadium and the mainstream where transformation is taking place. As Connell and Gibson (2003: 193) have argued ‘Music can be used in certain contexts to create a sense of space, to reaffirm various social identities or challenge or subvert power relationships’. It can, therefore, change practices, cultures and rituals.

These sonic connections are not exclusive to the Anglophobe world (and we note the limitations of our coverage here). Something equally important happened in France in 2018. Vegedream, a French Hip-Hop artist of Ivorian background, recorded the track *Ramenez la Coupe à la Maison* (transl. *Bring the Cup Home*) which, in an ode to the French team, gives ‘shout outs’ to Samuel Umtiti, Benjamin Mendy, Blaise Matuidi, Kylian Mbappé, Ousmane Dembélé, N’golo Kanté and Paul Pogba – all players of black African heritage – before going

on to celebrate all squad members. This invocation of diasporic sensibility was demonstrated most powerfully at the team's victorious homecoming, as the players were filmed singing and dancing with Vege Dream as they undertook their victory lap of honour at the Stade de France in Paris (in front of a primarily white audience). These associations emerge in various other locations such as the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam with Ajax fans' adoption of Bob Marley's *Three Little Birds* (Bob Marley Official Website 2020); and in contemporary songs that synchronise football, race and diaspora, such as *Reggae Ball* by Kenyan Dancehall artist Frankie Dee, *Drogba (Joanna)* by British Afrowave DJ Afro B, and British duo Dave and AJ Tracey's *Thiago Silva*. This latter track is of particular note, introducing South America into a Black Atlantic dialogue with the multiracial (post)colonial European metropolises of Paris and London: a celebration of a Brazilian footballer (then) playing in France, recorded by artists from Ladbroke Grove and Streatham. In 2019, footage of a young white man in a Thiago Silva replica Paris Saint-Germain shirt, performing the track with the artists on stage at the Glastonbury Festival, went viral on YouTube – again highlighting the circuits through which football facilitates a selective mainstream consumption of music of black origin.

Football and Black Atlantic audiotopias? Some emerging thoughts

As Kun (2005: 21-2) notes, 'thinking about music in terms of its potential for audiotopias does not involve space as a fixed, static, unchanged landscape. The spaces of music may produce maps, but they are maps that move'. Our emerging thoughts take us back to the transnational diasporic spaces hinted at in our opening example of Ms Banks. Banks calls attention to, and shows the potential for, more inclusive transnational spaces to open up in areas that have traditionally been subject to gatekeeping by the media, fans, and other sports and music industry figures. Banks showcases the anticipatory aspect of audiotopias in action. Back (2003a: 283) remarks that:

Thinking with sound and music may offer the opportunity for thinking through issues of inclusion, coexistence and multiculturalism in a more humane way and allow us to imagine what a multicultural landscape might sound like in the age of information and global interdependency.

The circumstances, cultures and structures that have whitened the sonic element of mainstream fan practices are a particular construction that individuals create, and these stories are both reproduced within their collectivities and shared with others. We do not see the current state of affairs as cast in stone though: residual forms of resistance emerge and the possibility of change is always present.

Music and football have, we have argued here, something in common in relation to race, migration, identity and belonging. As Kasinitz and Martiniello (2019: 859) state, ‘migrants often know the music of the places to which they migrate before they speak the language, and members of the host society often become familiar with the newcomer’s music before they know much else about them’. The same is true of football. The globalisation of the Premier League means that consumption of British cultures within the developing world is led by football, with replica shirts worn across the globe and seen on refugees trying to come to the UK. Music is, in many ways, the connecting ‘glue’ through which these forms of identity, affiliation and consumption are integrated. Kasinitz and Martiniello (2019: 861) go on to highlight this potential, arguing that ‘popular music can become a means of communication and dialogue between different groups to build some form of shared local citizenship’ and thus represents ‘an arena in which diversity is experienced in everyday life and “the other” is encountered, often in a positive context’.

We end this article with another occurrence – more mundane but equally instructive – that demonstrates the coming together of black sound culture and football, and which presents a similar, fleeting audiotopian vision of contemporary Britain. In June 2019, video footage was

shared on social media of Liverpool FC's victory parade, following their UEFA Champions League victory. It brought into sharp focus how globalisation, place, migration and diaspora, music and sport can come together and be mediated as an audiotopia. Among packed crowds on Liverpool's waterfront, a black man, with a Senegal national flag, was recorded playing a drum and singing a song about the club's Senegalese star Sadio Mané. This was especially poignant and evocative of time and place within the city of Liverpool, which had played a major role in the transatlantic slave trade and is home to the oldest settled black population in Europe (Christian 1998). The final leg of the parade took place in sight of the River Mersey, the docks, the reimagined warehouses of Empire and the International Slavery Museum. This episode simultaneously presents other possibilities, orientations and futures. It demonstrates the ability of this man and his companions to take a space and to connect the local with the transnational, with the sounds of Black Atlantic echoing along the river that gave the world Merseybeat.

Quite apart from the anticipatory and symbolic elements of this scene, the claiming of space is ever more relevant in the age of Black Lives Matter. As we have demonstrated, black sound cultures have a role to play in the creation and sustenance of inclusive practices and spaces *inside and outside* the stadium. As racism is increasingly directed at those employed in the football industries through social media networks, there is more urgent action required to create active fan communities and new forms of activism for the digital age. The critical task is to harness the potential of sound, and to mobilise and orientate sound cultures towards realising the imaginary power of the beautiful game.

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