

Just a wind up?

Ethnicity, religion and prejudice in Scottish football-related comedy

Introduction

Sport and the media are popular terrain for critical social scientists to explore ideas, meanings and collective identities associated with different social, cultural and political communities called nations. Scotland is an interesting case in this regard. Scotland is one small nation within a larger nation-state (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; hereafter the UK) where sport and media institutions are symbols of a nation that is distinct from the UK state and from each of the other constituent nations of the state (Bairner, 1994; Blain and Boyle, 1994; Haynes and Boyle, 2008; Higgins, 2004; Law, 2001; Meech and Kilborn, 1992). Sport and the media in Scotland are also cultural sites where the social, cultural and political components of different national and ethno-religious identities are expressed. Critical academic commentaries about sport in Scotland have sought to unravel the different discourses of nationhood and shared identity, belonging and otherness embedded within, but not restricted to media coverage of sport in modern Scotland (e.g. Bairner, 1994; Dimeo and Finn, 1998; Jarvie and Walker, 1994; Kowalski, 2004; Reid, 2010)

Critical reflections on sport and identity in Scotland have examined a number of themes. It is recognized that sport can be perceived as a unifying focus for national identity, but research has exposed the social, cultural and political cleavages that are manifest through the nation's sports culture. Of note for this paper are the ways that sport is constitutive of the idea of Scotland (e.g. Bairner, 1994) and representations of Irishness in Scotland that coalesce around professional football notably at club level (Bradley, 2004, 2006b, 2009, 2011; Finn 1994; Kelly, 2011; Reid, 2008; 2013).

Drawing on social, historical and political disciplines, these studies have revealed the unpalatable narratives of discrimination and racism that are implicit in discourses that mark

belonging and otherness in national and ethnic communities. Analysts have therefore challenged Scotland's national myth that *our* nation is inherently egalitarian, socially inclusive and more tolerant of difference than other nations (Finn, 2000; Gallagher, 2000; McCrone, 2001). Social scientists interested in sport have raised questions about the possible culpability of some media output about football in legitimizing ideas, knowledge, values, myths, stereotypes and prejudices that sustain ethno-religious discrimination and intolerance in Scotland (Bradley, 2009; Kelly, 2011; Reid 2008; 2013). Of note for this paper is how humour is used either to deny intolerance in Scottish football culture and wider society, or as a mechanism to justify utterances that are discriminatory or rooted in prejudice.

In comparison to other forms of media, radio sport output has been neglected in academic analysis of the reproduction of social identities and power relationships (Owens, 2006). Certainly previous studies about media sport in Scotland have tended to concentrate on newspaper sources, but the neglect of radio in academic scholarship 'seems to lie some distance behind [the] actual social importance' of this media form (O'Donnell, 2003: 211). In Scotland a substantial amount of radio airtime is given to football-related output on radio including match commentaries, phone-in programmes and nightly studio-based conversation programmes, and comic review shows. However, little attention has been paid to this resource in previous studies of the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies concerning national and ethno-religious identities through media sport. Moreover, although most football output on radio in Scotland is serious '[w]it and humour provide key elements of radio output [of football] in Scotland outside live commentaries and match reporting' (Haynes and Boyle, 2008: 262). This is significant given the concerns raised previously about how humour is one mechanism used to deny, legitimise or sustain intolerance in Scottish football culture and wider society. This paper seeks to help redress the gap in the Scottish context by providing a

critical perspective on selected content from one popular BBC Scotland radio comedy programme, *Watson's Wind Up*.

The paper probes how hegemonic ideologies associated with football, nationhood, ethnicity and religion are reproduced and sustained in certain radio sketches formulated in *Watson's Wind Up*. As a weekly comedy sketch show, *Watson's Wind Up* claimed to provide a satirical perspective on social, cultural and political life in Scotland. Sport was not the sole focus of the show, but it was a prominent and regular feature. In *Watson's Wind Up* sport - or more precisely association football (hereafter football) - was contextualised within the social, cultural and political life of Scotland. The central thread of the paper is that football-related comedy and humour cannot be dismissed as simply frivolous or funny – that is, as just a wind up or joke. On the contrary; the paper attempts show that non-serious football content in the media ‘can ... be seen to have dialectical or “porous” relationships with wider political debates on Scottish sport and culture’ (Haynes and Boyle 2008: 262).

This case study of one Scottish comedy programme is located within the corpus of international research that has examined the complex interactions between humour in popular culture practices and the reproduction of hegemonic power relations. International scholarship has explored how humour in popular culture can be a mechanism to deny or to legitimize discrimination and intolerance of social Others. Consideration has been given in particular to the ways that humour is used to sustain hegemonic social power relations concerning gender (Benwell, 2004; Burke, 2002; Hurley, Dickie, Hardman, Lardelli and Bruce, 2006); ethnicity and race (Atluri, 2009; Billig, 2001; 2005b; Davies, 1982, 1987); and national identity (Beeden and de Bruin, 2010; Jontes, 2010). These studies show the ideological systems that sustain discrimination and intolerance are not quarantined to media sport. On the contrary, they are embedded within the particular society whose popular culture

(including sport) is being investigated, experienced through social and cultural institutions as everyday practices and understood as common-sense (therefore 'natural') ideas.

The paper begins with some theoretical reflections on the sociology of humour and comedy, and an overview of previous critical academic commentaries of sports-focused comedy and light entertainment programmes. The article then turns to the case study of *Watson's Wind Up*, initially providing an overview of the programme structure, linguistic style and content. It then concentrates on a **deeper** analysis of selected sketches to reveal how dominant discourses **around football** concerning **Irishness**, ethnicity and religion **draw on** prejudices and stereotypes that suffuse other areas of the social and political life of Scotland. **The intention of the paper is not to make recommendations on how, or if, mediated sports-related comedy might address or avoid the reproduction of such discourses. Rather it offers a critical analysis of selected comedy content to illustrate how the ambiguity of comedy may simultaneously sustain and subvert certain prejudices towards Irishness and Catholicism that circulate in Scottish football culture and wider society. The paper purposely does not provide a substantive comparative analysis with sports-related comedy output in other ethno-national settings, since comedy is often rooted in and draws upon codes, customs, traditions, ideas and knowledge of a specific society, community or culture. This noted, the paper has significance for other countries where similar patterns of different ethno-national prejudices may be manifest in comedy discourses. This analysis of selected *Watson Wind Up* content concentrates on aspects of a particularly Scottish discourse, but it resonates with studies of how humour may simultaneously sustain and subvert other prejudices (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia) in a variety of social settings.**

Irishness, religion and football: Scotland's national demon

In contemporary Scotland football is often highlighted as a cultural space where bigotry is most prominent. Specifically it is argued that bigotry is embodied by and 'contained' within the rivalry of Scotland's two biggest clubs, Glasgow Rangers FC and Celtic FC. Some commentators perceive the Protestant and British traditions of Rangers and the Irish and Catholic origins of Celtic by some to be the cause, rather than one manifestation of a deeper problem. The ethnic and religious associations of these clubs must be understood in relation to the broader social, cultural, political and historical circumstances of Scottish society. In particular the collective experience of discrimination by Irish immigrants, many of them Catholics, and their descendants, since the mid-nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century (Devine, 2000; Bradley, 2006a; 2006b; 2009; Finn, 1994).

The issue of ethno-religious bigotry directed towards the Irish in Scotland has only recently been partly acknowledged. Some scholars acknowledge changes in Scottish society since the 1960s mean overt and endemic forms discrimination against Irish Catholics has diminished (Devine, 2000: 263). Others go further suggesting such discrimination 'has been much exaggerated' (Bruce Glendinning, Paterson and Rosie (2004: 4) and has now significantly diminished. Critics of this approach argue ethno-religious bigotry persists in modern as racism does in other countries, in banal, recycled and sophisticated forms as well as in those that are explicit and malign. It is encountered in subtle practices such as workplace banter or jokes that play on stereotypes that equate Irishness with lack of intelligence. It also circulates in demeaning and derogatory commentaries around personal names suggestive of Irish ethnicity, and commentaries that ridicule religious customs and practices associated

with the Catholic church, and deny the authenticity the Irish ethnicity and culture in Scotland.

Ethno-religious bigotry experienced by the Irish in Scotland is a particular form of racism that is Scotland's national demon (Reid, 2008; 2013). It is reproduced in mainstream media narratives concerning football, and as this paper seeks to demonstrate in football-related comedy satire. Before examining examples of such humour from the radio comedy *Watson's Wind Up*, it is important to consider the conundrum of satire that simultaneously sustains and subverts expressions of intolerance and prejudice.

Humour and comedy: some sociological considerations

Social scientists acknowledge that as a form of social interaction humour pervades public culture, and 'infiltrates every area of social life and interaction' (Pickering and Lockyer, 2005: 3). Humour is different from serious discourse but it may be used for serious purposes, draw on humourless ideas and have damaging repercussions (Fine, 1983; Pickering and Lockyer, 2005; Mulkay, 1988; Nash, 1985). The separation of humorous from serious discourse is characterised by certain linguistic conventions that involve a form of incongruity (Snyder, 1990); in broad terms 'humour depends on the active creation and display of 'interpretative multiplicity' constructed through 'ambiguity, inconsistency, contradiction and interpretative diversity' (Mulkay, 1988: 3-4). In contrast serious discourse 'avoids contradictory ways of speaking' that might cause disjunctures in the social world (Mulkay, 1988: 23).¹ Two important points arise from the principles that separate humorous and serious discourse. First, humour is dependent on the deliberate use of ambiguity and allusive language in order to construct multiple interpretative possibilities; and second, the incongruity between humorous and serious discourses permits humour to be used to give

‘voice and status’ (Benwell, 2004: 11) to ideas and utterances that are otherwise taboo (Mulkay, 1988; Billig, 2001).

For some commentators humour in all its forms is harmless merriment while others assert it is not simply ‘an amiable decoration on life’ (Nash, 1985: 3). Michael Billig (2005a) in particular has been critical of the ideological positivism that runs through popular accounts, and some academic explanations, of humour; that is, the tendency to understand all humour as a positive, playful and harmless social phenomenon. As Billig and others contend some types of humour such as ridicule, sarcasm and mockery are aggressive, negative and may have detrimental consequences (Jontes, 2010; King, 2006; McCallum, 1998). Significantly:

If a comic assault on someone’s sense of themselves as individual subjects, or on the sense of social and cultural identity of a particular social group or category, proves to have seriously damaging results and repercussions, we should take this seriously (Pickering and Lockyer, 2005: 4).

Of interest here is how negative humour embedded in popular entertainment programmes on radio and television, including sports related programmes, reinforce and sustain ideas that demean groups who are in some way characterised as social others in a particular national community or culture.

Comedy and media sport output

Humour can be a welcome part of the media’s sport content. Indeed some of the most effective media sport professionals are those who can inform and entertain their audience using a variety of skills and techniques, including humour when appropriate. For example, banter, or the light-hearted interaction between presenters, creates the simulated intimacy and male solidarity (Fairclough, 1995; Johnson and Finlay, 1997; Whannel, 2002) that is a feature

of serious sports coverage. In the twenty-first century sport is a central component of the wider entertainment industry (Whannel, 2002). The sports-focused comedy that is part of radio and television light entertainment is perhaps a different type of comedy from the backdrop of jocular interaction that punctuates conventional media coverage of sport, phone-in shows and studio-based conversation programmes. Joking and banter may lighten the serious tenor associated with the competitive rationality of sport, but sports-focused comedy programmes that have been a feature of postmodern cultural pastiche offer a different humorous discourse. Many of these comedy programmes tap in to ‘the conventions and mannerisms of the [sports] media’ developing comedy that is built around parody, caricature and mockery of sports media presenters, sports and sports celebrities (Whannel, 2002: 190-91).

This parodic comedy may have the potential to subvert the self-referential image culture conferred on elite sport and the media industry that sustains it. These may serve the surface interpretative meaning derived from such sports-related comedy output but it is not the only meaning. Selected studies have shown a serious side underpins sport comedy entertainment programmes; specifically, such programmes often celebrate attitudes and behaviours that reproduce and sustain ideologies and hegemonic power relations embedded in the social, political and cultural life of a nation. It is therefore important for analysts to take ‘a critical perspective on popular sporting programmes’ where humour and comedy is present (Hurley et al, 2006). From this perspective, analysts have considered sports-related media output where comedy and humour are directed against ethnic and national groups who are characterised as outsiders in a named national community, or reproduces subordinate social others (e.g. women, or men who display non-hegemonic masculinity) within sports culture.

It is unusual to encounter explicit offensive utterances in mainstream popular entertainment and media coverage of sport. Nevertheless both forms of popular culture

(comedy and media sport) are infused with allusive language that can be implicitly sexist, homophobic or racist; utterances may also insinuate intolerance of another nation or ethnic community, reinforcing ideas of us/them, or insiders/outsideers, characteristic of media narratives about sport and nationhood. The use of ambiguity in comedy is crucial in creating the potential multiple interpretative meanings through which humour operates, but most of the time the use of such language in media sport and comedy is unquestioned. Yet when attention is drawn to inappropriate boundaries being crossed, the response of those whose language challenged is often “it’s just a joke”. This defence of humour, when it is challenged, is a common technique used to deny or conceal the dominant hegemony that legitimises, sustains and reproduces social power relations between intolerance of social Others.

Critical studies that probe media representations of ethnicity, religion and identity in Scotland have overlooked this element of sport output; radio sport output has also received limited attention in substantive case studies. The paper now turns its attention to an analysis of one such format - the Radio Scotland comedy show *Watson’s Wind Up*.

Watson’s Wind Up: an overview of structure, content and linguistic style

The comedy show *Watson’s Wind Up* (hereafter *Wind Up* for brevity) was broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland over a period of ten years between 2000 and 2010.² The main performer, and one of the show’s key writers Jonathan Watson (hence *Watson’s Wind Up*) is also familiar to television audiences in Scotland as the leading impressionist in *Only An Excuse?*, a programme broadcast annually on December 31 (Hogmanay) which takes an irreverent look at Scottish football. In contrast to the television series, which concentrated almost entirely on football, on radio *Wind Up* lampooned news and events across a broader spectrum of Scottish politics, social affairs and broadcast media. **This section provides an overview of the structure of the radio sketch show, the content and the distinctive linguistic style utilised. The intention is to give readers a general flavour of *Wind Up* that characterise**

the Scottish of the programme and the humour. The next section of the paper, ‘Football, Irish ethnicity and religion’ considers in more depth specific sketches that are illustrative of how *Watson’s Wind Up* reproduced particular ideas, myths and stereotypes that are consistent with particular forms of ethno-religious intolerance that coalesce round football, Irishness and Catholicism in Scotland.

Built around a combination of sketches, impressions, and mock conversation or interview pieces as a comedy form *Wind Up* claimed to ‘put a satirical slant on the stories and people making the news’ (www.comedyunit.co.uk/content/watson's-wind-up). It is indicative of *Wind Up*, a programme that took an alternative look at the news in Scotland that most of the sketches and impersonations reflected news and events over the preceding seven day period. The comedy was therefore topical drawing on events circulating through public culture. *Wind Up* lampooned certain features of mainstream news and sports coverage that some analysts have identified as limitations of the Scotland’s “national” media. In broad terms, these limitations concern the Glasgow-Edinburgh centric focus of the news media in Scotland and the provincialized discourses associated with political and cultural affairs in other parts of the nation. In terms of sport, (men’s) football dominates in newspapers, on television and radio especially Scotland’s two pre-eminent clubs - Celtic FC and Rangers FC (collectively “the Old Firm”); other clubs are integrated as part of the provincial discourse, while sports other than football (including all women’s sport) are marginal and treated with indifference.

As with all radio programmes, the *Wind Up* broadcasts were framed by certain announcements and familiar music that functioned as ‘boundary rituals’ for the beginning and end of programmes (Crissell, 1984: 6). Each week a Radio Scotland continuity announcer introduced the programme with the same announcement: ‘And now an alternative look back at the week’s news in *Watson’s Wind Up*’ (BBC Radio Scotland, February 8 2008). Since the

Wind Up broadcasts followed the scheduled hourly news, sport and weather bulletin this formal announcement functioned as a signpost, or disclaimer, signalling that what followed was not a continuation of the news programme.

It may be difficult to pinpoint precisely what signifies comedy as Scottish. Comedy actor and writer Greg Hemphill suggested ‘people like their comedy to reflect their own lives’ since scenarios that are locally understood ‘adds to the originality of our humour’ (*Watching Ourselves: 60 Years of TV in Scotland: Having a Laugh*. BBC Scotland; broadcast January 4 2012). This idea that some comedy is framed around scenarios familiar to the population of a national community is not unique to Scotland. Beeden and de Bruin (2010: 6) noted that ‘humor [is] a locally based phenomenon’, continuing ‘one must be familiar with the “cultural codes” of a society to understand the comedy and jokes of that nation’ (2010: 9). The content of the weekly *Wind Up* programmes drew on topical news and events associated with public figures in Scotland including national and local politicians, media personnel and football in Scotland, yet the distinctive vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation of Scots, contributed to the Scottishness of the comedy. **The vernacular** pronunciation and vocabulary (e.g. waants for want; Ah for I; hoors for hours; tae for to) is therefore a crucial feature of the sketches presented.

Two sketches provided a consistent framework for mocking the coverage of sport by the Scottish media: ‘Scotland Today’ and ‘Sportscene’. ‘Scotland Today’ ridiculed Scottish Television’s (STV) main evening news programme particularly the interaction between the main presenter John MacKay and sports correspondents, usually Raman Bhardwaj. The second regular sketch ‘Sportscene’, parodied BBC Scotland’s coverage of football on radio and television with caricatures of presenters and pundits and imaginary interviews with prominent players and managers of football clubs. As the main opening and closing sketch of *Wind Up*, ‘Scotland Today’ and ‘Sportscene’ were regular internal ritual signposts for each

show. Football was prominent in these sketches as it is in the serious coverage of sport in the Scottish broadcast media and press.

Wind Up mocked the BBC Scotland's football coverage in a series of sketches based on the station's *Sportscene and Sportsound* programmes. The regular *Wind Up* sketch was 'Sportscene'; the parody of Chick Young, a football journalist with the *Scottish Daily Express* newspaper and contributor to BBC Scotland's football programmes, was one of the core characters. As the following example illustrates the parody of Young exaggerated a popular perception about the pundit's allegiance to Glasgow Rangers FC. The sketch began with BBC Scotland sports presenter Rhona McLeod reflecting on 'The magic of the [Scottish] Cup'; she was interrupted by Young, who tells her:

Rhona forget the Scottish Cup in all its pishy wee diddyness. We all know there was only one match worth wetting ourselves over this week and it involved Rangers in all their glorious UEFA Cup glory. What a night for the **Sons of Will-Yeah-em** [William]. Of course in Europe you need a helping hand, well last night they got two both of which belonged to Bremen goalie Tim Wiese, which surprised me because let's face it it's not often a Tim presents Rangers with such gifts. (March 7 2008)

The exaggeration of some personal trait or interest is typical of parody. Throughout *Wind Up* Young was portrayed venerating Glasgow Rangers FC, a club with strong Scottish-British national and Protestant identities, and an additional significant association with expressions of anti-Catholicism in popular public culture (Murray, 1984; Walker, 1990). In the sketch above, and in others this representation of Chick Young provided the frame where broader social, religious and political identities associated with, but not limited to, football in Scotland were evident. Through Young's,

exaltation of Rangers as ‘the Sons of William’ the comedy utilised local codes to infer the Protestant, Unionist and loyalist cultural traditions celebrated by a section of the club’s support. The phrase is used by sections of the club’s support to self-identify these traditions, and alludes to King William of Orange the Protestant Dutch-speaking prince, who replaced the Catholic King James II on the British throne in 1688, that secured the Protestant succession enshired in legislation to this day. Similarly ‘Elizabeth’s eleven’ refers to the incumbent monarch - Queen Elizabeth II - and implies Rangers’ as a team (eleven players) remains loyal to the crown. Another reading might be that the sketch suggests - tongue in cheek - the Queen herself supports the club.

The phrase “a Tim” also carries ethno-religious meaning in the sketch. It is of course a common male name, the diminutive of Timothy, as evident in the literal reference to the goalkeeper of Rangers’ German opponents in the match. However, in Scotland, particularly when used in football culture, the phrase “a Tim” is a derogatory term or religious slur for Irish and Catholic a local code for Celtic supporters. In the actual match referred to in the sketch errors by the German side’s goalkeeper’s may have ensured Rangers’ victory. The allusion to the derogatory local meaning incorporates a clever sense of irony capturing Young’s surprise that “a Tim” would help the club that symbolises what “Tims” (by implication Celtic) are not.

The real Chick Young may or may not share the allegiances of some sections of Rangers’ support. The constructed stereotype in *Wind Up* however celebrated what in real life others do celebrate about Rangers and what they represent. In contrast it also depicts what those whose community identity is the opposite, and who receive the sketches as a triumphalist denigration of their religion and community. When juxtaposed in sketches to the use of ‘them’, ‘tattie-munchers’ or ‘Tim’ to refer to city rivals Celtic FC with its roots in

Glasgow's Irish Catholic immigrant population, the comedy brings into sharper focus the contentious social, religious and ethnic alignments in Scottish society.

As with all forms of satire, there are multiple readings of the sketches. Different listeners (and readers) construct alternative interpretative meanings from the sketches drawing for example on their own social, cultural, political, national persuasions and loyalties. More simply stated, what is transmitted by media, is not uniformly received by the audience. Philo (2008) cautions about the freedom of audiences to take what they please from texts, arguing that media power has been overlooked in some scholarship around this notion of active audiences. This noted, different communities are likely to bring particular schemata to the reception of comedy. In the case of the football-related comedy of *Wind Up* considered here, the different, indeed opposing, ethnic, religious and national identities of the listeners may define the meaning of the comedy in ways that overrides the programme's intentions, or even its self-definition as satirical.

The inherent ambiguity of comedy - especially in satirical and ironic forms - means there are always different ways of reading (or even misreading) the sketches. Two points underpin this: (i) satire and irony operate at two levels simultaneously, the literal and non-literal; and (ii) the unknowability of the audience, who may choose to 'listen' (in the case of *Wind Up*) with or without irony. For all of the sketches presented, there is a satirical - or at least humorous - interpretation. The intention in the analysis presented is not to censure the use of the vocabulary of bigotry and prejudice in sketches, since its use is necessary in order for the satire to work. Rather the analysis probes beyond the idea that these sketches are just funny, in order to shed more light on the serious side of comedy. The interpretations offered here are not the only possible accounts of these sketches selected. The readings presented illustrate how the sketches

strategically capitalise on the ambiguity of comically coded bigotry concerning Celtic FC, Irishness and religion.

Football, Irish ethnicity and religion - comically coded bigotry?

One dominant theme to consider in a critical analysis of the *Wind Up* sketches is the way they draw upon the social cleavages around religion and Irish ethnicity in Scotland. Football was prominent in the radio sketches that specifically sent up Scottish media coverage of sport, but as this strand of analysis will show allusions to football permeated certain sketches not explicitly concerned with the sport. This is not unusual; as Bradley (2011: 819) noted ‘football [is] ... frequently mentioned in ... public debate’ concerned with ‘ethnic, national and religious identities in Scotland’. In drawing on the cleavages around these elements of social identity the catalogue of *Wind Up* sketches can normalise and sustain, even legitimize, a particular system of ideas, values, beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes about Catholics of Irish descent, the most prominent ethno-national minority group frequently marked as outsiders or others in Scotland (Bradley, 2006b; Kelly, 2011).

Previous research has demonstrated that intolerance and prejudice against this community infuses Scottish social life often in subtle ways but is most apparent when it coalesces around Celtic Football Club, and various media narratives that are applied with respect to the club’s historical and contemporary origins and identity with Ireland and the Catholic religion. This feature of *Wind Up* simultaneously reveals and sustains the dialectical relationships between football and wider issues in Scottish society.

In one example, a sketch that mocked anti-Catholic sentiments simultaneously legitimises humour as a mechanism to voice otherwise offensive ideas. In this instance the *Wind Up* sketch was not about football but alluded to football-related knowledge to ridicule presence of Catholicism in Scottish society. The sketch mimics BBC Scotland football pundit Chick Young for his publically expressed objections to a proposed outdoor adventure

development within Pollok Country Park on the south side of Glasgow (Young, 2008: 14; Devine, 2008: 15; Morgan, 2008). The sketch, presented as a general news item, separate from the regular ‘Sportscene’ item, began with an unidentified female voice using Standard Scottish English associated with news programme presenters:

It was revealed this week that Glasgow City Council are [*sic.*] considering an application to develop a theme park area within Pollok Park, an announcement that had one local in particular absolutely furious.

A male voice interjected, identifiable to those familiar with Scottish football media culture, and Watson’s mimicry, as Chick Young:

Yes this is me eco-Chico Young saying this has my blood boiling. These plans for Pollock Park are an affront to decency, democracy, trees and bushes. This will turn this most beautiful park into an area of disrepute. I guarantee this scheme will attract an undesirable element to the area.

Female voice: But why do you think the Go-Ape project would do that?

Young: The, the Go Ape project? Och Ah thought it wis the Go Pape project.

Sorry, let them do whit they want. (January 18 2008)

The term “Pape”, the diminutive of Papist, is a derogatory and offensive term for “Roman Catholic” that has currency in Scotland in communities where anti-Catholic prejudice prevails, including on certain websites and discussion forums used by supporters of Rangers Football Club. In the sketch (but not in reality) Young’s objection to the development is founded on a deliberate malapropism (Go Pape, rather than Go Ape); when this is pointed out by the female news presenter Young’s switch to the earthier pronunciation of Glaswegian Scots often associated with football (e.g. Och, Ah, wis, whit) reinforces this error. The use of the term “Pape” by *Wind Up*’s caricature of football media pundit Chick

Young is however crucial in unravelling the opaque connection to what many consider a serious issue in Scottish society: the persistence of anti-Catholic sentiments that coalesce around football, but are not restricted to football culture.

As noted previously there is a popular belief in Scottish football culture that Young supports Rangers. This may, or may not be accurate, and in most national communities, arguably it is irrelevant which club (if any) a football journalist supports. However, the popular belief – fact or fiction - that Young supports a club with strong Scottish-British national and Protestant identities, and an additional significant association with expressions of anti-Catholicism in popular public culture (Murray, 1984; Walker, 1990) becomes important for understanding different interpretative meanings of the sketch. In *Wind Up* sketches, none of this is explicit. Like most forms of parody, the sketch works as humour because of the allusive references to religion combined with inside knowledge about Young's alleged football loyalties and "known" wider implications of this. The sketch may (or may not) be humorous in terms of its possible simultaneous readings, framed (to greater or lesser degrees) by the ethnic, national and religious identity and football allegiances of different audience groups. For some listeners the humour may lie in Young's apparent naivety about the actual name and purpose of the 'Go Ape' development. Amongst those who harbour anti-Irish or anti-Catholic sentiments the humour may be located in the utterance in "mainstream" public culture ideas that are "usually" taboo. Simultaneously, others may find humorous the way the sketch (gently) pokes fun at the representation of Young's benign bigotry. The explicit use of the derogatory term "Pape" in mainstream football media would be unacceptable to many people, but the comedic environment of *Watson's Wind Up* permits its use, to offenders and offended alike. The ambiguity of the comedic situation and its humour entices the programme's multiple audiences to *their* preferred [humorous] interpretation.

There is however, another reading of such a sketch, that is legitimate but not amusing. For those who experience ethno-religious intolerance because they are Irish and/or Catholic - football supporters or not - different possible interpretative meanings infuse the sketch. Those who recognise in the sketch utterances and sentiments that are consistent with what they encounter or recognise in their daily lives (e.g. work-place banter, the denial of their community's experience, or ritualised stereotyping in popular media) this "comedy" has serious connotations. The comedy framework has the capacity to render "acceptable" intolerant views held by some in Scotland that Roman Catholicism is (in the words of the sketch) 'an affront to decency [and] democracy' and Roman Catholics are 'an undesirable element' in Scotland.

The utility of football to allude to wider meanings and implications in Scotland was evident throughout the *Wind Up* series. In other sketches, the comedy trivialised recognised expressions of prejudice around football towards Scotland's Catholics of Irish descent, including its manifestation in the context of loyalist and unionist allegiances. This is illustrated in another sketch where roughly spoken Glaswegian men – "Billy and Tam" – plan a route using new satellite navigation technology. The purpose of their route planning becomes clear at the end of the sketch:

1st male: Right noo Tam are you sure you've got our route aw marked oot?

The last time we done [*sic.*] this we got completely lost.

2nd male: Stop worryin' Billy Ah got masel [myself] wan ae these wee sat nav gadgets, it's pure magic by the way. All Ah huv tae dae is type in oor destination like this [beeping noise] and then it'll tell us the best route. Listen tae this.

Robotic sounding female: Advance five-hundred metres along Main Street and stop at Saint Mark's chapel, then turn left advance for seven hundred metres

until you arrive at Our Lady of the Rosary. Advance for one hundred metres and you will have reached the Gorbals Green Brigade Celtic Supporters Club.

1st male: Tam that sat nav thing huz [has] worked oot a route that takes us past two chapels and a Celtic supporters club. That's great work brother. Now let's get this Brigton [Bridgeton] Apprentice Boys' Junior Orange walk on it's way. (May 26 2007)

The sketch is not explicitly about football but the identification of a Celtic supporters club as 'the destination' provides a cultural marker that is important to the interpretative meaning of the sketch. En route to this destination "Billy and Tam" will pass two Catholic churches (chapels) to the Gorbals, an area of Glasgow that was home to a high concentration of the city's immigrant Catholic population, predominantly from Ireland. As the sketch unfolds it initially appears that the route planners intend to join fellow Celtic supporters but their "real" purpose is revealed at the end by two related cultural codes. The first is when "Billy" commends "Tam" as a "brother" – a term used amongst the fraternity of the Protestant organisations the Orange Order and the one mentioned here, the Apprentice Boys. Both organisations are associated with the celebration and promotion of Protestantism, and allegiance to unionism and loyalism to the Protestant ascendancy of the British Crown and its rejection of Catholicism.

The Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys celebrate their culture of Protestant loyalism and unionism annually with public marches (or walks) in many town and cities in Scotland (and the north of Ireland) in July and August. Bridgeton (Brigton) in Glasgow's east end is an 'area of strong Rangers and Orange order loyalties' (Walker, 1990: 145), therefore the social and political nemesis to Irish ethnic and Catholic religious roots of Celtic FC. For some these annual marches, and the ideology underpinning their cultural tradition, are a celebration of anti-Catholicism. Understanding these local social codes reveals the

“real” purpose for “Billy and Tam’s” route. Rather than joining other Celtic supporters, their route appears an ideal one to celebrate the triumph of the Protestant and loyalist cause over the defeated and “alien” catholic faith.

In the context of comedy, the sketch is humorous because it pokes fun at what many perceive as an outdated brand of Protestant loyalism and anti-Catholic sentiments that coalesce around the Apprentice boys, the Orange Order and some sections of Rangers’ support. However, as outlined previously comedy works around controversial or taboo subjects because of some ambiguity. In this instance the sketch overlooks the serious matter, and possible consequences, of such marches that for a substantial section of the community experience as intimidating and threatening, as well as demeaning their religious faith.

The final sketch considered exemplifies how football is utilised to reference these wider social, cultural and religious prejudices. The allusion to Celtic FC is central to the meanings embedded in a sketch that has no obvious connection to football. The sketch evolved round *Celtic Connections* festival held in Glasgow annually from mid-January until early February.³ *Celtic Connections* is ‘Glasgow’s annual folk, roots and world music festival’ that ‘celebrates Celtic music and its connections to cultures across the globe’ (www.celticconnections.com) but performers from Scotland and Ireland feature prominently. Broadcast on February 1 2008 the sketch is a mock interview with Councillor Steven Purcell leader of Glasgow City Council, one of the agencies that co-funds the festival. The interviewer “Pauline McShona” mimics BBC Scotland arts correspondent Pauline McLean.

McShona: Well as Glasgow City Council are the main sponsor of Celtic Connections I’m with the leader aff of the Glasgow City Council Cumbie Mr Steven Stevie-boy Purcell. Mr Purcell, hello.

Purcell: Hail, hail! Eh, first aff Shona just tae let you know doll eh yer no callin' the festival by its right name. It's not Celtic Connections, it's **Selic** Connections.

McShona: Mr Purcell are you sure?

Purcell: Hen do you think that we in the Glasgow City Council Cumbie wid haun over a couple a hunner-thousand brick for somethin' that hud nuthin' tae dae with **the B-hoys**.

McShona: So what bands have you seen at the festival?

Purcell: Well on Monday Ah went tae see eh Carfin and the Grottoettes eh they wur great an' they were supported by the Vatican Tribute Band – John Paul Benedict and Ringo.

McShona: And what songs did the Vatican Tribute band play?

Purcell: Well [hesitates] there was Lady Madonna obviously eh Papal-bull writer and eh Priest, Priest Me.

McShona: And who else have you seen?

Purcell: Well on Tuesday Ah went tae see The Wolftones, on Wednesday Ah went tae see The Wolftones and on Thursday The Wolftones came tae see me [laughter] to be awarded the Freedom of the City in recognition for aw the years of annoying Proddies wi' thur music.

McShona: Mr Purcell do you not think that this festival is perhaps only aimed at one particular religious group within the city?

Purcell: Naw, this is pure rubbish. It appeals to loadsa different religious groups Ah mean the Jesuits, the Little Sisters of the Poor, the nuns from Saint Vincent de Paul Ah mean they've all been gaun tae the concerts.

McShona: What about Glasgow's Muslims, Jews and Protestants?

Purcell: Whit? There are Muslims, Jews and Protestants in Glasgow naebody tells me nuthin'. If you'll excuse [me] tonight's the biggie concert, the wan that the hail [whole] of eh Selic Connections has been waiting for.

McShona [sounding puzzled]: Really, who's playing tonight then U2?

Purcell: Eh naw [voice excited] the Coatbridge 1916 Easter Uprising Commemorative Accordion Band they're even be'er [better].

In its totality, the sketch weaves together a combination of facts about Steven Purcell, his class, ethnicity and Catholic upbringing. These elements are entwined with a particular set of cultural codes – vocabulary, symbols and inferred meanings - that coalesce around Celtic FC, Irish ethnicity and Catholicism in Scotland. In some instances this is also misconceived as an ideological alignment to Irish Republican politics Scotland. Cumulatively these threads provide lines of enquiry that sustain a banal ethnic and religious bigotry in Scotland towards those who are, or are perceived to be Irish and Catholic.

The identification of Purcell as ‘the leader aff of Glasgow City Council Cumbie’ acknowledged his position as the leader of the council (2005-2010) but the terms “leader aff” and “Cumbie” are not simply local vernacular. The terminology resonates with the gang culture that was once part of Glasgow’s social history, characterised by the schism between the majority Protestant and minority Catholic communities (Jeffrey, 2002; Patrick, 1973). The Gorbals Cumbie gang took its name from Cumberland Street in the Gorbals (Patrick, 1973: 19), an area of the city where many Irish immigrants, significantly Irish Catholics, settled. The vocabulary reads as a deliberate allusion to a more recent prejudices – fact or fiction – that local (west of Scotland) and national Labour politics are dominated by individuals whose names suggest Irish ancestry and they are, or are perceived to be, Catholic (Devine, 2000; Maver, 1996). The description of Purcell as “leader aff” of the city council

Cumbie is a coded, reference to a wider notion that the council is some sort of insular fraternity of Irish-descended Catholics.

The crucial element that fixes Purcell's ethno-religious identity in the sketch is the location of Purcell in relation to Celtic FC, a social and cultural institution embedded in 'the history and evolution of the Irish Catholic community in Scotland' (Bradley, 2004: 24). It was a matter of record that Purcell supported the club, and this featured in *Wind Up's* caricature through his consistent use of the greeting 'Hail Hail'. The phrase resonates with the chorus of a song popular amongst supporters of Celtic, and is a popular greeting amongst the club's supporters.⁴ A more explicit linking of Purcell to Celtic lies in his correction of McShona's pronunciation of the name of the festival: 'It's not Celtic Connections, it's Selic Connections'. In addition to this deliberate correction, omitting the letter 't' (Selic) would be indicative of west of Scotland working classes, depicted as an "outsider" community in modern "media-articulate" Scotland. Finally the connection to the football club is firmly established with Purcell's reference to 'the B-boys' the official nickname for Celtic used by the club and its supporters. In everyday pronunciation it would be 'the boys', but the emphasis placed on the presence of the usually silent 'h' signified this as a derogatory cultural euphemism.

These cultural codes begin to mark Purcell's (perceived) Irish ethnicity through links to Celtic. The sketch mocks his ethnicity and by extension the Irish descended predominantly Catholic community in Scotland. This is reiterated by depicting Purcell's limited interest musical interests at the festival. On the one hand the sketch constructs a stereotype of the Irish folk band (the Wolfe Tones); the group plays 'songs of reflection, history and aspiration' but as one of its founder members observes these are alleged by some to be 'something else' more 'sinister and subversive' (Warfield, 2006: 180). This is inferred in the sketch with the fallacious idea that the Wolf Tones deliberately set out to 'annoy Proddies'

(Protestants). The sketch creates fake bands and songs that depend on humour that many may consider demeans the Catholic religion and organisations within the church. The reference to ‘Carfin and the Grottoettes’ has particular resonance. The former alludes to a Catholic shrine in Lanarkshire (Carfin Grotto) where in 2001 a memorial was established to commemorate the victims of Ireland’s Great Hunger (1846-52). As Bradley (2009: 20) and others attest ‘it was the Great Hunger that initiated the mass migration’ from Ireland with Scotland, ‘particularly the Glasgow and Lanarkshire areas amongst the major recipients of Irish immigrants’.

The main focus here was inspecting how the comedy in certain *Wind Up sketches* utilised certain ideas about football that sustained rather than subverted, deeper prejudices that coalesce around Celtic FC, Irish ethnicity and Catholicism in Scottish society. It is interesting that although football featured frequently in this process in *Wind Up* there are many other sketches where it was absent. Yet the use of Irish sounding names, the mention of Irish festivals (e.g. St Patrick’s Day) or communities that have a high proportion of Irish diaspora descended people in their population (e.g Coatbridge in Lanarkshire) served to iterate stereotypes and “alien” rituals that reinforced those of Irish ethnicity as the national other in Scotland.

Conclusions

This paper has probed some examples of how football related content in one comedy entertainment series. Although humorous, such comedy reproduced certain ideologies and stereotypes that are familiar currency in mainstream discourses about one particular ethnic, national and religious community in Scotland. Building on previous research the contention is that comedy and humour is not unproblematic, frivolous or harmless. The analysis of particular sketches in *Watson’s Wind Up* revealed there are multiple, or at least, alternative

interpretative meanings embedded in the comedy that operate through complex and ambiguous cultural codes and shibboleths.

The sketches considered here represent an illustrative sample of the ways in which the ambiguity and allusive language, local knowledge ideas and myths works as humour. This however is only one part of the broader discourses of ethnicity, religion and intolerance in Scotland. The catalogue of *Wind Up* sketches offers many more examples of how comedy can be the cultural conduit for uttering in public a range of ideas and constructing stereotypes grounded in other divisions and prejudices in Scotland. The initial trawl of material revealed for example how the comedy lampooned other Christian faiths (notably the Free Church of Scotland) and Highland communities in Scotland. However, there was also some evidence of how comedy was used as a “legitimate” sphere where Asian Scots, another ethnic minority community, could be ridiculed and stereotyped in ways that may sustain particular forms of banal racism. These aspects of comedy in Scotland merit closer inspection.

The irreverent perspective on social, political and cultural life played out in *Watson's Wind Up* cannot be understood in an ideological vacuum. On the contrary, the programme was situated within a system of ideas, values beliefs, stereotypes, myths and prejudices and linguistic meanings that characterise Scottish society. The social, cultural and political resonance of sport, particularly football, and the comedy associated with it, cannot be isolated from this broader hegemonic system. The sports-related events and other new items parodied in *Watson's Wind Up* are humorous, but they are not just a wind up.

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¹ This is perhaps an over-simplified account of serious discourse, since all discourse is *polysemic* (Riggins, 1997: 2). Within any social communication process participants' (e.g. speakers, readers, listeners) own experiences, knowledge and understanding inform the meaning they derive from the interaction therefore 'authorial intention is only one part of the meaning making process' (Benwell, 2004: 9).

² **It has not been possible to establish precise information regarding the audience figures and profile of *Watson's Wind Up*. Direct contact with the Comedy Unit (January 2013), the Glasgow-based production company of the programme advised that statistics produced by RAJA on radio audiences in the UK are based on quarterly information, and tend to concentrate on radio stations, rather than specific programmes.**

³ Celtic in this context is pronounced Keltik.

⁴ *The Celtic Song* chorus begins 'Hail Hail, The Celts are here, What the hell do we care'. It was public knowledge that football was an interest of Steven Purcell, as it is many men in Scotland, and that he supported Celtic FC.

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