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Tottenham Hotspur, Fan Identity and Figurational Sociology: 'Yid Army'

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Abstract

This chapter will utilise a figurational sociological approach, pioneered by the work of Norbert Elias, as a theoretical framework to explore the relationship between sport and religion. Elias has been considered one of the greatest sociologists of the 20th century, whose work builds upon the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. A figurational approach has been utilised to cover a wide range of subjects, including violence, ageing and death, art, gender, racism and, most importantly for this discussion, sport and leisure. Giulianotti states how the figurational approach has 'acquired a very "established" position' within the field of sport sociology and leisure studies. In addition, his work has been utilised by a range of scholars including Maguire and Tuck, Liston and Moreland, and Liston and Maguire to explore identity, subsequently making it ideal for examining Spurs and their publicised 'Jewish' identity.

Introduction

Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, also known as Spurs, has been perceived to be a 'Jewish Club' for many years. This perceived identity has resulted from a range of factors; the most likely causes include the demographics of the fans, the religious identities of current and previous shareholders and the nickname that the fans identify with, 'Yid', which is a Jewish ethnonym (Poulton & Durell, 2014). As a result of this, it is evident that they have been targeted

for antisemitic hate by opposing fans. This current issue of antisemitism at British football matches has sparked thoughts and discussion regarding what makes a club 'Jewish' or even religious and what bridges a football club to a certain religion.

This chapter will utilise a figurational sociological approach, pioneered by the work of Norbert Elias, as a theoretical framework to explore the relationship between sport and religion. Elias has been considered one of the greatest sociologists of the 20th century (Dunning & Mennell, 2003), whose work builds upon the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim (O'Connor, Ashton & Smith, 2015). A figurational approach has been utilised to cover a wide range of subjects, including violence, ageing and death, art, gender, racism and, most importantly for this discussion, sport and leisure (Dunning & Mennell, 2003). Giulianotti (2004, p. 145) states how the figurational approach has 'acquired a very "established" position' within the field of sport sociology and leisure studies. In addition, his work has been utilised by a range of scholars including Maguire and Tuck (1998), Liston and Moreland (2009), and Liston and Maguire (2020) to explore identity, subsequently making it ideal for examining Spurs and their publicised 'Jewish' identity. Figurational sociology has been derived from the concept of 'figurations', defined by Elias as 'generic concept for the pattern which interdependent human beings, as groups or as individuals, form with each other' (1987, p. 85). According to Elias (1978), groups/individuals are linked by 'chains of interdependence', through which they influence one another in both evident and indirect ways; in addition, these networks of interdependencies can be known to influence others not directly connected to them. This concept will be useful when examining the community of Spurs and their Jewish identity, given that this perceived identity has emerged as a result of 'chains of interdependence', in which some fans have adopted the religion and specific aspects (the use of Yid) due to the club's history and the demographics of other fans. It may be argued,

however, according to Elias (1978), that this happened both directly and indirectly, which will be explored in greater depth within the later part of this chapter.

There are several components and key tenets embedded within the theory, with the ‘most important sociological legacy’ being his 1939 work ‘The Civilising Process’ (Giulianotti, 2004, p. 149). This work explored how individuals became more civilised (despite moments of decivilisation), through the shifting and changing of behaviour and psychological qualities of the people in the West, discussing examples of violence, manners and etiquette, including table manners and aggression. A variety of researchers, including Dunning (1992) and Maguire (2006), have employed the civilising process in which to examine the subject of sport. Maguire’s (2006) work used the civilisation process to talk about folk games and how they have evolved into the sports we play now. This work has aided our knowledge of modern sport and the process of modern civilisation. Elsewhere, Dunning (1992) explored football hooliganism using the civilisation process to demonstrate, through football hooliganism, the potential for violence in today’s more ‘civilised’ sports. Scholars have worked in the field of sport to apply an Eliasian viewpoint to the study of sport, with the civilisation process being the most commonly adopted owing to its prevalence and popularity in other academic fields.

Nevertheless, this chapter will focus on two key concepts, the ‘established-outsiders’ concept and the ‘personal pronoun model’. Firstly, the ‘established-outsiders’ concept explores the figurations of interdependent groups and the shifting power relations between these groups (Mennell, 1994; Velija, 2012) and proves useful when examining the relationship between positive and negative community identities (Moore, 2010). Secondly, the ‘personal pronoun model’ examines how people are interrelated to one another in order to identify an individual’s identity within a larger web of interconnected identities through the use of language (Moore,

2010). Within academia, the ‘established and outsiders’ concept has been addressed amongst a range of scholars in the field to investigate discrimination and migration (Loyal, 2011) and gender inequality (Liston, 2011; Velija, 2012). Despite the fact that there appears to be no prior literature using this model to investigate race or religion, the personal pronoun model has been used to investigate other identity factors including sexuality (Moore, 2010) and nationality (Moore, 2010; Leonardi, 2011). Thus, prior to the discussion of Spurs and their connection to the Jewish religion, some time will be dedicated to exploring previous literature using these two notions.

Elias’ ‘Established-Outsiders’ Concept and Sport

The ‘established-outsiders’ notion explored how societies are split into two contrasting groups, the ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ (Elias & Scotson, 1965). The more dominating group is the ‘established’ group, which has strong internal cohesiveness, social networks and a common background. Those who were the subordinates were called the ‘outsiders’, on the other hand, and are new and unfamiliar with one another, as well as having limited social networks, marginalised positions within society and lacking what is known as a ‘we-identity’ (Elias & Scotson, 1965). It became a source of worry to Elias and Scotson (1965) that members of dominant and strong groups saw themselves as superior to members of other interdependent groups, while outsiders were regarded as weaker and inferior.

Due to the evolving and dynamic nature of figurations, both the established and outsiders change status by contesting or becoming a part of the existing community (Elias & Scotson, 1965). The major concern, however, was how these group dynamics developed. In Elias and Scotson’s (ibid) seminal work, the established group was composed of families who had lived on a housing estate

for several generations, while the outsiders were comparatively newcomers. The established had formed a common identity, a set of rules and a hierarchical structure. Material and economic disparities, as well as social status and family history, are among the factors that contribute to these social figurations and the cohesion of these group interactions (Elias & Scotson, 1965; May, 2004). According to Elias (2008, p. 213), this model is a powerful tool in which to analyse issues regarding power, exclusion and inequality and with which academics 'can better come to grips with the similarities and differences of other cases'. Prejudice and culture, according to Elias and Scotson (1965), are insufficient explanations for power imbalances, which Petintseva (2015) criticises Elias and Scotson for, for additionally, failing to account for gender, ethnicity and colonial relations, all of which they believe could have a substantial impact. Petintseva (2015) states how the established-outsiders concept can also be used to talk about marginalisation and discriminatory behaviours, most specifically, when it comes to race, religion and ethnicity. Therefore, rather than using the 'established-outsiders' concept to explore neighbouring communities and the power between them, the main aim will regard exclusion and discrimination based upon religion in sport.

Maguire (2000), Black (2016) and Malcolm and Velija (2008) are amongst scholars who have used this notion to explore the field of sport. Maguire (2000) argues that 'Western' civilisations have used sport and other cultural practices to display status and superior social position in relation to the rest of the world. Westernised sporting taste and costumes subsequently became established and permeated throughout non-Westernised societies. This emphasises how within sport Western cultures have evolved into the equivalent of an established group through time, making those non-Westerns the 'outsiders' (Maguire, 2000). In addition, Black (2016) explored newspaper representations of athlete Mo Farah whilst drawing on this concept, alongside race. In

terms of race, racist discourse construction entails the separation of established and outsider groups, with the former considering themselves superior to the latter (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2015). However, what Black (2016) explored was that the British press may mislead ‘outsiders’ groups and individuals. This study looked at how Mo Farah’s ‘outsider’ position was handled and incorporated into the ‘established’ by the British press. It highlights how outsider individuals, including Farah, have become more accepted as an ‘ethnic minority athlete’ due to their sporting successes. Finally, through an Eliasian lens, Malcolm and Velija (2008) stated that female cricketers are considered the outsiders. Throughout the history of cricket, men have dominated the field and what Malcolm sees as ‘oldness’ has meant that they have greater cohesiveness than the ‘outsiders’ (Dunning, 1999). Nevertheless, as time develops and female cricketers become more ‘mature’, a more cohesive identity will be fostered (Malcolm & Velija, 2008). In addition, Malcolm and Velija (2008, p. 232) state that ‘a shift towards equality is unlikely to occur until a more coherent ‘we group’ identity is formed by female cricketers’.

‘Established-Outsiders’, Religious Discrimination and Tottenham

Hotspur

May (2004) discusses how ‘established groups’ practices of exclusion are particularly troubling. In addition to this, Petintseva (2015) states how the established-outsiders concept can be used to talk about marginalisation and discriminatory behaviours. Firstly, we can explore this notion by looking at Judaism within the United Kingdom. The UK has been considered a ‘Christian country’, with many individuals belonging to the faith; nevertheless, in more recent years, there has also been a rise in atheism. Therefore, when applying this notion, some may argue that Christianity and atheism are recognised as the ‘established’. When Western European and

Northern Jews migrated in the early 20th century, they were recognised as the newcomers and therefore considered as the outsiders. Using Elias' 'established and outsiders' notion, we can see that at Spurs the Jewish population, who in some contexts are regarded a minority by some and thus 'outsiders', have been absorbed into a group where they are deemed established members of a group with strong group cohesiveness regardless of religious affiliation. In the context of female cricket, Malcolm and Velija (2008) previously described how, over time, a more unified identity would be created, and therefore, they will become part of an 'established' group. When looking at Spurs, it is clear that this Jewish identity has been part of the club's overall character, which has been transferred to fans regardless of their religious background.

Next, this may be applied to this case study with the word 'Yid' in mind. The usage of the term Yid, which has sparked significant debate among football fans, the Jewish community and scholars (Poulton & Durell, 2014), has been investigated using an Eliasian approach. The term Yid, which was originally used by Ashkenazi Jews as a term of familiarity but was later exploited by Hitler and the Nazis as a derogatory name to attack the Jewish community, is a term used among the antisemitic abuse received by Spurs fans (Poulton, 2016). Firstly, we can acknowledge that when used by the Nazi regime, this term was used to diminish and belittle the Jewish community, subsequently making them thought of as 'outsiders'. When we discuss it in the context of contemporary football, while some opposing teams may argue that their antisemitic chanting and use of the term Yid has no antisemitic content and is simply footballing 'banter', their comments and chanting could have a significant impact on members of the Jewish community, making them feel like 'outsiders'.

Nonetheless, even though the name is frequently used in a pejorative manner toward the club, Spurs fans also utilise it to deflect attacks and unite with their club's Jewish members, according

to a prior study by Poulton and Durell (2016). By integrating and supporting the attacked community, the phrase is used to deflect the attacks, reinforcing the Spurs' strong feeling of oneness. According to Elias and Scotson (1965), established groups are those that have evolved a shared identity. With this in mind, we can see how the term Yid, which is utilised by supporters as a form of 'identification', has strengthened their group's cohesiveness. The 'established' group, according to Elias and Scotson (1965), has high levels of cohesion, which is reflected within this case study, just by exploring the use of the term Yid.

Elias' 'Personal Pronoun' Model and Sport

According to Elias (1978), individuals are linked by 'chains of interdependence', via which they influence one another in both obvious and indirect ways; with this in mind, the above application of the 'established-outsiders' concept has reinforced that Spurs supporters have formed a Jewish identity in both obvious and subtle ways. Ethnic minorities are frequently excluded, but as Black (2016) discovered with Mo Farah, 'outsiders' may become part of the established 'us'. The Spurs case study demonstrates how certain outsiders might be discursively handled as members of the established, 'us'. The use of this pronoun can therefore be examined through the use of the 'personal pronoun' model, whereby language can be used as a method for illustrating how power dynamics between insiders and outsiders can make human interdependence and interconnectivity evident within groups (Nielsen & Thing, 2019). This argument is captured in Elias and Scotson (1965):

...how and why human beings perceive one another as belonging to the same group and include one another within the group boundaries which they establish when saying 'we' in

their reciprocal communications, while at the same time excluding other human beings whom they perceive as belonging to another group and to whom they collectively refer as 'they'.

(p.22)

This illustrates how the 'established-outsiders' concept is closely connected to the 'personal pronoun' model, as personal pronouns can also be used to investigate how group identities, such as 'we', relate to others and outsiders, such as 'they' (Crow & Laidlaw, 2019). This can have a powerful effect in generating feelings of inclusion and exclusion which enables people to recognise who are 'the established' and who are 'the outsiders' (Poulton, 2001).

The 'personal pronoun model' examines language and how people are interrelated to one another in order to identify an individual's identity within a larger web of interconnected identities (Moore, 2010). Individuals employ pronouns such as 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'they' and 'us' to express social statuses and are thus utilised in social contexts (Moore, 2010). They enable us to express the interconnection of social life and, more significantly, they aid in the recognition of an individual's interdependencies and connections within communities (Smith, 2001). When a person speaks when the statement is about themselves, the pronoun 'I' is usually employed. The pronouns 'we' and 'us', on the other hand, denote a bond between individuals, emphasising a sense of belonging (Elias, 1969). Elias's (1991) work found that some individuals will prioritise their 'we-identity' over their 'I-identity', as a collective identity and group status can be deemed superior. It is important to note that subsequently the 'we-image' could overshadow a person's image as an individual, which is the reason why communities endure as vital components in people's lives. As individuals, we develop our own identities as well as our group identities, so it is important to note that personal pronouns can and do change (Moore, 2010); they are in

‘constant flux and transformation, within interweaving processes of change occurring over different but interlocking time-frames’ (Quilley & Loyal, 2004, p. 5).

In comparison to the ‘established-outsiders’ concept, the personal pronoun model has been used less frequently in the field of sport and leisure but has been used by scholars including Maguire and Tuck (1998) to address national identity and Nielsen and Thing (2019) to discuss students’ experiences in physical education (PE) classes. Nielsen and Thing (2019) used the model to analyse students’ personal experiences in PE classes. By applying this concept, they were able to examine the ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ identities in relation to PE classroom cultures in order to understand young people’s interconnectedness within PE. They found that existing tensions and power dynamics were made apparent, demonstrating how individual relationships are both limiting and facilitating. Similarly, Maguire and Tuck (1998) believe that sport is a significant arena for the construction, maintenance and challenging of identities as well as a method of bringing individuals and local communities throughout the world together. When they looked at nationality in sport, they utilised the personal pronoun model to talk about how people saw themselves in different groups. When discussing national identity, they describe how rugby union offers one of the key sources of ‘I/we’ identity, where citizens regard rugby as more than simply a game. As a result of the game, individuals’ we-identities might get stronger. In addition, Tuck (2003) used the concept in another study of national identity in sport, stating that people may become the embodiment of the nation by using pronouns in athletic settings, enhancing our understanding of what is known as ‘national identity politics’. When established groups are faced by intruders, he claims that ‘we-identity’ and national habitus become stronger, cleaner and tighter.

‘Personal Pronouns’: Tottenham Hotspur’s ‘We-Identity’

A 'we-identity' has been argued to strengthen group dynamics (Elias & Scotson, 1965). This notion can be applied to the use of the term 'Yid' by Spurs fans, with the idea that the club has a strong sense of group identity by utilising the term Yid in order to show strong group cohesion and solidarity with their fellow Jewish supporters. Poulton and Durell's (2016) study looked at comments made by Spurs fans on the use of the name Yid on online fan forums. Questions such as 'how long have "we" used the term Yiddo as reference to Spurs fans?' and 'should and will "we" eventually be banned from chanting it?' were raised. Individuals used the phrase 'we' to explicitly emphasise that the term gives the club with a significant degree of team unity, as seen by some of the forum discussions and this conversation surrounding the term. Similarly, the pronoun 'we' continues to be used to express a strong feeling of belongingness in songs and chants related to the use of the name Yid, sung by Spurs supporters: 'We're Tottenham Hotspur! We'll sing what we want!', followed by their chant of 'Yid Army!' (Poulton & Durell, 2016, p. 16).

As discussed previously, Elias (1991) found that individuals may prioritise their 'we-identity' over their 'I-identity' as a collective identity and group status can be deemed superior. When exploring football fandom and religion, it is recognised how the collective pride in a sports team is deep-rooted. In addition to this, it can also be established that those who belong to a religious group also value their collective identity. It is also known that an individual's 'we-identity' can overshadow their individual identity. Elias (1991) noted that religious groupings tend to tilt more towards their 'we-identity'; likewise, in the case of football fandom, a person's fan identity can overshadow their individual image. One of the numerous parallels between sport and religion is the notion of having a strong 'we-image' as a fan or religious individual. Percy and Taylor

(1997) emphasise the similarities between sport and religion, stating that for some individuals and groups, football functions as a faith and, in some ways, is a metaphor for religion:

Football is like a religion to its devotees. It binds and divides, shapes, and delimits, providing a critical identity for a given group and individuals. The scarf, the ground, the songs and the ritual activity have a sacred quality about them; football is at least like a secular religion here.

(p. 39)

Likewise, Wann, Melznick, Russell and Pease (2001, p. 198) said that ‘similarities between sport fandom and organized religion are striking’. Individuals can be recognised by traits connected with their social grouping. ‘We’ and ‘I’ images are concepts that can shape an individual’s and/or collective identity. Individuals may differentiate across groups using these ‘we-images’ (Rosenthal, 2016) and can be developed within these groups (Roseneil & Seymour, 1999). Despite being two different concepts, on closer examination sport and religion have similar ‘we-images’, making it possible to find similarities between the two. Sporting supporters wear merchandise with their favourite team’s crest on it, and they are instantly connected with the club. Similarly, members of religious organisations wear garments, such as hijabs for Muslims and kippahs for Jews, and are therefore linked with their chosen faith. It is also acknowledged that fans and people of faith are dedicated to attending frequent gatherings in religious structures or sports stadiums, which for some are both seen as opulent temples (Wann et al., 2001). Words such as ‘worship’, ‘dedication’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘commitment’ and ‘suffering’ are used similarly by religious followers and sports fans (Wann et al., 2001). These ‘we-images’ reinforce the idea that although sport and religion are categorised as two separate entities, there are many structural similarities which make their resemblance difficult to ignore (Barber, 2009).

Conclusion

As highlighted within this chapter, there is relatively little study or writing in the field of sport that applies these two Eliasian notions of the ‘established-outsiders’ and ‘personal pronoun’ models to the relationship and interconnectedness of sport and religion. Sport fandom, like religion, is time-consuming, life-changing and revitalising and offers a social network for many (Murphy, Sheard & Waddington, 2000). Football fandom has been defined by Davis (2015, p. 423) as a form of leisure, whereby ‘a person can pursue activities to gain feelings of joyfulness and belonging’. The football club that the fan belongs to becomes a fundamental part of the supporter’s individual and social identity (Kossakowski, 2015; Maussier, 2017). Sport fandom provides a setting for developing identities; some identities are shared with others and some highlight differences and diversity (Malcolm & Mansfield, 2013). These concepts were thus deployed to investigate sport and religious identity in the case of Spurs and their Jewish associations to further examine this from an Eliasian theoretical stance. This chapter was motivated by a study on antisemitism in football, which is an area of research that demands further attention. However, this provoked debate, particularly as to whether Tottenham Hotspur is a Jewish club and, if so, what qualifies a club as having a religious identity.

According to Elias (1978), groups and people are linked by ‘chains of interdependence’, in which they exert influence on one another in both evident and indirect ways. The chain can be extended, and ties can be strained, tying groups and individuals together in unexpected ways, with unpredictable and undesirable effects. Figurations can have significant influence and impact upon others, including those not directly connected to them. This has been recognised through sport as many football fans transfer both their political and religious identities onto their teams, which has caused and still does cause issues at matches (Cronin, 2000). By exploring Tottenham

Hotspur and their connection with Judaism, it can be recognised that in some ways directly but mainly indirectly, fans have become associated with the Jewish religion. Research found that fans identified with the Jewish religion not as a result of their religious upbringing but through supporting Spurs. Through football, Spurs fans have begun to share their identities with the club's perceived identity, alongside the religious identities of their fellow supporters. This reinforces Elias's beliefs that individuals are linked together by these 'chains of interdependence' or 'figurations', thus underlining the utility of this theoretical approach.

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