

# **RHODES UNIVERSITY**

## **DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Title of the Thesis:

Racism Against Black Soccer Players In The English Premier League

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## **Abstract**

This study analyses racism against black players in the English Premier League. To that end, this thesis studies online articles published between 2018 and 2021 by two British tabloids, namely, The Daily Mail and The Sun, to make sense of the various ways in which black soccer players experience racism. This thesis uses the theoretical concept of “racial xenophobia” to analyse and understand expressions of antipathy towards black players playing in the Premier League. A key finding in the thesis suggests that fans and players racially abuse black players in the stadiums by likening them to animals and treating them as sub-human. Another finding in the study is that fans use the bad performances of black players as an excuse to racially abuse them via social media platforms. Social media in the 21st century has now accelerated the rate at which racism is perpetrated as fans now have more access to players through their accounts. The study also found that tabloids do not only report about racist abuse but are also guilty of portraying black players in racially stereotypical ways. This research concludes that racism against black players remains a constant feature of football in the English Premier League from the time black players started to feature in the sport in the 1970s.

**Keywords:** Racism, English Premier League, black soccer players, fans, media, online

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## **List Of Abbreviations**

ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EU	European Union
EURO	UEFA European Championship
FA	Football Association
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
MBE	Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
NFL	National Football League
PFA	Professional Footballers Association
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UEFA DR	Union of European Football Associations Disciplinary Regulations
UK	United Kingdom



# 1 Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study analyses racism against black players in the English Premier League. Racism has been an ongoing problem within the European football scene, and the English Premier League in particular has seen a rise of racist incidents in the last year. Black players remain highly targeted by racist fans, with Muslims and Asians also being targeted during games. For instance, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, a Gabonese Arsenal striker, has been the target of all kinds of racist harassments such as being subjected to monkey noises whenever he has the ball (Steinberg, 2019). Some fans have gone as far as to throw banana peels at him during games (Steinberg, 2019).

Racism in football became frequent in the late 1970s and early 80s as black players in the English league began to increase (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). Before then there had been an overwhelmingly low number of black players which meant white people did not feel any threat to their racial dominance in the sport. The 1970s saw the emergence of Bermudan soccer player Clyde Best who became the first black player to play for West Ham United in the English Premier League in 1970. Clyde Best was a victim of racial abuse from fans who did not want him to play for West Ham (Draper, 2016). Best recalls getting letters from fans before games and one particular letter stood out sent in 1971 which threatened to throw acid on his face if he walked on to the pitch for West Ham's next game that season, Best was only 19 at the time (Draper, 2016). Best also recalls that Everton and Leeds fans were the worst when it came to racist and monkey chants, Best would know it was directed towards him as he would be the only black player on the pitch (Draper, 2016). Best would not respond to racist chants but would let his great performances on the pitch do the talking as he went on to have a long career with West Ham (Draper, 2016). He is now a celebrated West Ham legend who is now more appreciated and remembered fondly by their fans as black players are much more accepted in the English Premier League. In the 1970s black players could not speak out on racist abuse which seems unfair as they were expected to deal with it and not challenge it.

The 1970s also saw the emergence of black English footballer Laurie Cunningham who played for Leyton Orient in England and made his debut in 1974 (Onuora, 2015). In May of that year

when he was only 18, he was racially abused by fans in a match against Millwall, who threw bananas and a carving knife at him as he came out of the tunnel for the start of the game (Onuora, 2015). He would make a black power salute as an act of defiance against the fans but despite his defiance he would be plagued by racial slurs and monkey chants throughout his career, which he had to 'bottle up' as he could not speak out against it (Onuora, 2015). His decision to bottle up his feelings was in order to show other black players that they could overcome racism in the sport. Unfortunately, Cunningham did not see out his football career as he was killed in a car crash at age 33 (Onuora, 2015). Another one of the few black players seen in the English Premier League in the 1970s was Nottingham Forest player, Viv Anderson who broke into the first team in 1974. According to Wheeler (2010), Anderson was also a victim of racist abuse as he would have bananas and apples thrown at him whenever he entered the pitch to play. He would also receive monkey chants as the fruits were being thrown at him (Wheeler, 2010). Anderson recalls being told by his manager at Nottingham Forest, Brian Clough not to let the fans' chants affect him as they would not stop their chants but simply distract him from playing football (Wheeler, 2010). His manager's advice would work well for him as he became the first black player to play for the England national team and he would also win the Champions League, Europe's biggest club competition with Nottingham Forest in 1980.

The 1980s were no different to the 1970s as racism against black players remained high, black players were not welcomed into football teams, and they could not speak out against the abuse they received from fans. The 1980s are described as a hotbed for racism in English football by Edwards (2012). Fans of football clubs such as Chelsea would wait outside the stadium to learn the team line ups which were released prior to the game to show which players made the team, the fans would do this to determine whether any black players had made the team, if there were black players in the team the fans would boycott the game (Edwards, 2012). Englishman Paul Canoville was Chelsea's first black player who made his debut in the 1981-82 season. His debut for the club was met with multiple racist chants by his own fans as they did not want a black player to play for their club (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 1999). Some of the chants including fans saying, "We don't want the nigger la la la laa", they threw bananas at him and also made monkey chants (Barlow, 2021). According to Barlow (2021), Canoville recalls feeling physically sick and terrified. This was not a once-off as he continued to face abuse from fans throughout his Chelsea career despite helping the club to two league trophies. His career was short-lived as it ended in 1986 after a nasty tackle and it resulted in him spiralling into a life of

addiction (Barlow, 2021). However, with his life now back on track Canoville is fondly remembered as a Chelsea legend as the club notice his cultural significance, being the first black player for the club.

Black British born players such as John Barnes who joined Watford in 1981 and more famously played for Liverpool from 1987 became prominent figures in the sport which resulted in white fans failing to accept them (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). Much like the players in the 1970s, Barnes remembers fans throwing bananas at him on the pitch (McRae, 2021). It became such a frequent thing that Barnes was no longer bothered by it anymore and would even perform tricks with the bananas as if they were a football (McRae, 2021). Barnes also played for England from 1984 and around that time the national team would travel with fans and journalist that would segregate and racially abuse them on planes without any repercussions (McRae, 2021). White fans felt that their dominance in the sport was threatened and as a result they would show their disapproval of the black players by making monkey noises, making racist chants and throwing bananas at the fans (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). Despite the racist abuse he faced when he played, Barnes is regarded as one of the greatest English players of all time due to his stellar performances for his clubs and the national team. Similar to the 1970s, black players like John Barnes and Canoville could not speak out on the abuse that they faced and had to play through it in order to succeed.

The 1990s saw the English Football League change its name to the Premier League. This made the league more global, and it attracted a wider audience (Nash, 2000). Attracting a wider audience meant that the Premier League clubs began to invest in more talent from outside of England which brought in more black players to the league (Back, et al, 1999). However, this did not mean that racism against black players had stopped as players would still suffer abuse from fans and even managers. Back, et al, (1999) write on an incident where Nathan Blake, a black Welsh player who played in the Premier League from the early 1990s for teams like Blackburn Rovers and Chelsea was racially abused by his manager as he was called a 'black bastard'. The manager would further explain that he sometimes lets his team train according to their race, letting white players play on one side and black players on another (Back, et al, 1999). Blake would also receive death threats in the mail and as well as receiving nuts with messages calling him "a fucking monkey" (Daily Mail, 2013). According to the Daily Mail (2013) Blake would brush off the racist abuse as it kept coming from fans and had he focused on it he would have lost sight of what he was trying to do. Blake's career in the Premier League was short lived as he would fall down to the lower divisions due to competition in the Premier

League. He does recall suffering a lot due to racist abuse during his time in the Premier League and the worst abuse he faced was the death threats from fans which significantly affected his desire to play (Daily Mail, 2013).

Unlike the 1980s, the 1990s saw a player retaliate to racism by a fan by attacking them. This took place in 1995 when Eric Cantona of Manchester United kicked a Crystal Palace fan for saying racist slurs towards him (Back, et al, 1999). Frenchman, Eric Cantona was regarded as one of the best players in the Premier League in 1995 and played for reigning champions Manchester United. He was racially abused by a Crystal Palace fan during an away game at Selhurst Park (Crystal Palace's home stadium) and in retaliation he kicked the fan (Wells, 2021). As punishment, Cantona received a 9-month football ban meaning he could not play football or train with his teammates, he was stripped off the French captaincy and he received 120 hours of community service (Wells, 2021). The fan who was kicked had his season ticket revoked by Crystal Palace meaning he could no longer watch football matches for the rest of the 1994/95 season (Wells, 2021). Such resistance to racism was unheard of at the time and according to Wells (2021) Cantona believes that the 9-month ban was just a way to make an example of him to discourage other players from defiant acts against racism (Wells, 2021).

The 1990s also saw the governing bodies in football make efforts to curb racism. To counter the rise of racism within football, the English Premier League launched a national anti-racist campaign in 1992 called "let's Kick Racism Out of Football", which was renamed to "Kick It Out" in 1997 (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The campaign targeted racist language in football, for example, the campaign installed "prescriptive written codes of conduct to which supporters had to adhere whilst in the stadiums they entered" (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014, p. 142). The issue with the "Kick It Out" campaign was that it was initiated by the Commission for Racial Equality, and not the English Football Association (FA) - the only football structure that has power over English soccer (Dixon, Lowes, & Gibbons, 2016). The FA's strategy to fight racism focused "on collective fan behaviour rather than addressing the structures of power and the maintenance of hegemony within the sport" (Dixon, Lowes, & Gibbons, 2016, p. 141). According to Dixon, Lowes, & Gibbons (2016), the "white-led FA" strategy concentrated on negotiating change outwardly while maintaining an institutional ethos that was detrimental for racial equality. Focusing on collective fan behaviour has led to the FA failing to single out racist behaviour from fans and this has allowed fans to continue abusing players as they get away with their behaviour. The failure of the FA to change inward has also contributed to their reluctance to consider racism as a priority.

The 21st century saw the incoming of even more black players into the Premier League which helped paint the picture that racism was on the decline (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The governing bodies in the Premier League hoped that success of black players such as Thierry Henry of Arsenal would change fans' perception and accept black players in the game (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century also saw the introduction of other anti-racism campaigns namely, Show Racism The Red Card, which aimed to reduce racism against black players in the English Premier League (Dixon, K., Lowes, J., & Gibbons, T, 2016). However, black players continue to be abused by fans which makes the perception that racism is on the decline a myth. Manchester City and English player Raheem Sterling has been a victim of racist abuse ever since he started playing football in the early 2010s. According to Steinburg (2022) Sterling has been a victim of abuse on social media, in stadiums and also by the media. Unlike the black players in the previous century, Raheem Sterling speaks out against racial abuse and calls for action against the perpetrators (Steinburg, 2022). Fans caught abusing players and other fans are now being held accountable for their actions and players are no longer expected to stomach the abuse. Continued racial abuse shows that black players remain foreign in the sport, usually being told to go back to their country (Rzepnikowska, 2019). This shows that not only are the fans racist, but they are xenophobic as well. Their xenophobia is influenced by a fear of foreign influence and perceived threats to their racial and cultural identity (Engel, et al, 2018). It is again also influenced by media outlets whom according to McGuire (2018) use words such as flood to describe how foreigners are entering the UK (United Kingdom). Such terms help create this fear which in turn is manifested as xenophobia and racism.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century also created social media which has been instrumental in how fans express their opinions in football. Social media platforms on the internet allows the discussion of football to occur 24/7 and also allows fans to use pseudonyms to protect their identity (Cleland, 2014). Prior to the invention of social media, fans mainly expressed their views in magazines (Cleland, 2014). What they could say in magazines may have been regulated meaning that their true opinions would not be reflected, however the invention of social media has come with the ability to be anonymous. The ability to hide one's identity is problematic as it has led to the promotion of hate speech that usually centres on racism (Cleland, 2014). Being anonymous on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook means that fans can say whatever they feel like saying to the players without suffering any consequences. Fans also have more access to players through social media which means that they can simply abuse them directly on their accounts.

English football experienced more explicit racism in the 1980s as fans and club owners refused to accept black players into the sport. Black players had no voice around this time and suffered abused even from their own fans. This changed in the 1990s which saw black players call out racial abuse. The introduction of the Premier League in 1992 saw more black players come into the league which meant action had to be taken against racism. This gave birth to “Kick It Out” but its bid to curb racism has not been successful as fans would continue to abuse players. The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw even more black players come into the league as its influence kept on growing. Much like the 80s and 90s, fans continue to abuse players, the only difference being they now have many platforms to express their racial thoughts and can remain anonymous. Racism in English football has remained consistent with the only difference being that in the 90s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century racism is now being taken seriously as compared to the 80s. In order to try curb racism, the Premier League conducted a social media blackout which meant clubs and players would take a three day break off social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Jimenez & Das, 2021). This was done to put pressure on social media companies to take action against racism on their platforms (Jimenez & Das, 2021). In February of 2021 the FA wrote an open letter to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Mark Zuckerberg CEO of Facebook, calling for the leaders to put an end to the level of vicious and offensive abuse on their platforms (Jimenez & Das, 2021). The effort the FA and other governing organisations in England have put to curb racism shows how it is taken more seriously now as compared to the 90s and 80s. Players and clubs now exercise their voice against perpetrators which is beneficial to black players that continue to suffer abuse.

The research questions that drive this research project include:

1. How do English tabloids report and frame the anti-black racism that black football players are subjected to on the field and online?
2. How do English tabloids express their own racial hostility towards black football players?
3. How are black soccer players represented in the English tabloids?

## **1.2 Conclusion**

Since the emergence of black players into the English Premier League in the 1970s they have been victims of racist abuse from fans and players alike. From the 1970s all the way through

the 1990s black players could not speak out against racist abuse but had to play through it or ‘stomach it’. This meant that fans could get away with the racial abuse they inflicted on black players, despite players of this time being psychologically and mentally affected by the abuse. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought more spotlight to racism as more black players are arriving in the English Premier League. This has meant that players are now able to speak out on racist abuse from fans and players, and more action is being taken by the governing bodies to curb racism this includes the three-day social media break taken by clubs and the FA. However, this has not meant that racism is on the decline as the introduction of social media has allowed more fans to racially abuse players given that they have more access to them. Fans are now able to express their racial thoughts online without any filter and they can do so being anonymous which means they show no remorse for their actions.

### **1.3 Limitation of the Study**

This study is limited in scope because it researched only two British newspapers, The Daily Mail and The Sun. Future studies on racism in football could expand on the scope of the study to include more media organisations such as television channels that offer football punditry and various sources, including print and visual. Other social media outlets such as the Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok can also be analysed as football has become popular on the platform, which arguably breeds an environment for the racist fans to abuse players. The articles sampled from the selected newspapers were published online between 2018 and 2021. More articles from earlier years can be analysed as racism has been a constant feature of English football since the introduction of black players into the league.

### **1.4 Chapter Outline**

Chapter One provides a historical context of racism within the English Premier League. It explains the causes behind black soccer players being abused by fans. Through the historical context, Chapter One shows that black soccer players have been racially abused in the English Premier League from the time they started playing for English clubs. Chapter One introduces a critical matter by identifying how black players have dealt with racism in different manners during the five decades that they have been a part of the English game. Lastly, Chapter One

introduces the efforts that the governing bodies of the English Premier League have made to limit racism in the league.

Chapter Two provides a literature review on the existing research on racism in the English Premier League. The literature shows that racism mostly comes from fans who believe that black people should not be playing the sport as they are foreigners who need to go back to their countries. Chapter Three shows the theory and methodology used for this thesis. This chapter explains why the theory of racial xenophobia was best suited for this study as it best explains the hostility against black players. Chapter Three outlines the method used to collect data for the study, which is coding. The chapter also explains how the data was grouped in themes based on the data collected.

Chapter Four outlines how black soccer players have been victims of racism as reported by The Sun. The chapter critically analyses how black soccer players are abused at games by fans who chant racist slurs towards them and make monkey noises. It shows that racism is not only limited to stadiums but has also made its way to social media where black soccer players are targeted by rival fans or their own fans, should they make errors during games. Lastly, the chapter highlights The Sun's representation of black soccer players through their reporting.

Chapter Five also outlines how black players have been victims of racism but this chapter focuses on reports by The Daily Mail. The chapter critically analyses online and on-field racist abuse towards players, highlighting some of the explicit language fans use to abuse black soccer players. Chapter Five also highlights The Daily Mail's representation of black soccer players through their reporting.

Chapter Six provides a summary of the key research findings of the study.

## **2 Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews some of the key literature on football racism in the UK. Despite claims from governing bodies that racism is on the decline in the sport, racism continues to be present in football and the need to eradicate racism from the sport has become urgent. The review of the literature is arranged into three themes: online racism, on-field racism from fans and players, and media representation of black soccer players. The decision to use these themes was based on the fact that they were constantly recurring in the literature. The thesis made use of academic literature and journal articles that specifically research racism in English soccer, and where relevant, research into football racism somewhere else in Europe is also discussed. The discussion begins with the discussion of the literature that researched racism on the soccer field.

### **2.2 On-Field Racism**

A study that is well grounded on the study of race and racism was carried out by Papathanasiou, Tarnanidis, Tsaples, & Armenia, (2022). The study offers a perspective on on-field racism that is based on 650 respondents from an online survey taken across multiple countries which sought to investigate fans' and football officials' experience with racism, how they have seen it being perpetrated and if they had also been on the receiving end of racial abuse. The study found that the most frequent type of racism fans faced at football stadiums was verbal (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022). It also found that the most frequent victims of racism were the fans and players on the pitch (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022).

Contrary to other studies discussed in this chapter, Papathanasiou's, et al, (2022) research suggests that racism in football is widespread in society. Fans and players are victims of racist abuse on a daily basis (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022). According to Papathanasiou, et al (2022) numerous anti-racism organisations have been founded to help victims report racist incidents but the majority of them have failed significantly in addressing the causes of this behaviour. More needs to be done on the part of anti-racism organisations as racism continues to plague fans and players.

Papathanasiou, et al, (2022) research also found that racism directed at the fans and players comes from different origins. It can originate from frustration, insecurity, and a lack of knowledge and understanding (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022). It can also derive from a perception of endangerment one's indigenous or national identity due to the presence of 'others' (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022). I disagree with this notion of how racism originates. As far as this thesis is concerned, racism is an ideology that is over three centuries old, and is grounded on perceiving black people as subhuman and inferior (Smedley, 2022). Racism continues to be expressed differently in different contexts and is constantly evolving, and therefore it cannot simply be credited to one's frustrations or insecurities.

The research conducted by Papathanasiou, et al, (2022) suggests that people who perform racist behaviours are not well educated and mainly influenced through the social media communication tools. This is not true as racism has been historically enforced and developed by highly educated people in society. For example, although Maylam's (2009) study discussed

racism in a different context, that is apartheid South Africa, it illustrates the point I am making about racism being conceptualised and implemented by highly educated people. Maylam (2009) brings forward a quote from Apartheid South Africa's Minister of Native Affairs Mr. Verwoerd which stated that he would rather see South Africa white and poor than rich and living in a mixed society. His policies led to the formation of Bantu Education which led to the creation of an inferior education system for black people (Maylam, 2009). Apartheid South Africa's racist policies were enforced by rich and educated people which suggests that the claims made in Papathanasiou, et al's, (2022) study may be inaccurate. One's ability to perpetuate racism is not determined by their education or financial standing. Fans post daily about racist thoughts which are also expressed verbally during football games (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022). Fans have rejected multiculturalism in football through the presentation of whiteness and a hostility towards the other (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022).

According to Papathanasiou, et al, (2022) to curb racism there remains a need to for training programs for the police, sports officials and referees at games to be more alert for racist incidents. Marketing campaigns and media coverage on racist issues should be more frequent which puts pressure on soccer associations and clubs to take action (Papathanasiou, et al, 2022).

The research done by Papathanasiou, et al, (2022) is important as it highlighted that racism is embedded in society and therefore reflects society's racist values and beliefs. What is also important about Papathanasiou, et al's, (2022) study is that it was able to offer solutions to curb racism during games. However, the main weakness of the study is that it relied on surveys and as mentioned before, the use of surveys may result in a lack of honesty from respondents as they feel they need to present a certain answer due to fear of being perceived negatively should they not (DeFranzo, 2022).

Similar to Papathanasiou, et al's, (2022) study, De Vlieger's (2015) study also sought to investigate racism from fans' perspectives. The investigation also identified fans as perpetrators

of racial abuse. De Vlieger's (2015) sought to investigate fan behaviour at a Feyenoord game in the Europa League, Europe's secondary club competition which occurred on the 26th of February 2015 against Italian side Roma, to determine whether their acts were racist or not according to UEFA's (Union of European Football Associations) guidelines. The study found that spectator-related racism accidents in European football are still the order of the day, which has put UEFA on high alert (De Vlieger, 2015). Although De Vlieger's (2015) study is serious about researching and understanding racism, one of its weaknesses is that the study tends to make spurious claims about the expression of racism. For instance, De Vlieger (2015) claims that some fan behaviour is misconstrued as racism when it is not. An example being of this particular game in which the Feyenoord fans threw an inflatable banana towards Gervinho, a black Ivorian soccer player. De Vlieger (2015) writes that the throwing of bananas has been an ongoing harmless Feyenoord tradition since the 1990s and thus does not symbolise racism. This thesis has established that the throwing of real bananas or inflatable bananas towards black soccer players is a hostile act of racism. The UEFA also viewed this incident as an act of racism because the UEFA fined the Dutch football club Feyenoord €50 000 and ordered the team to play their next European match behind closed doors.

Feyenoord were fined under "article 14 of UEFA DR (Union of European Football Associations Disciplinary Regulations) which stipulates that any person who insults the human dignity of another based on whatever grounds including, race, skin colour or religion , incurs a lasting suspension of ten games, or any other appropriate sanction" (De Vlieger, 2015, p. 228). "Irrespective of the real intent of supporters conducting the behaviour, an act of discrimination or racism in the sense of Article 14 UEFA DR through objects or symbols can be established when it is likely that the object or symbol will be commonly acknowledged as being discriminating or racist" (De Vlieger, 2015, p. 230).

Throwing bananas on-field has been an ongoing racist issue in European football. According to Palmberg (2001) the throwing of bananas communicates a narrative that people of African descent are apish and dim-witted, and need to be domesticated. It becomes disingenuous for De Vlieger to claim that behaviours like this are not racist because the expression of anti-black racism involves likening blacks to apes. De Vlieger (2015) writes that in 2011, Roberto Carlos a black Brazilian had a banana thrown at him during a match in Saint Petersburg, Russia. A

similar incident would occur in 2014 to another black Brazilian player, Dani Alves whilst playing for Barcelona leading to the opposing team being fined €25 000 (De Vlieger, 2015). Throwing bananas at black football players has become a constant feature of the football game in Europe, and it becomes very problematic to try and justify forms of racism displayed by fans.

Despite the ongoing issue of banana throwing in stadiums by fans, De Vlieger's (2015) study suggests that Feyenoord's fans may not have been racist towards Gervinho. De Vlieger (2015) claims that bringing inflatable bananas to games has been a tradition for Feyenoord fans since the 1990s. De Vlieger (2015) credits this behaviour to fan culture, which is problematic. Fan culture is formed around specific cultural texts and behaviours that distinguish fans from nonfans (Guo, 2020). De Vlieger (2015) justifies his spurious claims about the misinterpretation of racism by asserting that fans of a certain club can create traditions and behaviours that are unique, that they see fit in distinguishing them from fans of other clubs. However, fan culture should not encourage behaviour that racially abuses other people and should also not be an excuse to forward racist tendencies.

The literature on what the banana symbolises when it is either thrown at black people or when a banana (real or inflatable one) is weaponised to mock or ridicule black people is crystal clear. As mentioned before, it likens black people to apes, being dim-witted and who need to be domesticated (Palmberg, 2001). The throwing of bananas at black players cannot be excused as fan culture. It is a failure to acknowledge the victims involved in the incident and the message it communicates. Nelson (2014) writes that the desire to protect one's place or culture can lead to the denial or unwillingness to acknowledge racism. This applies to the Feyenoord fans and De Vlieger's (2015) research. The desire to protect the fan culture has led to De Vlieger (2015) refusing to acknowledge racism, therefore questions whether UEFA could have reasonably established that the inflatable banana incident was an act of racism.

Be that as it may, the use of a case study in De Vlieger's (2015) study is important as it allows an in-depth view of how racist incidents are handled by UEFA. De Vlieger's (2015) defence of Feyenoord fans' action is not acceptable as despite it being described as fan culture, it cannot

insult the dignity of another human. The fan culture should never be practiced and needs to be banned. Feyenoord deserved to be punished by UEFA similar to Villareal who did the same to Dani Alves. More importantly De Vlieger's study lacked elementary understanding of how racism functions.

Taking a different approach to De Vlieger's (2015) study, Dixon, Cleland and Cashmore (2022), sought to investigate racism through the use of questionnaires. In this study, fans gave their opinions towards racism in the sport using an online survey that involved 1001 participants and investigated fans' perspectives on whether the political display of taking a knee before soccer games should continue, Dixon, Cleland, and Cashmore's (2022) study found that majority of fans were against the idea of players taking a knee.

Dixon, et al, (2022) research found that fans believed that the gesture of taking the knee had lost its political significance. Fans believe that the gesture is now futile and degrading that has no upside for any race and is now purely a tick the box exercise (Dixon, et al, 2022). The fans believe this to be the case as they feel that the players only do so because they feel obligated for various reasons which are no longer motivated with fighting racism (Dixon, et al, 2022). The fans' view in this instance can be viewed as problematic because in general black people are not receptive to white people telling them how to respond to white racism. It is also not clear why we should find white fans' evaluation of black football players' political tactics to fight against white racism credible. With this knowledge, their input on how to curb racism is problematic as they are arguably part of the reason why the sport is in that predicament.

Dixon, et al, (2022) research also suggests that despite most fans seeing taking the knee as no longer serving its purpose there are some fans who still feel it needs to continue. According to Dixon, et al, (2022) some fans believe that since racism continues to be alive and well, the football world needs to be constantly reminded of it and the knee is a good way to do it. One fan explained in the survey that watching players take the knee before games has allowed him to have conversations with his sons about racism and its continued existence (Dixon, et al, 2022).

Dixon's, et al, (2022) study also looked at what fans thought should be done to create awareness for racism besides taking the knee. Some fans would like to see tangible changes from the English football associations rather than token gesture actions. According to Dixon, et al, (2022) some fans are not against the use of soccer to promote just causes however, the causes need to be just and worthy of action for them to be promoted by the athletes.

The main strength in Dixon, et al, (2022) research was that it tackled a very relevant issue in modern football as there remains debate on whether the players should keep taking the knee or not. The study's survey was strong as it allowed participants to justify their answers as opposed to closed-ended questions.

A different and more personal experience of on-field racism can be seen through Moran (2000), a black footballer player who writes about his time in English football. Moran (2000) investigates what it is like to be a black soccer player in a white dominated sport.

Moran's (2000) article suggests that racism amongst fans is widespread and irrespective of age. According to Moran (2000) he has been called a nigger by a boy aged three, but his parents did not correct or discipline him. Moran (2000) also recalls that he has been called 'a black cunt' at a football game by a girl aged no older than seven. "It always disturbed me when playing professionally that when I looked on the terraces and saw the features of middle-aged men contorted with hate racially abusing me, that self-same man was often standing with his arm around his eight or nine-year-old son who was quite often calling me the same thing!" (Moran, 2000, p. 193).

Moran's (2000) article also revealed that racism is not only limited to the fans alone, but teammates and club officials also have racist behaviours. According to Moran (2000), racist jokes would be dismissed as jokes and banter in the dressing room or during training, these jokes would include how the size of his manhood is directly linked to the colour of his skin. Davis and Cross (1979) explain that the white people have a racial prejudice regarding the sexual potency of black people. Black men are thought to have larger penises than white men and due to their 'animalistic' tendencies, tend to be more sexual (Davis & Cross, 1979). Historically, black men would be castrated by white men due to this prejudice against them (Davis & Cross, 1979). It remains a common stereotype in the modern world as black men continue to be plagued by the assumption that they have large penises.

Moran's (2000) article also revealed how when he was playing for Birmingham Football Club, he was forced to cut off his dreadlocks as they were deemed unprofessional despite him explaining they were a part of his African heritage. Langat (2022) writes that the reason for this is because of the oppressive messages from white people that are directed to black people which include, that black hair is unprofessional, undesirable and uncultured in its natural form. This is why black people especially women, in professional or academic spaces are told to keep their hair in a certain way that resembles white mainstream culture (Langat, 2022). The narrative towards black people's appearance is problematic as it takes away from their culture and origin.

Moran (2000) also looked at how many white people in football have no conception about racism or know what constitutes racist remarks. According to Moran (2000) white stakeholders in football see racist remarks as part and parcel of the game and they happen so frequently that they cannot see why this 'banter' is offensive. World-class players often have their racist remarks dismissed either as banter or something said in the heat of the moment. "Shall I tell my son as he grows up that as long as he is racially abused in the heat of the moment by someone who is a superb pro that that is acceptable?" (Moran, 2000 p.196).

The main weakness of Moran's (2000) article is that it relied on first-hand information with no other evidence to back it up but his own word and personal experience. The article does well in highlighting how light some of the racist remarks are taken in the football world, this suggests that football associations need to educate their players and club officials about the damage, their banter causes to black players.

Racism on-field is not only limited to fans but can also be expressed by players and coaches. It also cannot be excused as part of fan culture as fans remain liable for their racist actions. Some of the studies analysed in this section allowed fans to raise their opinions on racism that occurs at stadiums which is important as they have first-hand experience on the type of racial abuse that is perpetrated at stadiums. They're also able to identify the flaws that anti-racist campaigns have in dealing with racism at stadiums and suggest what is needed to help curb racial abuse.

### 2.3 **Online racism**

Racism is not only limited to fans that are in the stadiums when games are being played, those that are watching elsewhere express racism through social media platforms.

One of the largest studies to have been done on this theme is a study by Cleland and Cashmore (2014). Based on “2500 responses from association football (soccer) fans to an anonymous online survey” which sought to investigate racism in British football, Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 638) study found that “half of all fans are still witnessing or experiencing some form of racism.”

Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 638) research suggest that “there exists a ‘colour-blind’ ideology among the game’s governing bodies” in England that creates a climate in which racism can be largely ignored. According to Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 645), the colour-blind ideology enabled some fans “to defend what they refer to as ‘casual racism’”. Additionally, the study found that fans who often engaged in this practice of minimising racism tended to be white, male and aged under 29 (Cleland and Cashmore, 2014).

Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 646) research also found that although “overt racist chanting may have declined since the 1980s”, some racist fans have migrated to social media platforms where they express “their views with relative impunity”. According to Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 646), “social media, particularly Twitter, has become a kind of conduit for some of the vilest racist smears conducted anonymously via smartphones and computers.” About 80 per cent of the research participants in Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 646) study stated that social media presents an opportunity to express racist thoughts “in a way that was not available to previous generation”.

Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014) study also looked at the ways in which white hegemonic power structure is maintained in football. Looking at the structure of the game in a hierarchical sense, at the bottom are the fans (comprised of a white majority), whilst a white majority also exists at the top, where the key governance and organisational decisions are made (from FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) down to club level). “It is only in the middle (i.e. the playing side) that we see a blurring of different races” (Cleland and Cashmore, 2014, p. 648)

The white hegemonic power structure is partly to blame for the ineffectiveness of anti-racist campaigns like “Kick It Out”. Cleland and Cashmore’s (2014, p. 649) study found that “79 per cent of the participants stated that “Kick It Out” has only been partially effective in tackling racial inequality”.

However, the main weakness of Cleland and Cashmore’s study is that it over-relied on surveys. It has been argued that respondents in surveys may not give honest and accurate answers (DeFranzo, 2022). This may be because of the questions the respondents are presented with, they may feel a need to give a specific answer even if it is false because they do not want to be presented in a negative light (DeFranzo, 2022). Due to such reasons, the survey may not have offered the full account of fan experiences with racism at football stadiums.

Similar to Cleland and Cashmore (2014), Cleland (2014) based his study on an analysis of 500 posts on online message boards which sought to investigate online racism. Cleland’s (2014) research found that fans have a deep essentialist view of identity and national belonging that is centred on whiteness and a rejection of multiculturalism (Cleland, 2014).

Cleland’s (2014) research suggests that the use of online platforms to engage with football has led to the promotion of hate speech. The hate speech includes racism, xenophobia and homophobia (Cleland, 2014). The study also suggests that despite the presence of racial cyber bullying and hate speech, there have been limited efforts in addressing online racism expressed by soccer fans on online fan message boards. (Cleland, 2014). Anonymity on these online message boards and other social media sites such as Twitter have encouraged fans to feel comfortable racially abusing players and other fans.

The study analysed posts from two message boards, namely from Huddersfield and Grimsley Town (Cleland, 2014). Analysis was done through a survey which allowed fans to give their opinions anonymously on race in football which would lead into a discussion with other fans (Cleland, 2014). Making the survey anonymous was beneficial as this allowed fans to voice their true opinions. Cleland’s (2014) study suggests that the two areas Huddersfield and Grimsley Town are mainly white populated.

Cleland’s (2014) research suggests that the white fans dislike foreigners. Cleland (2014) quotes a fan saying that all foreigners should “fuck off” because they are no jobs and opportunities for the British people. The fan is othering minority groups in the UK, and it is a false perception

that foreigners are stealing their jobs. Research (Wrench & Modood, 2000) conducted in the UK show that immigrants are employed in the semi-skilled and un-skilled industries including manufacturing and transportation, with fewer being employed in skilled occupations. According to Karim (2013) unemployment in the UK is low, but the immigrants are however affected the most with unemployment as compared to the white people. Despite this they continue to add value to the British economy as they are more willing to work in blue collar jobs than their white counterparts (Wrench & Modood, 2000). This ensures that the industrial sector continues to flourish in the UK benefitting the economy at large. The findings here contradict the claim that immigrants are in the UK to steal the white people's jobs as most of them work in industries the white people are not interested in. They also continue to suffer the highest rate of unemployment as compared to the whites which suggests that they are not stealing white people's jobs.

One fan suggested that the misfortunes of the England national team are due to them having multiple players who are not of British heritage, the fan also suggests that when they won the world cup in 1966 they did so because they did not have any black players (Cleland, 2014). This opinion is problematic as the black players have a right to play for England due to them being citizens, football success is not determined by your heritage but by your ability, the players' ability is evident as they are chosen to play for the national team.

Cleland's (2014) study allowed the fans' posts to be anonymous which was beneficial as it meant that the fans were free to express their thoughts. However, the study's main weakness was that it was conducted in areas mainly populated by white people. This means that most of the opinions on racism were made by perpetrators of racism and not the victims of it who may have had more insight on the topic.

Similar to Cleland's (2014) Kilvington, Hylton, Long and Bond (2022) analyse online posts from fans to understand their opinions on racism within the game. Kilvington, et al, (2022) found that racism in English football is influenced by society at large. Politicians in the UK such as David Pulman endorse blogposts that claim that non-whites are causing the destruction of the white man and are flooding their countries (Kilvington, et al, 2022). Such thinking in society translates to how the English fans see black people in the sport which in turn leads to racist thoughts and abuse of the black players and fans who are considered foreigners and should not be part of the English game.

Through an analysis of online football forums which covered topics such as racism and Islamophobia, Kilvington, et al, (2022) found that some fans consider racism in stadiums as part of the match going experience. Fans are quoted saying reports on racism are blown out of proportion as those abusing act out of passion for the game (Kilvington, et al, 2022). Kilvington, et al, (2022) dismiss this claim stating that the fans that posted this on the forum are downplaying the impact of racism and are exonerating the perpetrators from their abusive ways. This thesis agrees with the critic as there can be no excuse for racism and it should not be downplayed.

Kilvington, et al, (2022) research also found that some fans liken racial abuse to the insults about one's body. Fans were responding to the incident that occurred which saw Mohammed Salah, an Egyptian player being called a 'Muslim cunt' by West Ham fans (Kilvington, et al, 2022). Fans likened the incident to players being called fat by fans, these players laugh it off which led them to question why Salah could not do the same when he was racially abused (Kilvington, et al, 2022). This is another way of downplaying racism by putting it on par with being fat. The two cannot be grouped in the same category as racism has a much darker history and has resulted in millions of people being unfairly treated. As far as this thesis is concerned, being teased about being fat and being racially abused are completely different.

The research also found that some fans on the forums believed that the British society is now too sensitive. One fan defends racist comments stating that the country allows free speech and how they are offended that speaking the 'truth' is now seen as offensive, the fan suggest that there are more serious issues to be dealt with than this (Kilvington, et al, 2022). Saying that there are more important issues to deal with than racism undermines those who challenge racism and encourages perpetrators to continue with their abuse as it is branded a minor issue (Kilvington, et al, 2022). In a diverse sport such as football, racist issues are very important as there are victims that continue to suffer abuse every day be it online or at stadiums.

Kilvington, et al, (2022) research is important as it analysed open discussions about race which allowed them to gain the fans' opinions. Their critique of fans' opinions is very important as some fans would make wildly racist claims and defend perpetrators which should never happen.

The analysis of online posts is also done by Glynn and Brown (2022) who took a different approach and analysed Twitter posts instead of online forums. The study researched discriminatory posts that were xenophobic and racist. These posts were researched as

homophobia and racism are the most common form of discrimination found in English football accounting 76% of all reports in the professional game during the 21/22 season (Glynn & Brown, 2022).

Glynn and Brown's (2022) study suggests that the fans in England target non-whites making use of discriminatory terms but masking it as banter. A fan mentioned how his team has so many black players that they are now becoming "niggers united" (Glynn & Brown, 2022). Another fan was quoted saying they feel like "calling Lingard a nigger lol" (Glynn & Brown, 2022). The use of the term lol makes it seem as if the fan is being humorous as it translates to laugh out loud (Glynn & Brown, 2022). As far as this thesis is concerned the use of the word "nigger" is offensive and cannot be used as a joke by fans. It is demeaning towards black people as it was used to refer to black slaves by white individuals who saw the black community as inferior and as property (Glynn & Brown, 2022). As such it is a term that should never be used as banter due to the meaning and history behind it.

Glynn and Brown's (2022) study also found that fans make use of humour to putdown black players in the Premier League. One fan was quoted saying that Ngolo Kante, a black player cannot mark Lionel Messi, a white player, the fan explains that Messi will dribble Kante and send him back to slavery (Glynn & Brown, 2022). Before stating that Messi will send Kante back to slavery, the fan uses the acronym *lmao* which means 'laugh my ass off' to suggest that the comment made is a joke (Glynn & Brown, 2022). However, joking about slavery which contains the discourse that whites are masters to black people should never be allowed to stand. The humour here results in the othering of black people and shows how abuse aimed at black players has started to grow again due to the increased use of social media (Glynn & Brown, 2022).

The analysis of Tweets in Glynn and Brown's (2022) research is important as it shows real time examples of how fans aim abuse at black players and try to mask it up by presenting it as banter. Glynn and Brown (2022) do a great job in dismissing the banter claims from fans as one cannot joke about discourses that reduce black people to being mere subordinates to white people.

Analysis of online abuse is not only done by looking at online posts as seen through Kilvington and Price's (2019) research which made use of purposive sampling to investigate what governing bodies were doing to curb online racism. Purposive sampling is defined as a sampling technique in which researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study (Business Research Methodology, 2022).

The study involved interviewing personnel with guaranteed anonymity, from important governing bodies in English football such as “Kick It Out”, the PFA (Professional Footballers Association) and media personnel from English Premier League clubs (Kilvington & Price, 2019). It is an important issue to discuss with the governing bodies as Kilvington and Price (2019) found that almost 135 000 discriminatory social media posts relating to the English Premier League were made during the 2014/15 season with Mario Balotelli, a black player being the most targeted individual receiving over 8 000 posts.

Kilvington and Price (2019) found through their research that the PFA, “Kick It Out” and football clubs offer social media training to academy and first team players. “Kick It Out” focuses more on how players can identify and report abuse, whilst the PFA investigates players’ social media accounts (Kilvington & Price, 2019). However, it is interesting to note that Kilvington and Price (2019) discovered that there were no compulsory educational sessions offered to first team players as most of the focus was only on academy players. This is problematic as first team players are the ones most targeted by online abuse from fans as compared to academy players hence why they need to be more informed on how to deal with abuse on social media.

According to the study, players are less likely to report online abuse (Kilvington & Price, 2019). Kilvington and Price (2019) write that this is because players are well versed in facing online racism and see it as merely a distraction from their primary focus which is football. This thesis disagrees with this claim as players do not get used to online racism, if they did there would not be any complaints about it still from the players. This thesis argues that the reason why players fail to report racist incidents is because they seem to feel that little will be done to handle the situation as fans continue to get away with online abuse. Kilvington and Price (2019) also suggests that players end up tolerating racism due to the incompetence of the white structured football system. This is correct as football bodies do little to ensure that players are protected from racist fans and therefore players tend not to report the abuse that they face.

The main weakness with this study is that Kilvington and Price (2019) failed to interview members of the FA which is the biggest governing body in English football. The FA would have been key in this study as they have the authority over all football related issues include abuse of players. One could argue that the failure of the FA to comply with the interview suggest incompetence on their part and a reluctance in dealing with racism faced by the players.

A study that takes a different approach at analysis of online racism was conducted by Cable, Kilvington and Mottershead (2022) who analysed Twitter conversations before, during and after a single Premier League game. The game in question was Chelsea against Tottenham in December 2019 which saw black Chelsea defender Ruediger get racially abused by monkey chants (Cable, et al, 2022).

The research conducted by Cable, et al, (2022) suggests that fans from the opposing team are more likely to be racist towards the other team's players. This is seen after an incident during the game in which Ruediger and Tottenham player Son clashed which forced Son to be sent off after getting angry at Ruediger. According to Cable, et al, (2022) a Chelsea fan was quoted accusing Son of trying to be a nice person, but he eats pre-match meals of dogs and mash. With Son being a South Korean man, this is a racial stereotype as Asians are accused of eating dogs as well as other animals rarely consumed by humans (Cable, et al, 2022). After the incident where monkey chants were directed towards Ruediger a Tottenham fan was quoted saying, "he deserved the chants and he is a true monkey indeed" (Cable, et al, 2022). Labelling Ruediger a monkey supports the long-standing narrative that black people are apish and brutish and in need of being civilised, a sentiment that dates back centuries.

According to Cable, et al, (2022) a high number of discriminatory Tweets remain on the Twitter platform without being deleted. In 2021, 31 out of 56 racist and discriminatory posts remained live on Twitter despite being reported to Twitter and over 71% of accounts that have abused players remained active after 6 months of being reported (Cable, et al, 2022). This shows how online racism is still not being taken seriously by the social media platforms and more needs to be done by these platforms to protect players and fans from such hate, this includes deleting all these hateful posts and banning the aggressors' accounts. Keeping such posts live on the platform may encourage other fans to post racist messages as well.

Cable, et al, (2022) also question why abuse on social media has been on the rise. The answers that come up in the study include anonymity. Being anonymous removes any sense of remorse for the fans as they do not have to be held accountable for their actions (Cable, et al, 2022). This allows them to say whatever they feel like on platforms such as Twitter and most of the time what they say is abuse aimed at black players. Another reason as to why social media abuse is on the rise is invisibility (Cable, et al, 2022). Being physically removed from the victims' presence prevents aggressors from truly understanding the impact of the racist acts and therefore they lack empathy (Cable, et al, 2022). However, even if the aggressors are in the

same environment as the players, they still abuse them as seen continuously in soccer stadiums where fans chant racist slurs and make monkey sounds.

The research done by Cable, et al, (2022) is important as it highlighted how one game of football can produce aggressive and abusive comments from fans. It is also important as it tries to understand why racism has been growing so much online. However, its weakness is that it fails to offer any solutions to the problems that they have highlighted.

The studies show that fans are able to express their true feelings and thoughts online as they remain anonymous. Being anonymous removes any sense of remorse or guilt from fans which allows them to fully express any racist abuse towards other fans or players. Fans have masked their racist behaviour as banter which is problematic as jokes about one's skin colour cannot be made given the segregation that people of darker skin have had to go through. The studies also show how fans express their racist feelings towards players due to frustrations that come from games, making it more likely that fans abuse players from opposing teams. More needs to be done to hold fans online accountable for their racist acts and the FA should be at the centre of this initiative as they have a duty to protect the players that play under their federation.

## **2.4 Media representation of black soccer players**

Racism is not only limited to fans online and in stadiums, but it is also expressed by the media in their writing or on commentary. Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers and De Leeuw (2010) write that media's popularity has allowed it to play an important role in expressions and meanings given to race and ethnicity. This is true as media personalities shape how fans may perceive black players due to their stereotyping in commentary or what they write in newspapers.

Through their analysis of football matches in Europe, Van Sterkenburg, et al (2010) found that football commentators gave white players more play-related praise and presented them in a more positive light than black players. The most common stereotypes that are made by these commentators include that black players are strong and gifted but lack the intelligence and hard-working nature of the white players (Van Sterkenburg, et al, 2010). This goes back to the long-standing stereotype that black people are only useful for hard work and lack the civilisation that the white people have. Saying such claims on a public platform is problematic

as these become embedded in the minds of football fans and may result in them also abusing black players.

Van Sterkenburg, et al, (2010) write that such claims are not only limited to commentators as newspaper outlets also forward these narratives. An example of this is of a Dutch newspaper claiming that African players are quick and strong but are tactically weak (Van Sterkenburg, et al, 2010). Being tactically weak is linked to their inability to make intelligent decisions which in turn means that the black players are being presented as dull and in need of assistance from the white players.

The analysis done by Van Sterkenburg, et al, (2010) also claims that comments made by the media place players into different racial or ethnic categories through their analysis of their on-field performance. This is because most of the commentators and media personnel are white and they tend to relay their perception of black people on to the players. Van Sterkenburg, et al, (2010) claim that this is done unconsciously and unintentionally by the media personnel because they have little time to think about their reactions to what is happening on the field. However, as far as this thesis is concerned, media personnel cannot be excused for what they say about black players. The fact that commentators do not have time to think about what they have to say and in turn say racist things means that they may be inherently racist which is something people cannot be excused for.

Similar to Van Sterkenburg, et al (2010), Sabo and Jansen (1994) also analyse how the media has portrayed black players as compared to their white counterparts. Sabo and Jansen (1994) found that black players are associated with being athletic, but this comes with certain stereotypes. Being labelled athletic is associated with common stereotypes about black players and it is associated with words such as aggression, brute strength and stupidity (Sabo and Jansen, 1994). This is in contrast to white players who are labelled intelligent and receive more praise for their ability on the ball.

Sabo and Jansen's (1994) analysis also found that the media associated black players to failures they may have experienced which in turn results in them being perceived in a negative light. Sabo and Jansen (1994) mention that the 'failures' associated with black soccer players by the media may include their appearance, academic issues or growing up in a bad environment. An example of this is Sterling who was criticised for having a gun tattoo as it was perceived to be encouraging violence when instead it has a deeper meaning to him. The media is quick to judge black players which is unfair as there are often misunderstood, past failures that have nothing

to do with the sport do not deserve to be mentioned by the media as they do not relate to the game being played.

In their analysis, Sabo and Jansen (1994) found that there is a hierarchy of naming in sports media, with white players getting the most respect. White male athletes are referred to by their full names whilst black players may be regarded by just their first names (Sabo and Jansen, 1994). Some of the black athletes are not referred to by their full titles an example being Marcus Rashford a black player who received a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) which is a post nominal honour from the Queen or King of England (Royal Central, 2013). According to (Royal Central, 2013) as a recipient, Marcus Rashford's name should be accompanied by the MBE when writing about him but publications such as The Sun choose to ignore this. Failure to respect black players suggests that the media stirs up white supremacist sentiments and reinforce racist beliefs (Sabo and Jansen, 1994). This is true as they continue to look down upon black people whilst exalting their white counterparts.

The analysis done by Sabo and Jansen (1994) is relevant to the issues that black players face and draws attention to how the media has been unfair towards black players. However, the analysis would have benefitted from explicit examples of the media reinforcing racist beliefs. The study does well in highlighting specific incidents in which the media were racist towards black players. It does very well in showing the history behind the common stereotype that black people are more physical and lack intelligence as compared to white players who are viewed as being more tactical and intelligent.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The media plays an important role in encouraging racism against black players. Commentators and writers continuously stereotype black players for being strong and athletic but lacking the tactical brains that the white athletes have. This puts white athletes in a positive light whilst leaving the black players looking inferior. Commentators and writers in the media seem to fail to respect black players and this study can attribute this to the fact that most of the personnel in sports media is white and therefore relay their perception of black people on to the players. Sports media needs to have more black people analysing and writing about games as this removes the continued stereotypes assigned to black players.

Racism in football can be expressed through multiple avenues. Fans at stadiums are able to abuse players through chants and racial slurs but they are not the only ones liable for racial abuse as players and coaches can also abuse other players and fans alike. The literature analysed in this chapter gives a voice to fans to understand their experience with racism, why they perpetrate racist ideas and also what they feel needs to be done to curb racism in the sport. Some fans see their racist abuse as banter or part of their harmless club culture, but both of these cannot be used as excuses for the abuse that players suffer. The ability to be anonymous on online platforms has also resulted in the rise in racist incidents as fans lack remorse and empathy for players due to their identity being hidden which results in a lack of accountability. The media arguably also forwards racist stereotypes through their commentary and writing. Praise is usually given to white soccer players who are viewed as intelligent and good readers of the game whilst the black soccer players are only seen as physically strong and lacking intelligence. All the findings in this chapter sum up how English football is still a white person's game and although black players have increased in numbers, they are still seen as outsiders. The FA has a huge role to play in protecting the black players with fans suggesting a zero-tolerance policy on racism.

### **3 Chapter Three: Theory and Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This is a qualitative desktop research. Qualitative research is a research methodology that describes and explains persons' experiences, behaviours and social contexts without the use of statistical procedures and or quantification (Fossey et al, 2002). This means that using qualitative research does not involve numerical figures to understand social issues. Qualitative research is an important epistemological tool to employ when one wants to critically analyse how human beings socially interact (Pathak et al, 2013).

Tracy (2010) explains that good qualitative research is relevant, timely and significant. The research also has to be sincere and transparent (Tracy, 2010), this means to say that the findings presented in the research have to be trustworthy and honest without any bias. It is significant as it tackles important issues within society bringing them to light to create more awareness and delves beneath the surface to tackle issues that are usually assumed or implicit (Tracy, 2010). This means to say that qualitative research provides valuable information that allows readers to formulate stronger opinions on issues that may have been ignored or not given enough attention in the past.

Qualitative research can be conducted in multiple ways. Weckesser and Denny (2022) explain that one of the ways to conduct qualitative research is through observation. This involves the act of watching social phenomena in a real-world setting and recording what people do rather than what they profess (Weckesser and Denny, 2022). The thesis aims to achieve this by reading tabloids to understand fans' behaviours towards black soccer players. Study samples in qualitative research are smaller than those in quantitative research which enhances understanding of individuals' or groups' experiences (Weckesser and Denny, 2022). The thesis focuses on a sample size of black players in the English Premier League whose racist treatment brings to light the abuse that black players have to navigate in the English Premier League.

Hague (1988) describes desktop research as secondary data or data that can be collected without engaging in fieldwork. Sources that can be used for secondary data include, the internet, journals and newspapers (Hague, 1988). This research will make use of desktop

research, with a particular focus on the internet. It will focus on British tabloids that report and document various racist acts that black players in England face.

I critically discuss articles that have been published in two media publications namely, The Daily Mail and The Sun. I used The Daily Mail and The Sun because they are the two biggest tabloids in the UK (Boycott, 2008). Amy Watson (2022) reports that the Daily Mail was the second biggest circulating paper in the UK in 2021 with 902 000 copies being sold in December alone. The Sun is the biggest circulating newspaper in the UK, as it sells over 1 million copies in a month (Watson, 2022). It is also worth pointing out that the two publications have been accused of forwarding hate speech as they have been labelled responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (Portilla, 2018). Both The Daily Mail and The Sun bring to light racist incidents that black players face be it online or in stadiums from both fans and other players. The Sun and The Daily Mail also expose how governing body, the FA and the anti-racism campaigns like “Kick It Out” have not been effective in combating racism.

### **3.2 Theory**

This thesis uses the theoretical concept of “racial xenophobia” to analyse and understand expressions of antipathy towards black players playing in the English Premier League. Xenophobia is derived from the Greek words “xenos” and “phobos” (Rzepnikowska, 2019). Xenos means “the stranger”, whereas phobos signals fear, thus xenophobia is defined in this thesis as “fear” of or hostility against foreigners (Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Engel, et al, (2018) explain that xenophobia in Europe and England is fuelled by a fear of foreign influence and perceived threats to cultural and racial identity. Research suggests that although the source of xenophobia is a complex issue to understand, the fear of foreigners seems to be “less self-induced than incited by those in authority so as to serve their interests” (Taras, 2009, p. 394). De Master and Le Roy (2000) provide more insight into the cause of xenophobic behaviour against foreigners. Foreigners are seen as carriers of a different culture

and have the potential to threaten the integrity of the nation in which they live (De Master & Le Roy, 2000). Some of the disruption and social unrest foreigners are blamed for include exploitation of social welfare, increased unemployment and increased crime and violent activity (De Master & Le Roy, 2000).

Studies about the nature of xenophobia in Western European countries describe the defining feature of xenophobia in these countries as largely shapes by a hostility towards people from the “Third World—not the “foreigner” who was a citizen of another European state” (Taras, 2009, p. 393). Moreover, “Western and Eastern European fears of the outsider appear to be converging. Yet the sources of phobias are diverse: EU (European Union) expansion, globalization, large-scale migration both from outside Europe and within it, historical animosities, religious and cultural differences, fear of foreign terrorists.” (Taras, 2009, p. 394)

McGuire (2018) blames some of the xenophobic behaviour on the media as they release articles that fuel hatred for foreigners. Tabloids such as the Daily Express make use of words such as “flood and flock” when talking about the entry of foreigners into the UK (McGuire, 2018). Using such words implies that foreigners are coming into the UK in astronomical numbers that the UK cannot handle when that may not be the case. This naturally sets alarm bells as British people perceive this as foreigners coming to exhaust their resources including health care and employment (McGuire, 2018). McGuire (2018) writes that the Daily Express also has an article in which the headline read, “Britain is full and fed up, join our Daily Express crusade to help stop the new flood of immigrants”. Such articles fuel the perception that the UK can no longer handle the coming of foreigners and it is up to the people to do something about it to stop more people from coming in. It in turn fuels hatred towards the foreigners that are already in the country leading to violent attacks and verbal abuse.

Racism is understood in this study as consisting of discrimination or prejudice against an individual or people based on their membership to a racial/ethnic group (Sundstrom and Kim: 2014). “Racism is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the ‘capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system”” (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 10) Historically, white people have been conceptualised in this racial world as a superior people, a people who were deserving

human rights and socio-economic privileges, whereas black and brown people were seen as subhuman and therefore marginalised and oppressed (Grosfoguel, 2016).

Scholars who research race and xenophobia argue that the new forms of racism tend to be weaponised by linkages to discourses of patriotism such as Britishness (Rzepnikowska, 2019). It is on this theoretical basis that this thesis argues that though racism and xenophobia are often discussed as distinct phenomena, they often overlap, and both are particularly important in understanding the weaponization of racial xenophobia against black players playing in the Premier League (Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Therefore, in this study, racial xenophobia is used as an epistemological tool frame to investigate anti-black racism that some English soccer fans and some media outlets have displayed towards black players playing in the Premier League (Sundstrom and Kim 2014).

The theoretical framework of racial xenophobia exposes the lie of colour blindness in football. Cleland and Cashmore (2014) explain that the start of the 21st century brought about a transitional period in the English Premier League that saw more black players, homegrown and foreign coming to play in the league. This helped paint a picture that racism was on the decline in English football with the perception being that the increased success of black players would change the fan's perception (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). However, this is not how it has turned out as players and fans continue to abuse black players in stadiums and online despite their success on the pitch. Black players continue to be seen as foreign to the white man game and most suffer from chants telling them to go back home to their lands despite some of them being born in England (Rzepnikowska, 2019). Black English players even suffer frequent abuse from tabloids who continue to criticise every aspect of their lives.

The theoretical framework of racial xenophobia exposes the failure of anti-racist campaigns that have been implemented by soccer organisations over the years. The English Premier League launched a national anti-racist campaign in 1992 called "let's Kick Racism Out of Football", which was renamed to "Kick It Out" in 1997 in a bid to combat the rise of racism within the league (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The campaign targeted racist language and "Kick It Out" would implement written codes of conduct which fans had to adhere to in stadiums (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). However, "Kick It Out" has not been effective in kicking out racism as there is a "focus on collective fan behaviour rather than addressing the structures of power and the maintenance of hegemony within the sport" (Dixon, Lowes, & Gibbons, 2016, p. 141). Failure to address the structures of power within the English game

means that black players cannot be treated as equals within the game therefore their concerns are not dealt with effectively. The focus on collective fan behaviour also contributes to this failure as racist perpetrators are seldom singled out and when they do, the punishment is not gruesome which is why they may continue with their behaviour.

### **3.3 Sampling**

Qualitative sampling aims to recruit enough participants and observations that provide rich, in-depth data in order to thoroughly understand the phenomena being studied (Gill, 2020).

Gill (2020) writes that there are different kinds of sampling in qualitative research. These include, convenience sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling (Gill, 2020). This thesis makes use of purposive sampling which is designed to enhance understanding of selected individuals or groups' experiences within a certain environment (Devers and Frenkel, 2000). It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants (Etikan, et al, 2015). Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Etikan, et al, 2015). Purposive sampling is necessary for this thesis as the focus is to highlight and understand the experiences of black players within the English Premier League. Dever and Frenkel (2000) further explain that researchers making use of purposive sampling adopt information-rich cases on groups or individuals that provide the greatest insight into the research question. This is also adopted in this thesis as it purposefully chose to focus on black players' experiences with racism in the English Premier League.

The thesis will be focusing on racist incidents from 2018 to 2021. I have picked this timeline as there has been a high rise in racist incidents targeting black players through social media, most notably during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, when people were forced to stay at home therefore online communication rose even further (Ingle, 2020). This may be credited to the rise in social media that exposes people more to the players' lives making them more accessible (Ingle, 2020). Reporting of racist incidents has also gone up during this time bringing more awareness to the problem. 20 articles from The Daily Mail and The Sun were analysed. These articles were chosen for this study as they reported on the explicit abuse that black players have been victims of in the English Premier League. Some of the articles analysed also highlight how the media represents black players through their reporting, which can be very positive but

also very negative. I have decided to focus on online publications because they are easily accessible. As I am not in the UK, this was the most effective way for me to access their daily written publications.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

I conducted my data analysis through coding. According to Saldaña (2014) coding entails assigning a shortened, symbolic meaning to data for the purpose of qualitative analysis. Applying a shortened symbolic meaning to the data collected in this thesis involved the use of themes such as online racism, racism on the pitch and in stadiums, and media representation of black players. The themes were generated through a close reading of the literature review and through a theoretical framework of the data.

As chapter two of the thesis shows, one of the unintended consequences of the pandemic is the increase in online racist incidents that were targeted at black players in the Premier League. Cleland and Cashmore (2014) found that social media sites such as fan message boards have allowed racial xenophobia to flourish online. The statements usually include black players being told to go back to their country even though some of these players are English (Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Despite online racism being on the high, this has not seen a downfall in on-field racism. On-field racism remains high and a long-standing form of abuse towards black players. The BBC (2021) reports that one in 10 football matches in the 2019-20 season had an incident of hate crime in England, and the number of arrests for racist or indecent chanting more than doubled from 2018-19 to 2019-20 - from 14 to 35 - even though hundreds of matches during the second half of the season were cancelled or played behind closed doors due to the pandemic. Some of the hate crime includes throwing bananas at black players and making monkey chants towards them during games (Steinburg, 2019).

Racial stereotypical representation of black people within tabloids continues to exist and black people remain targets of the abuse by tabloids. The racial stereotypical representation of black people from the tabloids targets everyone and knows no bounds as even people like Megan Markle, married to Prince Harry of the Royal Family has been targeted (Woldemikael and Woldemikael, 2021). Woldemikael, et al (2021) report that her family was likened to slaves as they were labelled cotton pickers by the tabloids in reference to how black people would work

in the fields for white people. The British tabloids have also been criticised for praising white players for their business ventures outside of football but criticise black players for their own business ventures in a bid to discredit them (Pinder, 2020). This has led to black players such as Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford speaking out against tabloids such as The Sun and The Daily Mail for their constant abuse on black players.

## **4 Chapter Four: Data Analysis: The Sun**

## **4.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the methodology section, this chapter focuses on data analysis collected from one of the two tabloids being used to analyse racism in the English Premier League, The Sun. This chapter is organised in themes namely online abuse, racism on the field and the media representation of black soccer players by The Sun. These themes have been generated based on the dominant themes that emerged during data analysis.

## **4.2 Online Abuse**

The first theme to be analysed is online abuse. The abuse of players online before, during and after matches has become so frequent that the tabloids in the English media have brought it to the attention of the public. The players most abused are black players no matter their nationality as even black English players are victims of abuse. The tabloids report of online abuse mainly perpetuated by fans which is what this theme will be focusing on.

One of the most recent reports of racist abuse came after the Euro (UEFA European Championship) 2020 final (held in July 2021). The abuse was reported through The Sun on 13 July 2021 by Parker, Cole, Leo and Sullivan (2021). It brought to light how three black players from England namely, Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were subjected to racial abuse after missing decisive penalties that saw Italy win the tournament (Parker et al, 2021). According to the authors of the article Parker et al (2021), the Instagram accounts of all three players were “flooded with monkey and banana emojis from racist white fans.” The use of monkey and banana emojis invokes the long-standing racist stereotypes of black people being likened to apes (Palmberg, 2001). Since the 19th century, people of African descent have been stereotyped as apish, brutish, dimwitted and undisciplined, not deserving of respect and dignity but needed to be domesticated (Palmberg, 2001). Such a narrative made black people be seen as less than human and therefore inferior to whites. Making use of these monkey emojis and gestures reiterates the treatment black people received when they were seen as slaves to the white people. In the 21st century, an age where black people are fighting for equality, such references are unacceptable.

Throughout the article, the writers Parker et al (2021), sympathise with the three young men and portray the racists perpetrators as callous for their actions. The writers show a human side to the players as they report that Saka, only 19 years old was seen weeping after the penalty miss but soon after was subjected to online abuse (Parker et al, 2021). The article suggests that players are not superhuman but are just like the rest of us and deserve a level of compassion. By sympathising with the players, the article also suggests that those who perpetuate racism are wrongdoers who deserve to be held accountable for their actions. The article exposes ways in which dehumanising narratives about black players are deployed by trolls online to slander black players.

Another article that reports the online abuse of Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka was published on 9 September in *The Sun*, authored by Christodoulou (2021) reports that an estate agent who abused the above-mentioned players online has been fired from his job and is requested to turn himself in to the police. Christodoulou (2021) reports that the “37-year-old man labelled the three players n-words on Twitter”. The n-word is an anti-black racist word commonly used by whites in the United States to wound and degrade African Americans for over three centuries (Kennedy, 2002). The word has been used since the 1700s but became more popular in the 19th century and its sole purpose was to injure the black people (Kennedy, 2002). Being labelled the n-word was very degrading as white people would reprimand their children by telling them if they do not behave, they will be less than the nigger or would be taken away by ‘the old nigger’ (Kennedy, 2002). This shows that black people were likened to monsters and the worst possible version of a human. A black person termed nigger only had one task which was to obey their master, which reiterated the slavery status of the black people (Kennedy, 2002). However, Kennedy (2002) writes that in modern times, the n-word has been used in a positive light by the black people making it okay to say it amongst themselves. It is however wrong for the white people to say this word as black people take offence to this due to the racist way white people have historically used it during slavery (Kennedy, 2002). This is why it is problematic for a white person to address a black person using the n-word.

The writer further reports that the man’s employers have distanced themselves from him stating that they do not tolerate racism (Christodoulou, 2021). The writer here holds the man

accountable for his actions towards the players, suggesting that there is no place in society for racism as his actions cost him his employment contract. Christodoulou (2021) also frames the whole incident as a criminal offence as the man was requested to turn himself in to the police. The n-word is regarded as a racist and criminal act in the UK because the law views the use of the n-word as hate speech (Kennedy, 2002). It is a derogatory name used against black people and perpetuates white racism. One is subject to an investigation in the UK should they make use of the word against black people. The UK government is right to criminalise use of the word by white people as in the past it has been purposely used to injure black people and make them feel less human.

Another theme that is a feature of the racist narrative about black soccer players in the UK is the notion that black soccer players are driven by physicality and the body, and their game is generally framed as being characterised by emotions and is undisciplined (Leonard, 2017). White players, on the other hand, are portrayed as cerebral and hence their game is predicated on finesse and intelligence (Leonard, 2017). Moreover, white players are cast as coachable, disciplined, and follow rules (Leonard, 2017). In other words, black players in football are racially stereotyped as lacking talent and flair and only being physical. The talent is usually credited to white players who are regarded as intelligent players, which in turn suggests their superiority over black players. This is part of a long-standing anti-black racist discourse that views blacks as possessing lower IQ than whites. Hall (2001) writes that athletes of African descent are considered strong but intellectually dull, the 'dumb black'. Pseudo-scientific racist evidence claims that black people are primitive, violent, and sexually powerful, which was effective in conveying that Africans were mentally dull and lacked self-control (Hall, 2001). This pseudo-science racist narrative is often deployed to assert that black people dominate sports because of their physical nature, while white people would have the edge on them due to their intelligence. McCarthy, Jones and Potrac (2003) write that black players in the Premier League are often credited for their physical ability by the English media but only as a way of justifying any success they may have over the white players. McCarthy et al, (2003) explain that this is not seen as praise for the black players but rather reinforces racist stereotypes that portray black people as just being physically strong and lacking the intelligence that white players possess. It is seen as a racial stereotype as there is no proof of black players being more physical and less intelligent as compared to the white players (McCarthy et al, 2003).

An article by Upal, which was published in The Sun on 29 May, reports that some fans take bad performances by black players as an invitation to racially abuse black players. Upal (2021) reports that both Sterling and Rashford were victims of online abuse after Manchester City and Manchester United both lost European finals. Rashford would receive the bulk of the abuse as Upal (2021) reports that Rashford suffered “at least 70 racist messages online” after the final. Rashford outed a teacher who sent “a mountain of monkey emojis on his Instagram account” reports Upal (2021). As already pointed out, likening blacks to monkeys is a long-standing anti-black racist trope. In the article, the writer sympathises with Rashford reporting that he said “for those trying to make me feel worse than I already do, good luck trying” Upal (2021). Through the article we are again able to see the human side of these players and just how much racism affects the players. Upal (2021) through the article suggests that racism is living amongst everyday people such as the teacher and questions whether the children being taught by the teacher are also victims of racist abuse by him. The article suggests that such racist thinkers should not have access to kids as they can consolidate these racists principles to the children, allowing the racist narrative to continue.

Overall, the discussion on online abuse reported by The Sun reveals the following, that fans constantly make use of the racist theme that portrays black people as apes. It reveals that fans rely on a racist stereotype that black people are dull and unintelligent but are more physical and that fans make use of the n-word despite its degrading meaning. These findings show that black people are still not accepted in the sport which is why they are constantly targeted.

### **4.3 Racism on the field**

Racism in football is not only limited to social media but is also seen at stadiums. This will be detailed in the second theme in this chapter which focuses on abuse that has been seen at the football stadium during games. The abuse comes from rival fans and fans from the player’s team alike. It is usually aimed at black players having bad games but can also be seen even when these players have good games.

Stonehouse (2021) of The Sun reports of how England players are continuously booed for taking the knee before games. The knee is done by players as a gesture to show that there is no room for racism in football and as a gesture for racial equality (Stonehouse, 2021). Street (2021) also of The Sun further explains that the gesture came into English football after the death of George Floyd in the United States. Street (2021) presents the booing of the gestures as an unwillingness to support racial equality. This is backed up by a quote in which the reporter says ‘it is likely that some England fans are booing the idea of racial equality’ (Street, 2021). The England fans are also portrayed as ignorant to the racist issues as they complain about players ‘lecturing them’ and also claiming that such gestures have no room in the sport as they only favour the black people instead of all the fans (Street, 2021). The two reporters suggest that England fans take time to be educated on matters regarding racial equality as they suggest that the fans do not have enough knowledge of it, which seems to be an accurate analysis by the reporters.

To contextualise the taking of the knee before the game, it was a gesture first taken by Colin Kaepernick, a National Football League (NFL) player in the United States (US) during the national anthem (Schmidt, Frederick, Pegoraro and Spencer, 2019). The gesture was Kaepernick’s way of protesting the oppression of people of colour within the United States, claiming that he would not show respect for a country that discriminates against minorities (Schmidt, et al, 2019). The gesture created a lot of backlash as Kaepernick was accused of being anti-American and failing to respect the flag and the sacrifices made by veterans who fought for the country (Schmidt, et al, 2019). Kaepernick was labelled ungrateful for speaking about racism whilst on a million-dollar contract (Schmidt, et al, 2019). It is clear that the white Americans did not want someone in the public eye to bring attention to the brutalities that minorities were facing hence why the backlash which ultimately would cost him his career.

In response to the Black Lives Matter Movement, which Kaepernick was associated with, some English white fans flew a “White Lives Matter Burnley” flag over the Etihad Stadium before a Premier League game between Manchester City and Burnley (Fermie, 2020). Whilst there is nothing wrong with saying white lives matter, it has become problematic as it has been used to counter the Black Lives Matter movement. Claiming that white lives matter or all lives matter

in this context is used as a way of denouncing the inequality and brutality that black people face with the pretence that everyone is equal when blacks are oppressed daily (Lebron, 2017).

Lebron (2017) writes that the #Black Lives Matter movement started when a white man, Zimmerman killed a 17-year-old black boy for walking in the street late at night. More outrage surrounding this incident would be realised when he was not convicted for the murder of the young boy (Lebron, 2017). The movement seeks to establish equality for the black people as they are humans too. However, some white people have struggled to accept the movement. Activists of the movement have been accused of contributing to deaths of white officers by politicians and pundits (Lebron, 2017). It is seen as an organisation that supports black people only and neglects everyone else which is why there is the all lives matter/white lives matter movement (Lebron, 2017). The controversy surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement seems to be a failure to acknowledge the inequalities that black people continue to face in society, which can be seen as being ignorant to the issues of society. Fermie (2020) condemns the ignorance shown by football fans, recalling how the players were outraged by the white lives matter message and Burnley put out a statement saying there is no room for racism at their club. Fermie (2020) however questions the authorities' handling of the issue as no legal action was taken suggesting that this enables the racists. Fermie (2020) also condemns the perpetrator reporting that he showed no remorse after the incident and continued with their daily life as even his employers did not take action against him.

On August 8, 2020, Lipton of The Sun presented the abuse on football fields as an ongoing problem that needs action. Lipton (2020) reports that the Football Association (FA) and "Kick It Out" joined forces to ensure that clubs face ground closure should their fans chant racist chants. The clubs have been given the responsibility to ensure that their fans behave in accordance to the rules, and this comes after multiple abuse the previous season (Lipton, 2020). As mentioned in the literature review, "Kick It Out" aims to remove racism from the Premier League and has taken steps towards that such as conducting social media blackouts to protest racism. Their actions are not just limited to online activity but also racism in the stadiums. The writer views the action taken by the FA and "Kick It Out" as positive as it forces clubs to act as their ticket revenue is under threat should they not. The writer seems to suggest that this will help control the racism that is seen at the stadiums but questions the abuse online as there has

been no similar measures. However, Cunningham (2018) writes that the “Kick It Out” campaign continues to have its shortcomings. The organisation has been unable to deal with racism online despite the proposed social media blackouts (Cunningham, 2018). It has also been accused of failing to punish high profile footballers like John Terry who racially abused Anton Ferdinand in a premier league game (Cunningham, 2018). More needs to be done by the organisation for it to be effective and taken seriously in the English game.

The Sun’s Hodge (2019) reports of another incident that occurred at the Etihad stadium when Manchester United were playing against Manchester City. Hodge (2019) recalls that a fan was arrested for making monkey gestures towards Fred Rodrigues, a Brazilian Manchester United player, as he went to take a corner. However, as he reports of the incident the writer sympathises with the perpetrator. Hodge (2019) tries to humanise the man stating how he is a family man and a British Army veteran. Hodge (2019) also reports how the man has lost his job due to this incident which the man denies claiming he was ‘putting his hands in his pockets’. The article seems to suggest that what was caught on camera was false and that the man deserves to gain his life back with no further action taken. However, the writer seems to neglect the fact that Fred did suffer racist abuse from this man and shows no sympathy toward him.

Dearden (2016) writes that the tabloid newspapers in the UK have been accused of continuously making racist remarks and hate speech towards minorities. With the increase in racist reports, it is no surprise that the same tabloids sympathise with racist perpetrators and do not consider the victims involved. There is a need to portray white people as good upstanding citizens who cannot do wrong. Ross (1990) describes this need as white innocence which goes far back as slavery when the abuse of black was not seen as wrong. Black people are not seen as citizens or members of society by the white people which justifies their discrimination (Ross, 1990). The black people’s humanness is removed and they are seen more as criminals and deviants (Ross, 1990). This in turn justifies the harsh treatment that black people receive and removes any wrongdoing on the white people. It is unfair to blame the racist acts of the white people on their victims as they are humans too, something that the black lives matter movement seeks to rectify.

Overall, the discussion of abuse in stadiums reported by The Sun reveals the following, that fans are still ignorant of the equality of black players within the sport and in society. That fans view the black lives matter movement as not being inclusive of the white people, which is an ignorant view of what the movement is trying to achieve. It also reviews how the “Kick It Out” and FA have tried to combat racism but still fall short of their goal and that there is a tendency to defend white fans for their racist acts within tabloids.

#### **4.4 Media representation of black soccer players by The Sun**

It is interesting to note that The Sun does not only report about racism but are also perpetrators of racism in their reporting. This theme focuses on the racial abuse that The Sun has perpetrated towards black players through its reporters. Some articles published in The Sun often frame the lifestyle of black soccer players in a negative, stereotypical light.

For example, without talking to Manchester City player Raheem Sterling first, the Sun portrayed Sterling as a callous, gun crazy maniac for having a gun tattoo on his leg. The Sun’s Moyes and Diaz (2018) report that Sterling has sparked outrage amongst the football community over ‘a sick tattoo’. The writers bring to light that Sterling had got a gun tattoo and call for his removal from the England squad. Moyes and Diaz (2018) villainise Sterling stating that a mother whose son was gunned down called the tattoo a disgrace, suggesting that the tattoo may cause trauma. Moyes and Diaz (2018) label Sterling a disruption to society who should ‘hang his head in shame’ for his action and remove his tattoo immediately. However, an article from Goal (2021) sat down with Sterling who explained that the gun tattoo was special as it reminded him of how his father was gunned down when he was only three and serves as a reminder that he will never touch a gun. Without knowing the story behind Sterling’s tattoo, The Sun’s Moyes and Diaz drew their own assumptions from the tattoo and simply perpetuated negative stereotypes about a young black man who happens to play soccer for a living.

The stereotype invoked by Moyes and Diaz is another long-standing racist trope about supposedly violent and bestial black men. This stereotype has had devastating social outcomes for black American men. For instance, Duru (2004) has argued that it is partly because of this

stereotype that American police have historically mistreated black people, seeing them as inherently criminal and violent. It is partly because of the same stereotype that over half of the prison population in American prisons are black men (Duru, 2004).

Moyes and Diaz's story also shows that mainstream publications like The Sun are quick to make judgements about black players without knowing the full story. In mainstream white society, black people are mostly viewed as guilty until proven otherwise (Tucker, 2009). Maneri and ter Wal (2005) support this claim as they write that minority groups are seen as deviant in media reports which in turn creates social alarm. Due to the reports, black people's actions are usually criminalised. Meena (2021) writes how even the music that the black people make is criminalised and the artists are seen as violent and criminals. Meena (2021) argues that contents of the music represent the artist's struggles in an artistic form and this is similar to Sterling with the gun tattoo. Black people constantly need to explain their actions to the mainstream white community as failure to do so will result in them being labelled as criminals or paying with their lives (Tucker, 2009).

Parveen (2017) of The Guardian reports of a shocking article by The Sun's MacKenzie in 2017 which expressed racial xenophobia towards mixed race player Ross Barkley and his family. Parveen (2017) reports that MacKenzie described Ross Barkley as 'thick' and a 'desire to women' due to his physical features. He was regarded as a desire to women due to his manhood being well-endowed due to his black heritage (Parveen, 2017). The assumption is a stereotype towards black players within the Premier League as many black players such as Romelu Lukaku have had fans and tabloids alike mention their manhood.

Caballero (2019) writes that historically, mixed race people like Ross Barkely have been viewed as impure by the white people. People of mixed race are seen as foreign and are subjected to racial abuse much like the black people (Caballero, 2019). In early 20th century England, white women who married black men were portrayed as deviant and immoral. The children conceived from the marriage were stereotyped to be deviant and immoral like their

parents (Caballero, 2019). This train of thought continues to haunt mixed race people who continue to be stereotyped in mainstream media with their humanness going unnoticed.

For instance, MacKenzie likened Ross Barkley and his grandfather, a Nigerian man, to a gorilla (Parveen, 2017). According to Parveen (2017), MacKenzie is quoted saying “There is something about the lack of reflection in Ross Barkley’s eyes which makes me certain not only are the lights not on, there is definitely nobody at home. I get a similar feeling when seeing a gorilla at the zoo. The physique is magnificent but it’s the eyes that tell the story.” He refers to Barkley as a dumb black man and also questions his salary at Everton saying, “\$60 000 is a pay packet for drug dealers or friends of the queen” suggesting that Barkley does not deserve the amount of money he receives (Parveen, 2017). Parveen (2017) reports that the article received backlash as it was blatantly racist towards Barkley and his family which should not have been published by a well-known tabloid like The Sun. Parveen’s article exposing MacKenzie invokes the racist stereotypes that black people continue to face in the UK. Van Dijk (1989) writes that negative attitudes against black people have been accelerated in the UK due to them being seen as aliens. Being seen as aliens has meant that there is prejudice towards the black people even in the media to show that they do not belong and that them being in the country may cause problems. This has allowed black people to be villainized by the media without having a voice to speak out for themselves.

## **5 Chapter Five: Data Analysis: Daily Mail**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter interrogates the various ways in which racism in the English Premier League is talked about and reported by The Daily Mail. Like chapter four, this chapter is also organised in themes namely online abuse, racism on the field and media representation of black players by The Daily Mail. The themes have been generated based on the dominant themes that have emerged when the data analysis was conducted.

## **5.2 Online Abuse**

This chapter will first discuss online abuse aimed at black players. The Daily Mail offers a detailed account of the offensive nature of the abuse aimed at black players. Black players are victims of very abusive language at the hands of the racist trolls, something that the Daily Mail has been able to document. The abuse goes beyond name calling as it is used to degrade the players. Most of the abuse comes from football fans hence this theme will focus on online abuse coming from fans.

James Dutton (2019) published an article in The Daily Mail on April 7 which reported online abuse aimed at Wilfred Zaha, a black Crystal Palace player on Twitter. Dutton (2019) reports that the player was called a monkey on the social media site and received a death threat which read, 'I hope you and your family die you slave c\*\*\*'. Dutton (2019) condemns the FA, Premier League and “Kick It Out” for not dealing with racist situations as they keep getting worse and overshadow the football being played. The writer is appalled by the language that the fans have resorted to using and calls for action to be taken against racist trolls.

According to Stevenson (2019), the use of the word slave invokes the Atlantic Slave trade that took place from the 17th century in which black people were brought to America and forced to engage in hard labour on plantations for white people (Stevenson, 2019). Failure to comply with the requirements of the white slave owner would result in black people being subjected to harsh punishments (Stevenson, 2019). Internet trolls invoke this racist history to imply that blacks are deserving of slavery etc. Furthermore, the use of the insult “cunt” expose how black

people continue to suffer racial harassment in the form of threatening comments and insults (Stevenson, 2019). Morales (2013) describes the word cunt as one of the most offensive words in the English language and is used to intentionally degrade someone. The word is linked to female genitalia which makes it taboo and a very insulting word to the receiver (Morales, 2013). Being called both a slave and a cunt is highly offensive towards Zaha, he is being degraded by being called a slave and a cunt exposing the high level of disrespect and hatred the fan directed towards him.

Another article by Dan Sales, Nick Craven, Martin Robinson and Isabella Nikolic on 12 July 2021 again brings to light the extent of racial abuse that Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho suffered after missed penalties in the Euro 2020 final. Sales et al (2021) report that one fan posted a homophobic message on Saka's Instagram account saying, 'Pack them bags and get to your own country' implying that he is not English when in fact he is. The writers also report further racist abuse of the players which saw them receive messages which included, 'Take a banana you nigger' and 'Foreigners are stupid' (Sales et al, 2021). The writers criticise the racist actions, calling the racists ignorant as they failed to acknowledge that all three players are English and were born in England (Sales et al, 2021).

The narrative from the fans in this instance assumes that to be English you have to be white. FRA (2018) reports that English people of African descent are particularly at risk of victimisation caused by racism and xenophobia. The victimisation is usually based on the grounds of their skin colour, which is black and not associated with being European or English (FRA, 2018). Black people or people of African descent, irrespective of where they are born and grew up, are regarded as belonging in Africa and thus could never be genuinely English or European (FRA, 2018). Othering people of African descent results in the inability of white people to accept them as one their own hence they are labelled as foreigners or told to go back to their country despite being born and raised in England. FRA (2018) reports that the frequency of racist abuse on people of African descent is so high that they hardly report cases as they know it will happen again. This exposes the continued inability of the racist abusers to accept black people as part of their country.

Being told to take a banana goes back to Palmberg's (2001) writing which claims that people of African descent are seen as apish and dim-witted. Hunds, Mills, Sebastian (2015) refers to racist insults that associate black people with apes as a simianisation discourse. As a racist discourse, simianisation is a potent and dangerous ideology that links black people to "objects or animals, dirt or germs, things that require managing, cleansing, or elimination" (Hunds, Mills, & Sebastian, 2015, p. 12). When racist trolls liken black players to apes, this is the discourse that they are invoking.

The article by Sales et al (2021) exposes the hatred for black people in the English football world. However, the writers also show the support that the players received from other fans showing that it was not only racist abuse that was aimed at them. Some of the English fans defended the players' nationality and claim that they would take the three abused players over any racist trolls (Sales et al, 2021). The players were applauded by the Royal Family and fans took to Twitter to claim that they stand with the three players despite their poor performance in the final (Sales et al, 2021). The show of support for the black players by some of the white fans and the Royal Family, goes a long way in the promotion of equality for the players and could be what is needed to curb racism in football. It also promotes a sense of belonging to the players abused. Players should be criticised for bad performances, but it should not get to a point where they are being attacked for the way they look or their ethnicity.

Overall, the discussion on online abuse reported by The Daily Mail reveals the following, that some fans still view black people as inferior to them, evident by the disrespectful language they direct to the players. It also reveals that fans still see black people as slave descendants and foreigners within Western countries. Ultimately this thesis concludes that soccer fans in England use social media platforms to create a social environment in which the racist harassment of black soccer players is normalised (Felmlee, Inara Rodis, & Zhang, 2019). The social function of online harassment of black soccer players is to reinforce racist stereotypes about black people ((Felmlee, Inara Rodis, & Zhang, 2019).

### 5.3 Racism on the field

As mentioned in the previous chapter, fans do not limit their racism to social media sites but also take abuse to the players at football stadiums. The second theme in this chapter will be focusing on the on-field abuse black players face as reported by The Daily Mail.

Williams, Summerscales, and Mokbel (2018) report an incident in which Manchester City player Raheem Sterling was racially abused by a fan in a game against Chelsea. Sterling suffered the abuse at Chelsea's stadium Stamford Bridge where a fan was caught on camera calling Sterling a 'fucking black cunt' (Williams et al, 2018). Williams et al (2018) write that the abuse was the only one caught on camera, but it was accompanied by a 'barrage of racist abuse' from other Chelsea fans. The writer suggests that the barrage of racist abuse occurred simultaneously as the comment was caught on camera. Small (2018) writes that to the modern European racist mind, being black is associated with being ugly and being sub-human. Hence being called black by the racist mind is meant to demean an individual. As mentioned previously, Morales (2013) describes the word 'cunt' as highly offensive and is used to demean and disrespect an individual. It likens one to being part of the female genitalia (Morales, 2013). The insult 'cunt' is a gendered insult, it is one of the most hurtful words in the English language, which when directed to a woman is meant to communicate that the woman being insulted has no redeeming features, be it feminine or otherwise (Felmlee, Inara Rodis, & Zhang, 2019).

An article by Daniel Davis published on September 3, 2021, highlights an incident that saw black England players abused by fans during an away game against Hungary. Raheem Sterling and Jude Bellingham were subjected to monkey chants throughout the game by the Hungarian fans (Davis, 2021). The abuse against Sterling by the Hungary fans would intensify after he scored as he was 'pelted by several plastic cups that were thrown to him after he scored the first goal' (Davis, 2021). The writer condemns the action by the Hungarian fans claiming that former Prime Minister of England, Boris Johnson, and England manager Gareth Southgate have labelled the actions unacceptable (Davis, 2021). This comes after Boris Johnson had also previously condemned the English fans for abusing three black players at EURO 2020 (Davis, 2021). Davis (2021) also questions why the fans were not banned from games as the Hungary fans had been repeat offenders of racist abuse against black players. Calls for action by FIFA

and UEFA are voiced in the article as the black players need the help of these governing bodies to help curb the issue of racism within the game.

The racist abuse that black players English soccer players were subjected to in Hungary confirms research findings that racism in football is widespread throughout Europe. According to de Vlieger (2015, p. 226), racism in football “has been reported in almost all EU Member States.” De Vlieger’s (2015) research shows that associating black soccer players with apes or throwing bananas at black players happens routinely in European soccer. With regards to Hungary in particular, recent research by Papathanasiou, Tarnanidis et al (2022) shows that racisms in Hungarian football has been on the rise in recent years. Furthermore, according to Papathanasiou, Tarnadis et al (2022, p. 11), “specifically, we found that racism in society contributes to racism in football or vice versa.”

Davis (2021) writes that both UEFA and FIFA have condemned the actions and have vowed to take action against the fans who abused the players. Small (2018) writes that modern European mindsets consolidate the historical thinking that black people are the ‘other’ and are subordinate. We get to see this through the actions of the Hungarian fans, exposing how black players are othered in the English game and also across Europe.

Sam McEvoy (2022) wrote an article criticising the difference on punishments that black and white football players in the English Premier League receive. McEvoy (2022) brings attention to the racial abuse of Anton Ferdinand, a black player from Queens Park Rangers who was abused by Chelsea player and captain John Terry. John Terry swore at Anton Ferdinand during a heated exchange between the two, referring to him as ‘a fucking black idiot’ during a game against the two clubs (McEvoy, 2022). He was fined £220 000 and received a four-game ban for his actions but remained Chelsea captain for another five years (McEvoy, 2022). Another incident of racial abuse saw Liverpool striker, Luis Suarez swear at Manchester United defender Patrice Evra on the field and during the exchange, Evra asked him why he had sworn at him and he answered ‘because you are a nigger’ (McEvoy, 2022). He was fined £40 000 and banned for 8 games (McEvoy, 2022). Despite the punishments received, these players were accepted back into their respective teams. These on-field punishments were however, treated different to allegations against Kurt Zouma who was accused of animal cruelty. Zouma was caught on video kicking one of his cats, and “he pleaded guilty at Thames magistrates court in

east London last week to two counts of causing unnecessary suffering to a cat, after blaming the family pet for damaging a chair” (Weaver, 2022, para. 9).

Zouma’s action were objectionable no doubt. However, one of the longstanding perceptions that Black people have of White people is that in general White people and White societies often value pets more than the lives of Black people. Hence, unlike white soccer players who have been caught committing racist acts, Zouma was fined £250 000 and lost his Adidas sponsorship, and there were vociferous calls for him to be sacked from West Ham (McEvoy, 2022). To our knowledge no white player has lost sponsorship over a racist incident, and there certainly has not been any calls to have these racist white players sacked from their teams. Instead, players who commit racist acts like Luis Suarez received on-field support from Liverpool players and fans when he served his ban for abusing Patrice Evra. The fact of the matter is that Western society continues to mentally associate black people with being irrational beings and violent in nature (Goff et al, 2008).

Tom White, of The Daily Mail wrote an article on March 24, 2015, highlighting the extent in which fans were showing their racism at football stadiums. White (2015) details an incident in which a fan, in the toilets of Manchester City’s stadium saw a white man cleaning them and claimed “that’s a fucking black man’s job”. During the same game another fan was heard abusing a player as they said “how many chinks and weed do you need?” (White, 2015). The fan stating that cleaning toilets is a black man’s job suggests that this is coming from a racist point of view. (Small, 2018) writes that in modern Europe, black people remain at the lower ranks of every economic and social hierarchy. Small (2018) explains that black people are expected to do jobs that are insecure and require very little or no qualification at all. This suggests that racist Europeans still view black people as below them or sub-human which is why the fan did not expect to see a white person cleaning toilets, something which is meant to be beneath the white person. Small (2018) also writes that there remains a belief in modern-day Europe that Africans are heathen, deviant and as a result are othered. This helps explain why the fan directed the weed comment to the black player. Smoking of recreational weed in the UK is illegal therefore only the deviant would be able to partake in its consumption.

Overall, the on-field abuse of black players in the English Premier League as reported by The Daily Mail reveals the following, that some fans are unwilling to accept the equality of black players in the sport. Fans are reluctant to change due to the leeway that UEFA and FIFA continue to afford them. It revealed that white players continue to be defended and sometimes celebrated for their actions whilst black players are quick to be villainised for their actions with calls to have them sacked from their clubs. It has also revealed that black people are linked to ‘demeaning’ jobs and are viewed as deviants who partake in illegal activities.

#### **5.4 Media representation of black soccer players by The Daily Mail**

Despite bringing to light the racist issues that black players face in their reporting, The Daily Mail has also been racist in some of its reports on black players. It has become known for its racist portrayal of black players, with black players speaking out against the publication. This section will focus on some of the articles published about black players which portray stereotypes that look to tarnish their reputations through their lifestyles.

An article published by Antony Joseph in The Daily Mail on January 10, 2018, reports on 20-year-old black Manchester City player Tosin Adarabioyo buying a mansion worth over £2 million. Joseph (2018) questions why the young player would buy a mansion at just 20 years and on only £25 000 a week. Joseph (2018) reports that the youngster has not even started an English Premier League game for Manchester City yet but is already buying mansions. This seems to suggest that the player’s priorities are misplaced, rather than focusing on football, he is buying expensive houses. The young player is also accused by Joseph (2018) of being money hungry as he states that Adarabioyo’s performances the previous season had stalled because he would not accept a contract with low wages from the club. However, the article fails to acknowledge that Adarabioyo did not just buy the house for himself, but it was for his family. Hirst (2019) of The Times sat down with the player for an interview in which he would review that he bought the house for his single mother who had spent many years struggling to raise three children. Hirst (2019) writes that the story by The Daily Mail has become so popular that Adarabioyo’s name is simply associated with the fact that he bought an expensive house. The player questions the article from The Daily Mail as he states that his intentions were only to

buy his mom a house and asks if there is anything wrong with that, as he was being scrutinized for his actions (Hirst, 2019).

It is interesting to note that months later, on October 4, 2018, Ian Herbert, again from The Daily Mail would publish an article on white 18-year-old Manchester City player Phil Foden buying a house. The difference between the stories is that Herbert (2018) portrays Foden as a sweet and caring child, applauded for his maturity in putting his family's interests above his own yet Adarabioyo did not receive the same praise despite having done the exact same thing. Herbert (2018) reports that he did this by moving his family out of poverty and buying them a beautiful home. Herbert (2018) writes how Foden is determined to keep his close-knit family together and that his money has allowed his family to stay together given that they come from a poor background. His actions were no different than Adarabioyo but he is celebrated whilst Adarabioyo is criticised.

Chris York (2018) of The Huffington Post wrote an article that criticised The Daily Mail for the two stories on Foden and Adarabioyo, who both bought their struggling families homes but one, the black player was seen as being extravagant whilst the other, a white player was portrayed as a caring child. York (2018) reports that Raheem Sterling of Manchester City, where both the young players play, took to Instagram to condemn The Daily Mail for their racist report. Sterling condemns the portrayal of the black player as compared to the white player as they both had done the same thing which is buy houses for their families (York, 2018). The writer sympathises with the black players stating that the media continues to depict black players in a negative light no matter how positive their actions may be. York (2018) calls for change in the British media and praises Raheem Sterling for speaking out in defense of the young black player.

The portrayal of the black player in a negative way is derived from the long-standing negative perception that the media has of black players. Page (1997) writes that the media encourages the viewing public to cast a negative light on black players, resulting in them not being accepted in society. Page's (1997) claim is true in this instance as Joseph (2018) tries to portray Adarabioyo as a financially reckless player who has never played an English Premier League

game but is only focused on spending his money on mansions, which presents a negative light on the player. Page (1997) writes that only a few black people have the privilege of getting positive press in the media and being embraced by society whilst most black people remain victims of negative press and are not embraced by society. This is the case with black footballers in the English Premier League as they continue to be negatively portrayed regardless of whatever positive action they do, in this case buying a home for one's family.

Similarly, Buckwell and Aitchison (2020) of The Daily Mail report on Manchester United player Marcus Rashford buying five homes worth more than £2 million yet he is campaigning to end child poverty in the UK. Buckwell and Aitchison (2020) report that Rashford has ventured into real estate by buying five houses on estates, a golf course and has multiple mortgages which enabled him to purchase the properties. Buckwell and Aitchison (2020) appear confused as to why Rashford would spend so much money on multiple properties, yet he is trying to campaign for children to gain free school meals. The two writers criticise his actions which is unfair as his business deals do not affect his ability to fight for children in the UK. Rashford spoke out against The Daily Mail for trying to discredit his campaign by linking it to his business deals (Pinder, 2020). Rashford explains that all he is trying to do is secure his family's future as he came from nothing, and he campaigns for kids getting free meals because he also struggled as a child (Pinder, 2020). Pinder (2020) criticises the media for speaking negatively against Rashford, but they applaud David Beckham's charity work and call for him to be knighted by the Queen for it, yet he flaunts his wealth without criticism.

Chris Wheeler of the Daily Mail wrote an article on February 10, 2021, that took aim at Manchester United player Amad Diallo for something he had no control over. Wheeler (2021) reported that Amad Diallo was under investigation by the Italian authorities, accusing him of falsifying documents that allowed him to enter and stay in Italy from Ivory Coast when he was 12 years old. The writer accuses Diallo of taking advantage of the false documents to play football in Italy, stating that the documents allowed him to sign for two Italian clubs before going to Manchester United (Wheeler, 2021). Wheeler (2021) also accuses Diallo of the incident by claiming that he made use of the false documents as a way of initially reuniting with his "bogus" parents and once in Italy, also used the documents to start playing at a football club. Wheeler (2021) also reports that Diallo has had to take a plea deal from the Italian

authorities which fuel the guilty narrative from the Daily Mail, as plea deals are usually taken by guilty people. It is unfair for the media to lay the blame on Diallo given that he was only 12 years old at the time he entered Italy. Burns (2021) reported on the story providing more context to the situation by stating that Diallo was smuggled from his home country of Ivory Coast through a child trafficking ring with his younger brother. The said bogus parents posed as the parents of Diallo which allowed him to enter the country and it was not a case of Diallo trying to reunite with them (Burns, 2021). Burns (2021) questioned the Daily Mail's accusations on Diallo as he was a victim rather than an accomplice, likening them to the Italian authorities who were investigating Diallo instead of the two adults who posed as his parents. The real offenders here were the people that smuggled Diallo as a 12-year-old boy and not the player himself, something the Daily Mail should acknowledge (Burns, 2021).

Perhaps at this juncture it is worth noting that the unfair treatment of black people by the British media does not know no bounds, even people like Meghan Markle have in the past been subjected to it (Woldemikael and Woldemikael, 2021). For instance, the Daily Mail wrote an article that read "Meghan Markle's Family Went From Cotton Slaves To Royalty" (Woldemikael, et al, 2021). The connection of Markle to slavery is variation on a theme of racialised insults that soccer fans discussed in this chapter deploy from time to time. The article compares Prince Harry's ancestry which has Queen Victoria, Empress to a quarter of the world's population to Meghan's ancestry which had cotton pickers and maids at Windsor Castle, which is where the Royal Family resides (Woldemikael, 2021).

The tabloid reduces Meghan and her family's status to that of slaves and low-class people who served the Royal Family whilst continuously elevating the Royal Family's status as way higher than Meghan's, opening the debate as to whether she deserves to be a part of the most prestigious family in the UK. Ottoson and Nordàs (2019) explain that the abuse that Meghan Markle has experienced from the British tabloids has been compared to that of Princess Diana who was constantly harassed by British media up until the time of her untimely death in 1997. Prince Harry, Meghan's husband accuses the media of conducting a ruthless campaign which intensified when his wife fell pregnant, this includes questioning her fashion choices and a constant reminder of how she is mixed race and underserving of being in the Royal House (Ottoson and Nordàs, 2019). Similar to how the Daily Mail covers black soccer players, the articles published about Meghan Markle have racial subtext that communicates that Markle is

not deserving of respect and her station in life. The article shows that the British tabloids portray black people in a negative light despite their status in society as even a member of the Royal Family is a target. Similarly, black football players continue to be subjected to the same fate from publications such as the Daily Mail, whose material continues to target non-white demographics without consequence.

## **6 Chapter Six: Conclusion**

This thesis has demonstrated that racism against black players remains a constant feature of football in the English Premier League from the time black players started to feature in the sport in the 1970s. Black players continue to be abused in similar ways as they had been abused, being labelled monkeys and niggers coupled with monkey chants as well. Social media in the 21st century has now accelerated the rate at which racism is perpetrated as fans now have more access to players through their accounts. Social media also encourages anonymity which means that fans show no remorse and sympathy when abusing fans, similarly to how it was in the 1970s and 80s. The 1990s saw more black players enter the Premier League which prompted action against racism. The action would come through the introduction of anti-racist campaigns namely “Kick It Out”. The 21st century saw more initiatives to stop racism being introduced such as “Show Racism The Red Card” however, this has not stopped racism from being perpetrated.

A positive motion in curbing racism in the 21st century has been the frequent reporting on racism by tabloids in England. Racism is now being given more attention and players are now able to speak out on it. This study contributes to the efforts of curbing racism in the Premier League by putting the academic spotlight on this matter. To that end, this thesis researched British tabloids that have a track record of reporting and documenting racist acts against black soccer players in the Premier League. As has already been pointed out in Chapter Three, this thesis critically discussed articles published in the Daily Mail and The Sun, largely because these two publications are the biggest tabloids in the UK.

To organise and analyse the data collected from these two newspapers, this study used three discursive themes, namely: online racism, racism on the pitch and in stadiums, and the representation of black soccer players in the British tabloids. This chapter aims to close the loop on this discussion by restating some of the key findings discussed in the data analysis chapters in order to tie together the arguments made in the analysis of data. The discussion begins by conducting a critical comparative summary of the two tabloids under the discursive theme “On the Field Racism”.

## **6.1 On the Field Racism**

A key finding in the thesis suggests that fans and players racially abuse black players in the stadiums by likening them to animals and treating them as sub-human. For instance, The Daily Mail's Davis (2021) reports on how black English players were subjected to monkey chants during England's game against Hungary. The main victims of the abuse were Jude Bellingham and Raheem Sterling. The abuse would intensify after Raheem Sterling scored a goal. He was pelted by several cups which were thrown to him by the Hungarian fans. The English manager, Gareth Southgate called out the fans for their racist behaviour after the game stating that this was not acceptable (Davis, 2021). Both UEFA and FIFA called out the fans for their behaviour vowing to punish the guilty fans.

Sam McEvoy (2022) of The Daily Mail reported on how back in 2012, then Chelsea captain John Terry racially abused a player during a game. Terry racially abused black Queens Park Rangers player Anton Ferdinand by calling him 'a fucking black idiot' during a match between the two clubs (McEvoy, 2022). Another racially incident saw Liverpool striker Luis Suarez abuse black Manchester United player Patrice Evra during a game between the two clubs (McEvoy, 2022). Suarez saw at Evra and when Evra asked why he had been sworn at Suarez responded saying, 'because you are a nigger' (McEvoy, 2022). Despite McEvoy reporting that both players were fined for their racial abuse, it is evident that much like the Hungarian fans they do not have respect for black players and treat them as less human than they are.

Similarly, The Sun highlight incidents in which black players were subjected to demeaning racial chants and being treated as inferior to their white counterparts. The Sun's Stonehouse (2021) reports on how fans in England have resorted to booing players taking the knee before games. Taking the knee is a gesture that signifies that there is no room for racism in the sport and as a gesture for racial equality (Stonehouse, 2021). Stonehouse (2021) reports that the booing of the knee suggests that the white fans are rather booing the idea of racial equality. Another reporter from The Sun, Street (2021) reports that fans believe such gesture have no place in the sport as they only favour black fans instead of everyone.

Another incident was reported by Fernie (2020) who reports on how Burnley fans flew a banner across their stadium that read 'white lives matter Burnley' before kick-off of a Premier League game. This was in response to the Black Lives Matter movement which is seen as an organisation that only represents black people and not white people as well (Lebron, 2017). This suggests that fans are not ready to accept black people as their equals as they refuse to

forward a cause that helps raise awareness to how they have been marginalised in sport and society.

Hodge (2019) reports on how Manchester United player Fred Rodrigues was subjected to racial abuse during a game against Manchester City. A fan was caught on camera making monkey chants and gestures towards Fred as he went to take a corner (Hodge, 2019). Despite reporting on the incident Hodge (2019) sympathises with the perpetrator reporting on how the man has lost his job because of the incident which he claims he did not do. The writer tries to defend him backing his claim that he was simply putting his hands in his pocket. Sympathising with the perpetrator is being inconsiderate to the victim who suffered abuse, fans need to be called out and suffer the consequences for their actions.

These findings are consistent with other findings such as De Vlieger's (2015) research which explains that the labelling of black players as apes or throwing bananas at black players happens routinely in European soccer. Black people remain marginalised and are not seen as equal hence their abuse remains frequent. Another study consistent with these findings is by Papathanasiou, et al, (2022) who writes that modern European mindsets consolidate the historical thinking that black people are the 'other' and are subordinate. This is why it is difficult for the white fans to accept causes such as Black Lives Matter and the taking of the knee that signify the marginalisation black people have suffered from and call for racial equality.

## **6.2 Online Racism**

Another finding in the study is that fans use the bad performances of black players as an excuse to racially abuse them. For instance, The Daily Mail's writer Sales, et al, (2021) report that after three black English players, Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho missed penalties in the Euro 2020 final to give Italy the win, they were bombarded with racist messages. The three players were on the receiving end of online racist messages which told them to leave their country (Sales, et al, 2021). Other messages included 'foreigners are stupid' and 'take a banana you nigger' (Sales, et al, 2021).

Dutton (2019) also reports that fans abused Wilfred Zaha, a black Crystal Palace after a bad game, on social media by calling him a monkey. He would also receive death threats on social media with one fan saying, 'I hope you die you slave cunt' (Dutton, 2019). Dutton (2019) writes that the abuse against players online continues to get worse and that the FA need to do

something about the racist trolls. The abuse the players received is unfair, fans should be able to criticise players without abusing them. However, despite the online abuse The Daily Mail's Sales, et al, (2021) report that some fans have showed support to the three players. Some fans are quoted saying they would rather take the three abused players than the racist trolls who claimed the three have no place in the UK (Sales, et al, 2021). This suggests that some fans sympathise with the players and are willing to support them when others racially abuse them.

The Sun also reports on fans that racially abuse black players after bad performances. Parker, et al, (2021) report that the Instagram accounts of Rashford, Saka and Sancho were 'flooded' with monkey and banana emojis from white fans. Parker, et al, (2021) sympathise with the players for missing the penalties writing how then 19-year-old Saka was seen weeping after he had missed the penalty. This suggests that racist trolls lack remorse and empathy for the players as they still chose to abuse them even after seeing them devastated by their performances. Christodoulou (2021) further reports on the abuse on the three black players writing how a real estate agent called the three players nigger on Twitter. The perpetrator was fired from his job and was arrested for what his words towards the players (Christodoulou, 2021). His employers distanced themselves from him stating that they do not tolerate racism of any kind (Christodoulou, 2021). The writers here show that fans can be held accountable for racist abuse which is what needs to be done in order to curb racism.

Another article that supports the claim that fans use bad performances as an excuse to racially abuse players is by Upal (2021) who reports that Sterling and Rashford were victims of racial abuse after their teams lost European finals. Rashford was on the receiving end of at least 70 racist messages which included a mountain of monkey emojis from a schoolteacher (Upal, 2021). Upal's (2021) article suggests that everyday people who are important to society such as school teachers can also be perpetrators of racism and these people should not be handling children as they can forward their racist narratives to them.

The findings are consistent with findings from the study by Cleland and Cashmore (2014). Cleland and Cashmore (2014) indicate that social media has allowed fans to express vile racist thoughts without consequences as it encourages anonymity. Fans are able to be racist without any remorse as they are rarely held accountable for their actions. Cleland's (2014) study also indicates that fans that express racist thoughts have a deep essentialist view of identity and national belonging that is centred on whiteness and a rejection of multiculturalism. This is why they label black English players foreign or tell them to go back to their country. Kilvington, et

al's, (2022) study is also consistent with the findings in this study as they claim that some fans believe racism is part of the fan experience. This suggests that some fans view racist abuse as something that needs to happen to players and fans alike as it is part of football which is a false narrative. Racism needs to be curbed and not encouraged.

### **6.3 Media Representation of Black Soccer Players**

The study also found that tabloids do not only report about racist abuse but are also guilty of portraying black players in racially stereotypical ways whilst praising white players for the same achievements. For instance, The Daily Mail's Joseph (2018) reports on black 20-year-old Manchester City player Tosin Adarabioyo buying a mansion worth £2 million. Joseph (2018) questions why the 20-year-old would buy a mansion instead of focusing on his football as he had never played a Premier League game for Manchester City before. Joseph (2018) accuses the player of being money hungry bringing in the fact that he was having contract disputes with the club.

However, Hirst (2019) of The Times sat down with the player who revealed that he had bought the house for his mother who had struggled to raise him and his two other siblings. The Daily Mail may appear hypocritical for their article as they praise Phil Foden, a white 18-year-old Manchester City player for buying his mother a house which is the same thing his black teammate had done. Herbert (2018) of The Daily Mail describes Foden as a sweet and caring child who should be applauded for his mature actions. One questions why The Daily Mail could not praise both players for their actions and why the black player had to come out and give reasons as to why he bought the house. It also exposes how unfairly scrutinised black players are by the media.

Buckwell and Aitchison (2020) also criticise black English player Marcus Rashford for buying property that is worth over £2 million. Buckwell and Aitchison (2020) seem confused by Rashford's actions given that he was campaigning for free meals for children. Rashford spoke out against The Daily Mail for trying to discredit his campaign by linking it to his business deals (Pinder, 2020). Rashford explains that all he is trying to do is secure his family's future as he came from nothing, and he campaigns for kids getting free meals because he also struggled as a child (Pinder, 2020). Pinder (2020) criticises the media for speaking negatively

against Rashford but yet they applaud David Beckham's charity work and call for him to be knighted by the Queen for it, yet he flaunts his wealth without criticism.

The Sun takes a different approach in their abuse of black players as they tend to racially stereotype them. For instance, The Sun's Moyes and Dias (2018) report on Sterling's gun tattoo calling it 'sick' and blaming it for sparking outrage amongst the football community. Moyes and Diaz (2018) label Sterling a callous, gun crazy maniac for having the gun tattoo on his leg and call for his removal from the England national team. Such reporting perpetuates racist stereotypes about supposedly violent black man as the writers simply made assumptions about Sterling's tattoo when in fact it was a tribute to his father who was gunned down when he was only three (Goal, 2021). The tattoo also serves as a reminder to Sterling of how he will never touch a gun in his life, which is different to the assumptions of the reporters (Goal, 2021). Moyes and Dias (2018) are guilty of stereotyping Sterling linking his tattoo to violence when instead it was a tribute to his father.

Similarly, Parveen (2017) reports that The Sun's MacKenzie was found guilty of racial abuse after releasing an article on Ross Barkley, a mixed race player. According to Parveen (2017) MacKenzie racially stereotypes Ross Barkley by claiming that he is a desire to woman due to his physical features, engaging the long-standing stereotype that the black man's manhood is well-endowed. MacKenzie also labelled Barkley and his Nigerian grandfather gorillas as he is quoted saying, "There is something about the lack of reflection in Ross Barkley's eyes which makes me certain not only are the lights not on, there is definitely nobody at home. I get a similar feeling when seeing a gorilla at the zoo. The physique is magnificent but it's the eyes that tell the story." Parveen (2017). MacKenzie's article received a lot of backlash as it was blatantly racist (Parveen, 2017). Although The Sun would remove the article on their platform, it should have never been allowed to be posted in the first place given how racist it was towards Barkley and his family.

The findings are consistent with other findings such as the study by Caballero (2019) who writes that historically, mixed race people like Ross Barkely have been viewed as impure by the white people. People of mixed race are seen as foreign and are subjected to racial abuse much like the black people (Caballero, 2019). The findings are also consistent with Page (1997) who writes that the media encourages the viewing public to cast a negative light on black players, resulting in them not being accepted in society. Page (1997) writes that only a few black people have the privilege of getting positive press in the media and being embraced by

society whilst most black people remain victims of negative press and are not embraced by society.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for further study**

This study primarily focused on racism faced by English Premier League players on social media with a focus on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, racism on the field by players and fans, and also racism from tabloids The Sun, The Daily Mail and also on match commentary, therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised. Future studies on racism in football could expand on the scope of the study to include more media organisations such as television channels that offer football punditry and various sources, including print and visual. Other social media outlets such as the fast-growing TikTok can also be analysed as football has become popular on the platform, which arguably breeds an environment for the racist fans to abuse players.

#### **6.5 Concluding remarks**

It is unfair on the generations of black players in the English Premier League as they suffer the same fate when it comes to racial abuse despite being involved in the game for over 50 years. Players have been exposed to the same racist chants and continue to be treated as less compared to the white players. It is encouraging to see that black players in the 21st century have been speaking out against racist perpetrators as before it was advised not to speak out. Despite the players speaking out, the 21st century arguably has seen the most racist fans as there has been an introduction of social media which encourages anonymity. Being anonymous has come with explicit racist abuse as fans do not show any remorse as they are not held accountable for their posts. More needs to be done by the governing bodies such as the FA and FIFA to protect black players who continue to make their way into the English Premier League. Anti-racist organisations also need to be more efficient in dealing with racism which in turn will protect black players.

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