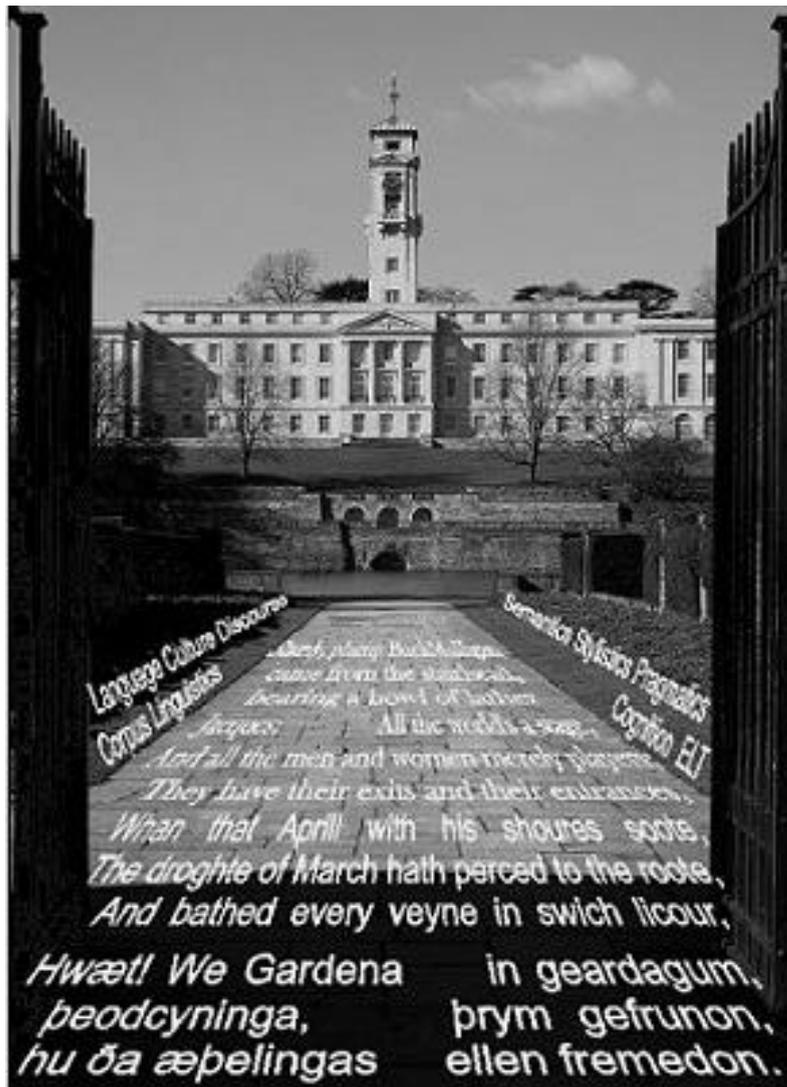


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# No Laughing Matter: How the Tabloids Textualised Racism During Euro '96

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The core purpose of journalism is and should be about producing serious information and debate on central social, political, and cultural matters. Journalists regulate much of what the public gets to know about the world they inhabit, and this activity is vital to a functioning democracy.

-- Jostein Gripsrud, "Tabloidization, Popular Journalism, and Democracy"

The media are responsible for enormous amounts of language output, which must have a substantial influence on the language community they serve.

-- Ramesh Krishnamurthy, "Ethnic, racial and tribal: The Language of Racism?"

Let's Blitz Fritz!

-- The Sun<sup>1</sup>

Achtung! Surrender.

-- The Daily Mirror

## Introduction

I rarely play sport or follow sporting events. My exercise is running - alone and lengthily through quiet countryside. I savour neither teamwork nor competition. Yet, despite my lack of competitive interest, I find it difficult to resist being caught up in the odd important international fixture. I am briefly overwhelmed by an inexplicable patriotism. "Inexplicable" for what does it really matter if my team wins? England's scoring more goals than their opponents will not reap the country any tangible benefit. There will be no reduction in unemployment nor increase in productivity. The trains will still run off schedule. Poverty, racial intolerance and other social injustices will still obtain. Football teams, essentially, compete for little more than so-called glory.

Yet the English press would have us think otherwise. As Alan Sillitoe observes, when England loses a football match against Germany, the people are made to feel as if the Battle of the Somme had just been refought (85). For Sillitoe, "Sport is a means of keeping the national spirit alive during a time of so-called peace. It prepares the national spirit for the eventuality of war" (85). George Orwell, similarly in an anti-sporting essay, took the battle analogy further, claiming that, at international level, "sport is frankly mimic warfare" or "war minus the shooting" (41-2). Orwell linked the rise of serious sporting competition with the rise of nationalism - "the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige" (43). Although football has been a potent force for international contact and understanding, "its competitiveness and its nationalistic basis have perpetuated cultural stereotypes and institutional prejudices" (Fleming and Tomlinson 91).

My purpose however is not to attack sport and sporting practices (especially football, for which I have a proud distaste). I write as a response to the English press' consistently racist reporting of the 1996 European Football Championships. Contrary to the aforementioned cynicism, sport, I'm sure, has been and still is a potential vehicle for bringing individuals and nations purposively together. Played and promoted sensibly, it can be of major service in "breaking down racial and religious barriers" (Fleming and Tomlinson 94). Yet for the English press, particularly the tabloids, the big international contest is often an opportunity to broadcast cultural prejudices and circulate jingoistic sentiment. Arguably, one of the most telling and alarming examples of recent times was the press coverage of Euro '96. Persistently vitriolic and hateful in nature, the coverage provoked many complaints from the public and led to a report by the National Heritage Select Committee which expressed its disgust at the "xenophobic, chauvinistic and jingoistic gutter journalism" (3) of the tabloids. The report also suggested inflammatory links between such coverage and rioting that occurred following the England-Germany semi-final (violence in Trafalgar Square saw, along with damage to German-made motor cars, an English mob set upon, and seriously injure, a Russian bystander mistaken for being German). Though the Select Committee's report was too simplistic in its equating journalism with the subsequent violence (Garland and Rowe 1), it is certain that the tabloids' coverage of the competition, which by June 24th had peaked feverishly, irresponsibly sought to turn a sports event into a conflict throughout which the hosts were seen to be defending themselves against foreign invaders. Accordingly, tabloid readers were continually exhorted to get passionately behind their national (English) side and encouraged to align themselves with the journalistic ridiculing of visiting teams and supporters.

This paper critically examines the linguistic and textual structures of such articles. It evaluates the stylistic and thematic strategies with which the Daily Mirror, among other tabloids, regularly distributed a consistently racist ideology during Euro '96. Though there has been much previous critical linguistic research into racist discourse (van Dijk, *Prejudice in Discourse, Communicating Racism, Racism and the Press*), and also how the press discursively construct English national identity during international footballing events (Bishop and Jaworski), there has been little critical textual research into the racist press reportage of Euro '96. Previous studies of press coverage of the tournament (Fleming and Tomlinson; Watkin; Garland and Rowe) give little attention to structural form and content by way of detailed textual analysis, focusing principally on the social and political background to the event. Along with other critical discourse analysts who argue for a more detailed and systematic focus on the language of media texts (Fowler *et al.*; Fairclough, *Media Discourse*; van Dijk *et al.*), I take the view of Fowler that

each particular form of linguistic expression in a text - wording, syntactic option, etc. - has its reason [...] Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium. If we can acknowledge this as a positive, productive principle, we can go on to show by analysis how it operates in texts. (*Language in the News* 4, 10)

Critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) seeks to expose ideologies which may be buried in and obfuscated by language. Without critical exposure, such hidden or implicit beliefs and values will remain uncovered and may pass off assumptions about social life as though they were common sense (Fairclough and Wodak 258). One common process of obscuration evident in the popular press, and which has been given little attention by CDA, is the construction and refraction of perspective through humorously diverting language in order to soften and distort ideological content. "Behind every 'joke'", argue Gordon and Rosenberg, "a serious point is being made" (38). Humour, in other words, can help legitimise and make palatable a racist set of beliefs (or whatever set of beliefs are being distributed) and

is therefore a valuable ideological tool in the dissemination and normalisation of prejudice. What, among its other abilities, makes it especially powerful, and perhaps to some extent inviolable, is that it is a positive social activity which transcends different cultures. To have a sense of humour is a “genuinely universal facility of human kind” (Husband 149) and an essential lubricant of social life (Lockyer and Pickering 635). Consequently, the humorist becomes unassailable since to challenge him or her (no matter what the subject matter) is not only to risk being exposed as intolerant but also as lacking a sense of humour - someone out of step with social norms and mores. Not being able to laugh with others is often taken as a negative and unsociable personality trait, liable to make us feel vulnerable and alienated from other people; and this helps account for the fact that we sometimes pretend to understand and appreciate a joke, simply in order to avoid the charge that we are stupid or ignorant (Lockyer and Pickering 635). Humour, in short, affords the joke-teller a potent resource for insulating ideas and opinions against potential objection and censure.

During Euro 96, the popular press exploited many “comic” opportunities occasioned by the circumstances of the tournament. A significant amount of humour relied on military analogies which recalled past conflicts (both military and sporting) with competing nations. In particular, the tabloids extensively and elaborately used war imagery to present England, the host nation, as a country defending itself against invading foreign hordes (typically represented in crude and comic stereotypes). Many of the images and tropes were constructed out of or relied on puns and other vivid semantic and phonetic patterns. But the regular use of such linguistic features by the tabloids is not, by any means, solely restricted to special occasions such as major international sporting events. Since the main motive of a tabloid is to secure as large a readership as possible, entertainment and sensation (the greatest selling points) will be, at the expense of more responsible and informative journalism, its prominent features (Rooney; Franklin). Not surprisingly, therefore, linguistic devices such as exaggeration, alliteration, and other forms of word play (particularly puns) are the speciality of the popular press (Bagnall 40). Throughout the reportage of Euro '96, the tabloids' obsessive pursuit of the pun, a consequence of the structural demands of format (according with textual and ideological outlooks), often resulted in profoundly distasteful comments which were nevertheless rendered acceptable, or at least more opaque, because they were part of the papers' humorous and entertaining journalistic routine.

Consequently, in my analysis I pay critical attention to puns and the construction of war imagery as part of the tabloids' “comic” and racist agenda during Euro '96. Since many of the linguistic devices were accompanied by, and actively worked in conjunction with, photographs and other textual representation, I undertake a “multi-semiotic” (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 4) analysis in order to provide a detailed account of the full extent of how racism was textually articulated throughout the tournament. Further, in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of CDA (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis; Media Discourse; Analysing Discourse*), I see this paper as not only offering insights into the textual distribution of humour and prejudice, but also enhancing other forms of social analysis. In particular, read in conjunction with the research of Garland and Rowe, Watkin, and Fleming and Tomlinson, this paper complements previous sociocultural analysis of the press coverage of Euro '96. Ultimately, I aim to show that, owing to the elaborate and persistent extent of the semiotic processes through which stereotypes and insults were broadcast, it was (and, of course, still is) not possible for newspapers to use humour as an excuse or defence for promoting racism.

### Defining terms: race, racism and xenophobia

It is necessary that I set out the concept of racism upon which my arguments are founded. There seems to be general agreement among theorists that “race” is a problematic concept, constructed out of social convenience rather than scientific and biological fact (Miles; Cole, *Race and Racism*; *Race, Racism and Nomenclature*; Van Dijk, *Racism and the Press*; Van Dijk *et al.*; Jones). For instance, Robert Miles (75-79) claims that distinct races do not exist. He argues that the distribution of genetic variation within a population is often greater than the average difference between populations. Racial grouping through genetic distinction, therefore, is ultimately indeterminate. Yet if “race” is an illusory concept, the illusion in no way applies to racism (Cole, *Race and Racism*; *Race, Racism and Nomenclature*, 449). Even if there is significant disagreement over the understanding of the concept (Van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 24), there is no doubting that racism is a very real, unimagined concept. Cole (after Miles) defines racism as

a process whereby social relations between people are structured by the significance of human biological and/or cultural characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social groups. Such groups are assumed to have a natural, unchanging origin and status. They are seen as being inherently different and as causing negative consequences for other groups and/or as possessing certain evaluated characteristics. Since these evaluated characteristics are stereotypes, they are likely to be distorted and misleading. If they are at first seemingly positive rather than negative, they are likely to be ultimately negative.

(*Race, Racism and Nomenclature: A Conceptual Analysis* 13)

The advantage of this definition is that it is both specific and inclusive, anticipating loopholes which have undermined previous formulations of racism. Though Cole, for the reasons cited above, dismisses race as a concept, he recognises that this doesn't prevent people from using what they perceive to be apparent biological differences (such as skin colour) as a basis for prejudice. To this, he provides the complement or alternative of “cultural characteristics” - a proviso which captures the cultural stereotypes often employed by the tabloids. For instance, the Daily Mirror, two days prior to the England-Germany semi-final (24<sup>th</sup> June 1996), reported that “There is a strange smell in Berlin... and it's not just the smell of their funny sausages. It's the smell of fear” (2-3). This negatively evaluated cultural depiction, where the adjectives “strange” and “funny” promote and reinforce ideas of the abnormality of German cuisine and therefore German lifestyles more generally, trades on the common stereotypical view of the national diet consisting of little more than wurst (or sausage for Daily Mirror readers). Such remarks, therefore, despite their purported light-heartedness, are by this definition racist and liable to cause offence.

Another important feature of Cole's definition is that it also allows for positive stereotypes to be a constituent of racism. Racism need not be transparently hostile; it can also be subtle, working insidiously. For instance, a positive stereotype such as “black students are good at sport” can ultimately be harmful. According to Cole, this apparently encouraging remark is “distorted and misleading and typically appears as part of a discourse which works to justify black children's exclusion from academic activities” (*Race and Racism* 450). The press coverage of Euro '96 was riddled with many positive stereotypes, frequently at the expense of Germany and German people. Tabloids exploited the “positive” stereotype of German “efficiency” and “industry”, a reductive and facile view which helps to deny other qualities such as spontaneity, imagination, humour, etc. The efficiency stereotype was also extended to the football field, where the German style of playing was evaluated by the same “positive” characteristics. In its edition of 24th June 1996, the Daily Mirror, caustically

modifying the stereotype, referred to “the brute force” (6) of the German team and the “Teutonic tedium of their tactics” (6). Note here that, in the latter stereotype, the persistent and clanking alliteration, as well as producing a comical and ungainly sounding phrase, also reflects and mimics the repetitive and predictable characteristic it describes. Similarly, in the same article, German football is again equated with and reduced to mechanic activity or the “practice of using force” (1).

Yet for all its comprehensiveness, Cole’s formulation of racism appears to me to miss out an important clause. As I interpret it, his construction of racism is dependent on individuals or groups making an “evaluation” (whether negative or positive) of the characteristics of other groups. Evaluation necessarily entails a judgement or an attitude. But any definition of racism should also allow for behaviour divorced from judgement. Katz and Taylor point out that “although prejudice and discrimination may often be components of racism, they need not be” (6). Certain behaviours “can have the same devastating effects, with or without an attitudinal component” (6). A clause which takes this behavioural possibility into account captures instances of racism of which the perpetrators are unaware but for which they are nevertheless still responsible. Such a proviso makes it no defence, in the case of the Euro ’96 press coverage, for tabloid editors to claim that their stories did not really represent their true opinions or were not meant to be taken credibly. “The Achtung thing was a joke that people didn’t get, that’s all” was Piers Morgan’s response to complaints concerning his newspaper’s coverage (Pilger 438). Yet, despite Morgan’s innocence plea, that didn’t extinguish the fact that racism was still broadcast by his paper, as the record number of outraged Mirror readers helped testify.

As stated earlier, previous studies of the English press reportage of Euro ’96, although insightful, have focused on the social and cultural aspects of the coverage, without examining how such articles are textually articulated and the effects that such articulation might have on readers. Moreover, they have been somewhat conservatively restrained in their criticism of the attitudes and behaviour of the popular press. At their most critical the reports censure the press for being jingoistic and xenophobic, where racist, I suggest, would be a more accurate and emphatic condemnation of the tabloids’ hateful invective. “Jingoistic” and “xenophobic” inadequately account for remarks such as “We kick them in the castanets” (News of the World, June 23: 4-5) or “We will McDuff you up” (Sun, June 13: 64). For this interpreter at least, jingoism connotes little more than bullish patriotism, while xenophobia, which combines “xeno” (strange, different, foreign) with phobia (fear), suggests an uneasy attitude of distrust and dislike, not active prejudice with damaging consequences. Xenophobia is, according to Cole, a “somewhat vague psychological notion” which “does not tell us much; either about the nature of such a disposition, or indeed about its underlying causes” (*Race, Racism and Nomenclature* 21). Racism, on the contrary, is a powerful conception. As a term it has advantages over many of its synonyms and semantic relations. It leaves no doubt as to the truly negative and harmful beliefs and practices working behind it. As Katz and Taylor point out, it has more “connotative power” than other terms: “The use of racist as an adjective leaves no doubt about its valence” (7).

## Analysis

My analysis focuses on two editions (20th and 24th June) of the Daily Mirror. It was during this period, when it appeared that England had a significant chance of winning the tournament, that the tabloids’ vitriol peaked. Like many of the red tops, the Mirror ceaselessly exploited the historical and geographical coincidences of the competition. Staged “at home” in England, on the thirtieth anniversary of the country’s victory against Germany in the 1966 World Cup, and shortly after the fiftieth anniversary of victory in the Second World War,

Euro '96 was for the Mirror an opportunity to revisit previous European conflicts and resurrect the full fervour of past antipathies. In the run up to England's quarter final match with Spain, the Mirror's front pages were entirely given over to aggressive support of the national side and crude intimidation and derision of opponents.

### 1. The Daily Mirror (June 20 1996)

The first thing the reader notices, directly under the Mirror's watchwords "Honesty, Quality, Excellence", is the front-page headline:

# YOU'RE DONE JUAN

The exaggerated font size is an attempt to replicate the bold scale of the original text. The brief three word headline, though occupying at least half of the front cover, is accompanied by a photograph of a befeater and a matador. Together, the extensive headline and photograph overwhelm the surrounding textual items. The report relating to the headline, for example, is reduced to two scant columns, constricted so as not to impinge perceptually on the larger items. The photograph is brutally explicit in its depiction; it could stand alone and readers would still extract the meaning supplied by the headline. Squarely facing the viewer, in what is plainly a scene of execution, a laughing befeater holds an axe above the head of an ignominiously kneeling matador. The matador is positioned side on to the viewer, and holds a spoil whose point is lowered ineffectually to the ground. His head twisted away from the viewer, he looks submissively up towards the befeater, whose triumphant grin offers a sharp contrast to the matador's expression of alarm and awe. In this instance, language, to borrow from Kress' critique of tabloid front covers, "has become, largely, a visual element" (Kress 25).

The photograph leaves little to the viewer's imagination. Significantly, neither the picture nor the headline relate explicitly to the football tournament. Nor is there anything inherently newsworthy, for all the attention that it boldly demands, presented in the headline (it was known two days before that England were to play Spain in the quarter finals). The headline reports no latest development in the championship; it simply generates its own news agenda, seeking to sensationalise events by making a conflict out of what should really be occasion of European sporting celebration. For conflict, as Hartmann and Husband observe,

is the stuff of news just as it is the stuff of drama and literature. Material that can be couched in terms of conflict or threat therefore makes better "news" than that which cannot. (*Racism and the Mass Media* 276)

But the Mirror's headline goes beyond rousing propaganda - the instilling into the nation a sure sense of victory over opponents in a football game. It is not difficult to imagine the circumstances under which the headline was manufactured. In accordance with the jingoistic and combative approach taken by the paper to Euro '96, along with the punning and sensationalising requirements of its front-page headlines, a writer selects a stereotypically Spanish figure or emblem, one easily recognisable as such (in this case Don Juan), and then,

in order to emphasise and promote English victory, and Spanish defeat, exploits an obvious phonemic element (Done). A decoding of the pun reveals not only a crude stereotypical reduction, but the imputation of negative and insulting characteristics to all Spanish people. It is made up of two unrelated concepts

- 1) You're Don Juan
- 2) You're Done (Don Juan)

which are brought unambiguously together. Both constituent parts, as well as merging to create new semantic and connotative significances, also resonant individually in the final word play. The first constituent is in itself offensive. "You're Don Juan" is a direct second-person plural address to Spanish people collectively, grouping them together as one entity. This projects an "us" and "them" opposition in which the English are positively individuated whereas their Spanish opponents are negatively generalised. Don Juan is a legendary character, often presented as the complete profligate. Unavoidably, therefore, characteristics such as immorality, extravagance and debauchery are transferred to Spanish people. The suggestion of sexual prowess, however, is undercut by the second constituent of the pun. "You're Done" intimates spent energy and impotence, an impression reinforced by the submissive posture of the matador in the photograph. But "Done" is not restricted in its semantic implications to sexual or physical inadequacy. The word is broader and more absolute in its connotative force, signalling a complete Spanish subjection: "done" not just in the sense of losing a football match, but "done" in the sense of utter inferiority, of being finished entirely, defeated both as a group of people and as a nation - a defeat (we are led to believe, no matter how fancifully) brought about, to some extent, by English superiority.

Positioned above the "You're Done Juan" headline are two underscored straplines, the first of which reports that

**Only 4,000 Spanish to face 72,000 Brits**

This subline dramatises what is essentially a trivial news item, if news at all (the tournament being hosted in England, it is only to be expected that there will be far fewer Spanish supporters than their English equivalents). Ticket sales in themselves are hardly worthy of front-page attention. The Mirror, however, forces its readers to perceive the occurrence as something far more significant: a crucial development indeed in the "conflict" between the two countries. The lexical arrangement of the line is revealing. Distorting the harmless and insignificant fact that Spanish and British spectators will simply watch a football match, the paper has supporters glatorially "face" each other. This dramatic impression of warfare, through use of the infinitive verb form, is given further spectacle by reference to the massive imbalance of national loyalties: "Only 4000 Spanish" implies a lack of patriotism, whereas "72,000 Brits" boasts extensive national support. And though "Spanish" is in itself a neutral and inoffensive term of reference, set against the affectionate diminutive "Brits" it takes on a dismissive or, at the very least, mildly unfavourable air. The Mirror's representation of subjects here recalls Hartmann and Husband's observation that war

creates special pressures within a society, and a crucial redefinition of the characteristics of participant nations; with allies becoming more favourably defined and the enemy more negatively defined. (181)

Indeed, not satisfied with a front-page offensive on its Spanish "enemy", the Mirror persists with its invectives throughout the rest of the paper, resorting, by page 5, to out-and-out hostility. In a long column, extending from the top to the bottom of the page, the paper lists "10 NASTIES SPAIN'S GIVEN EUROPE", a selection of which includes the following:

1. Syphilis. Brought back by Columbus from Central America.
2. Spanish flu. A particularly nasty strain that killed millions after World War I.
3. Carpet bombing. Invented during the Spanish civil war, when Guernica was flattening [*sic*], killing thousands.
4. Spanish Inquisition. Torture and murder supposedly carried out in the name of God.
5. Bull fighting. Fair it is not. (5)

Such a caustic list suggests that Spanish history entirely consists of one long, continuous visitation of cruelty, pestilence and death upon the rest of Europe. (Call me ignorant, but I never realised that Columbus, rather than setting out from Spain to discover the Americas, only sought to introduce a venereal disease to his homeland.) Further, the present perfect in the heading (“10 NASTIES SPAIN’S GIVEN EUROPE”) works to ensure that such negatively evaluated (and shamelessly distorted) elements of Spanish history are brought forward to resonant in the present, implying that current generation Spain is in some way still responsible for such evils, and is just as likely to perpetuate them. Other than out of pure malice, to stir up racial hatred, it is hard to find any justification for such an item. It cannot be said to serve as entertainment, let alone serve any journalistic purpose. But the list is not an isolated assault by the tabloid on Spain and Spanish people. Directly underneath there follows a section jubilantly titled “JOKERS SOCK IT TO THE SENORS” (“JOKERS”, one presumes, refers to the Mirror’s writers and, by implication, its reader-audience). The “jokes”, which are introduced with buoyant alliteration as “Costa crackers”, include:

- What do you call a good-looking girl in Spain?* A tourist.  
*What do you call a Spanish stud?* A goat-herd.  
*What do you call three goats tied to a Madrid lamp-post?* A leisure centre.  
*What does a Spaniard do if he sees a pile of bricks near the sea?* Put a “Vacancies” sign on it.  
*What are the first words a Spaniard says to his partner when he wakes up?*  
 Another hour’s graft and we can clock off.  
*Why do Spanish men grow moustaches?* To look like their mothers. (5)

I suggest that few judicious readers would deny that the Daily Mirror here openly wears its racism on its sleeve. Though hate-laden and damaging, and in no way excused or rendered acceptable by humour (one might also ask whether such bilge is humour per se), the sequence of interrogatives nevertheless works to involve the reader in the joke-telling process and thereby seeks complicity in the airing of prejudice. The reader, as recipient of the jokes, is therefore constructed as an implied conversant in a racist exchange (the italicised questions, and their non-italicised answers, further emphasise the co-presence of speaker and listener). This compelling collaboration encourages the reader/listener to engage in meaning making in order to understand and appreciate the rapid succession of punch lines. Moreover, the chatty tone of the exchanges between the paper and the reader, along with the colloquial vocabulary “graft”, “stud” and the colloquial idiom “clock off”, helps to simulate informal conversation (Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change, Critical Discourse Analysis, Media Discourse*), putting the paper and its audience on a seemingly equal footing. This is significant because it creates the illusion of shared mutual ground, of apparent confederacy, and, with it, shared values and assumptions. This is reinforced by the structural format of the jokes themselves - canned off-the-shelf jokes whose simple, common formulae are well known: “What do you call a ...? Why do ...? etc.” The parallel and repetitive syntactical structures of each joke - a wh-form followed by operator-verb - work to impress upon the reader - this reader at least - a sense of predictability, preparing the ground for the following ‘side-splitter’, so that when it

arrives he or she, having become accustomed to the content (no matter how unsavoury), is expecting the insult.

The textual construction of humour, then, works to inure readers to prejudice and encourages them to delight in, as the *Mirror* certainly does, the persistent and abusive ridiculing of Spaniards through common stereotypes. Writing about the Sun's repeatedly racist treatment of foreigners, Chris Searle asks a question which in this instance just as urgently applies to the *Mirror*: "What do The Sun's readers ever learn about people other than the English?" (21). For *Mirror* readers at least, Spanish people, as we have just seen, are portrayed among other insults as lazy, dirty, illiterate, sexually deviant, and even menacing. There are no positive attributes to redress the imbalance or at least provide a point of view other than one of abuse and hostility. Moreover, such grossly inaccurate representations of culture and character, apart from being maliciously misleading and preventing readers from responding to Spanish people as individuals, also implicate ideas of English superiority: that the English nation and its people are, as Gudykunst's formulation of ethnocentrism has it, "at the center of everything" (106). For the *Daily Mirror*, English customs and practices are the default value, the preferred and accepted way of life, against which all others, inevitably, are negatively compared and contrasted.

## 2. The Daily Mirror (24 June 1996)

The edition of the *Mirror* first published after it was known that England were to play Germany in the semi-finals sported one of the most infamous front-pages in recent tabloid history:

**ACHTUNG!**

**SURRENDER**

**For you Fritz, ze Euro 96  
Championship is over**

(1)

In the space between "ACHTUNG!" and "SURRENDER" appear photographs of the English football players Paul Gascoigne and Stuart Pearce, both wearing authentic World War II infantry helmets. The headline and photograph occupy, bar the leader column which runs down the far right-hand side of the page, the entire front cover, which readers are imperatively directed to "CUT OUT AND STICK IN YOUR WINDOW". Provocatively attached to the masthead is a reproduction of the flag of St George blazoning the dates "66" and "96" (where "66" refers to England's win over Germany in the 1966 World Cup). Above the masthead is the slogan "PEARCE IN OUR TIME", a pun which conflates the name of the aforementioned footballer (more popularly known as "Psycho") and Neville Chamberlain's "peace in our time" speech (after the 1938 Munich Agreement). Reference to the Second World War is made further explicit in the leader which has been urgently brought forward, as if in a moment of unprecedented national import, to appear on the front cover, giving dramatic and explicit prominence to the paper's beliefs and opinions. The editorial parodies

Chamberlain's radio broadcast (a declaration of war against Germany) to the British nation on September 3rd, 1939:

## **Mirror declares football war on Germany** **BY THE EDITOR**

Daily Mirror statement to the nation.

I am writing to you from the Editor's office at Canary Wharf, London.

Last night the Daily Mirror's ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final Note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their football team from Wembley, a state of soccer war would exist between us.

I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently we are at war with Germany.

(1)

For the popular press, the Second World War always serves as a particularly convenient backdrop where international sporting competition is involved. But for German people, the war analogy must be rather worn, though still no less offensive and sharply felt. In the case of Euro '96, the Mirror antagonistically represents Germans solely in terms of past military and sporting encounters, insensitively rounding them up with one simplistic and reductive address term "Fritz". An arguable consequence of such intense preoccupation with military analogies is, as Searle points out, to refuel old conflicts, and stoke up "jingoism and a terrifying poverty of knowledge and lack of openness to new ideas" (22). Here, the leader intimates that something more than loyalty for the national football side is demanded of the reader: jingoistic support for your country is irreconcilable with amity and empathy for your opponent. Note how the noun phrase "football war" in the headline echoes the noun phrase "soccer war" in the second paragraph - where the sporting activity of "football" and "soccer" respectively premodify the recurring head noun "war". However, what is first recorded as "football war" and "soccer war" is, by the third paragraph, boiled down to become purely "war" outright, a lexical adjustment which foregrounds military conflict over sporting competition. In the following extract from the same editorial, the reference to Spain is similarly couched in terms of warfare and military victory, this time troping the Spanish football team as the "Spanish Armada", which in turn jingoistically recalls, whatever its relevance to football, English victory at the Battle of Trafalga:

*We must pull together, just as we pulled together to repulse the Spanish Armada*

...

*Since we have resolved to finish it, I know that you will all play your part with courage*

...

*We shall not submit to German territorial demands*

...

*May God bless you all. It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against - the brute force, the high tackle, the unfair penalty, the Teutonic tedium of their tactics, and the pretence of injury after a perfectly legitimate English tackle.*

*Against these evils, I am sure that inside right will prevail.*

(6)

At this stage in the “Daily Mirror statement to the nation”, the editorial now seeks to share involvement and responsibility directly with its readers, addressing them as “we” (instances of which I have italicised). The use of “inclusive ‘we’” (Fowler and Kress 202) involves the addressee in the contents of the text and “is therefore...more intimate and solidary” (202). In this instance, nation and newspaper become one collective voice and body, sharing the same common national resolve. As well as involving readers directly in the text, and intimately aligning them with the paper’s nationalistic sympathies, the repetition of “we” also works actively in conjunction with the modal auxiliaries “will”, “shall” and “must” which oblige readers to play their part in the conflict. It is expected that they will unquestioningly assume the responsibility, the sense of national duty, conferred upon them by the leader (a sense of national duty which is dramatically, if risibly, constructed as being as pressing as it was in 1939). Note also how the second-person appeals “you” and “your”, as well as helping to reinforce the sense of communal purpose, locate each addressee more individually: “you will all play your part with courage”.

Moreover, in order to further enhance the imperativeness and authority of its nationalistic appeal, the editorial assumes, even if in a comic, parodic way, the voice of Prime Minister Chamberlain. And though of course it cannot claim the import and urgency of the events that confronted the British PM at the beginning of the Second World War, the editorial compels readers, no matter how comedic the intent, to consider the football match principally in light of the conflict. By now, the paper has laboured the war analogy too exhaustively for it to be merely a playful and flippant connection. Consequently, the “evil things” of Hitler’s Germany in 1939 are not firmly located in the past but newly returned to the present to be equated with the Germany of 1996. Readers are encouraged, as they were with Spain, to identify a fixed and unchanging negative national character. Not surprisingly, therefore, the contrasts between the two football sides are emotively marked: England is represented as the “legitimate” nation, justly defending itself against a belligerent Germany, a nation with rapacious “territorial demands” and a sporting/military apparatus characterised by treachery and “brute force”. By now it appears to be nothing less than a battle, as the final italicised statement above emphasises, between good and evil, in which English “inside right will prevail” (the last minute pun, overwhelmed by all the references and allusions to military conflicts, hardly brings the tournament back into purer focus). Replaced by once forgotten hostilities, the sporting, football context has by now all but vanished.

## Conclusion

The scope of this essay has allowed for little more than a fleeting survey of the tabloids’ coverage of Euro ’96. Consequently, my analysis has restricted itself to a limited selection of textual features. Nevertheless, it has, I believe, provided a representative flavour of the papers’ coverage throughout the tournament, exposing a consistently racist set of beliefs and practices. My object, however, has not been simply to track down racist attitudes. That would be easy, for racism pervades tabloid discourse. Rather, my purpose has been to critically reveal the ways in which the popular press (the Daily Mirror in particular) circulated its attitudes and beliefs. Throughout Euro ’96, readers were repeatedly presented with predictable and offensive stereotypes, and were encouraged to uphold such misleading and reductive generalisations, as if they were reliable and universal. Building up national esteem, so the paper encouraged its readers to believe, entailed not only passionate support for England but also enmity towards foreign opponents.

By constructing and articulating a racist ideology in and through humour, the Daily Mirror, I contend, sought not so much to veil its prejudices as to make them presentable, as if, in incurring later criticism, it could all be simply laughed off. Indeed, responding to criticism

of his paper's reportage of the tournament, this was precisely the defence which the Mirror editor Piers Morgan offered: "The Achtung thing was a joke that people didn't get, that's all" (Pilger 438). Morgan's words are here worth repeating since they reveal some important insights into the use of humour as an ideological tool. First, Morgan suggests that since people "didn't get" the joke, that necessarily absolves the tabloid of any impropriety, while at the same time suggesting that the fault, in fact, lies with sanctimonious critics who were unable to appreciate the comic intent, and were therefore somehow lacking in personality (Garland and Rowe 6). Secondly, Morgan suggests that even if people did get the joke (and by "get" I assume he means appreciate the humour), then that would still have justified the nature of his paper's coverage. Appealing to the truism that 'it is difficult to have a sense of humour and to be offended at the same time' (Gary Younge qtd. in Lockyer and Pickering 650), Morgan implies: "How can you possibly berate me for having a joke?"

However, the defence of humour in the distribution and reproduction of racism (in the context of the press coverage of Euro '96 and elsewhere) cannot be accepted. The use of such a defence is based on the erroneous assumption that humour subsists in a "separate cultural sphere - divorced from its social context" (Garland and Rowe 6). Accordingly, the textual features that I have examined in this essay reveal much about how the tabloids constructed English national identity and their hostile relations with other countries - Spain and Germany in particular. Moreover, if humour cannot be divorced from the social context in which it is produced, then nor can it be separated from the effects that it has on recipients, for it is surely incredibly designing or, alternatively, extremely naive to maintain that no harm was done simply because perpetrators intended nothing more than having a joke, no matter how sustained or elaborate; with attitudes like this, perpetrators fail to take any account of, and avoid responsibility for, any offence that they have caused. My analysis of the tabloid reportage of Euro '96 has revealed the persistent and elaborate extent to which racist stereotypes were textually constructed and reproduced. Prejudice was articulated not only by linguistic means but interdiscursively, through the mixing of a range of genres, discourses and styles (Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*), which included political speeches, photographs, cartoons, canned jokes and so forth. The variety, extravagance and pursuit of these textual representations were far in excess of the simple maintenance of an innocent and straightforward joke, one which, if necessary, could be conveniently dismissed.

As part of a robust, healthy democracy the press have a central role to play. The facility of free speech, coupled with relatively relaxed reporting restrictions, enables them to promote the exchange of ideas and values. "Free" however should not be - though many papers take it to be - a licence to vent their prejudices. "Racist...slogans are indefensible on moral and empirical grounds, and add nothing to democratic deliberation or intellectual life' (32), argues Amy Gutmann. Accordingly,

[w]e fail ourselves and, more importantly, the targets of hate speech if we do not respond to the often unthinking, sometimes drunken disregard for the most elementary standards of human decency. (*Multiculturalism* 23)

Gutmann's entreaty explains the often direct and outspoken critical approach I have taken throughout this paper. If racist discourse is to be effectively exposed and censured in the daily press, it needs, I argue, to be done so urgently and emphatically. In keeping with the tenets of CDA, drawing on social and linguistic theories not generally called upon in everyday critiques of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 281), I have tried to articulate the semiotic effects which the tabloids' construction and reproduction of prejudice is likely to have had upon readers - specifically how readers were encouraged to delight and partake in the racist "othering" of foreign opponents and identify with a nationally united and domineering England. Given that present times have not seen any enlightened increase in racial tolerance,

such media conceptualisations of the nation as all powerful and superior are disturbing. Throughout Europe generally there has been a worrying increase in the political fortunes of the far right. In England, for instance, popular support for the British National Party has seen it recently gaining electoral seats in the May 2003 local elections – a success founded principally on concerns of immigration and its so-called threat to the nation-state. Such nationalistic concerns, moreover, are not restricted to political extremists but have the regular support of many sections of the English press. The racism and nationalism of Euro '96 was not a simple past one-off. Press coverage of Euro 2000, for instance, the England versus Germany match in particular, similarly exploited the nation state as a powerful image for invoking group identity (Bishop and Jaworski), and it is certain that, especially where international football is concerned, the popular press will continue to aggressively promote English nationalism and indulge in offensive stereotyping. Given this, if there is to be any determined resistance to racism in the media, there vitally remains the need for vigilant critical monitoring of its discourses. Even if CDA will be unable to stop the broadcast of racism altogether, it can at least confront it when it occurs and expose, no matter what its guise, be it humour or otherwise, the textual extent to which the daily press are prepared to go in order to make hatred appealing if not acceptable.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Both the Sun's and the Daily Mirror's headlines were published on June 24th 1996, two days before the England versus Germany semi-final match.

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