RACE AND RISK: EXPLORING ONLINE RESPONSES TO THE EURO 2020 FINAL

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Summary Abstract

In July, 2021, England lost the Euro 2020 football final to Italy. Following the loss, Black England players were widely racially abused online; Twitter alone took down over 1900 offensive posts directed at the players. In response, many commentators condemned the online racism and sent messages of support to players. How might online platforms such as Twitter reconfigure racism, according to a late-neoliberal logic of assetized identity? How might the football game, as a widely-publicized symbolic site which stages a relation between competition, chance, and nationhood, inflect this expression of online racism? In this paper, I analyze a range of online responses to the 2020 Euro finals, paying particular attention to narratives that express levels of expectation about posters' and platforms' roles in propagating online racism. I analyze how online responses to the Euro final express conflicts over race in reputational terms. Reading the football final's online aftermath as a distributed event suggests the need to extend insights from W.E.B. Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, and Cheryl Harris, to arrive at an account of assetized, late-neoliberal racial capitalism, which recodes racism as the uneven distribution of reputational risk. Such an understanding has the potential to nuance debates on data colonialism, by detailing how online racism sits within a continually shifting expression of multiple colonial temporalities, both on- and offline.

Extended Abstract

In 11 July, 2021, England faced Italy in the delayed Euro 2020 football final. UK commentators heavily hyped the match, hoping to end England's 55-year stretch without winning a major trophy. The game ended in a 1-1 tie; in the ensuing penalty shootout, Italy won 3-2. Three England players – Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka – hadn't scored. Soon after the loss, many British Twitter users voiced their fear that the Black players who hadn't scored on penalties would face extensive racial abuse. Others cited statistics on increased domestic violence following major tournament losses, urged women to stay safe, and posted information on hotlines and

shelters.[1] Twitter later confirmed that it had removed more than 1,900 racist, abusive tweets in the wake of the final, most of which had originated in the UK.[2] Racist abuse directed at schoolchildren, and linked to the match, was also reported.[3] A vandal defaced a mural of Marcus Rashford; this led to fans covering the mural with supportive messages, images of which circulated widely on platforms such as Twitter. How do online platforms such as Twitter reconfigure racism and anti-racism in widely publicized events such as these, by configuring both personal traits and attention garnered from public debates as *assets*?

Many important works have considered the cultural significance of online racism surrounding sporting events; analyzed the impact of anti-racist actions in sport; and developed new conceptual frameworks for understanding online racism, such as "platformed racism" and "weak tie racism."[4] Building on these frameworks, this paper in progress draws from recent debates on assetization in technoscientific capitalism:[5] the process of turning attention, traits, or things into rent-generating assets.
Analyzing a range of online responses to the 2020 Euro finals using tools such as Media Cloud's Topic Mapper, I contextualize these responses within what I call a topological-colonial space: layered, shifting colonial temporalities, from the long history of British empire and its racisms, expressed in recent conflict over immigration;[6] to "data

[1] Serina Sandhu, 'Domestic Abuse Spiked during Euros Tournament with One Centre Seeing 400 Extra Cases', inews.co.uk, 13 July 2021, https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/euro-2020-domestic-abuse-england-increase-cases-during-football-tournament-1100995; see also Stuart Kirby, Brian Francis, and Rosalie O'Flaherty, 'Can the FIFA World Cup Football (Soccer) Tournament Be Associated with an Increase in Domestic Abuse?', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 51, no. 3 (May 2014): 259–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427813494843.

[2] Andrew Griffin, 'Twitter Reveals First Findings about Racist Abuse after Euros Final', The Independent, 10 August 2021, https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/twitter-racism-euro-2020-saka-rashford-sancho-b1900049.html.

[3] BBC Yorkshire, 'Euro 2020 Racism: School Pupil Abused after England Defeat, Family Say', *BBC News*, 15 July 2021, sec. Humberside, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-57833414.

[4] Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, 'Platformed Racism: The Mediation and Circulation of an Australian Race-Based Controversy on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube', *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 6 (3 June 2017): 930–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1293130; André L. Brock, *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*, Critical Cultural Communication (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 157; see also Adam B. Evans et al., 'Sport, Race and Ethnicity in the Wake of Black Lives Matter: Introduction to the Special Issue', *European Journal for Sport and Society* 18, no. 3 (3 July 2021): 187–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2021.1966283; Stephanie M. Ortiz, 'Racists without Racism? From Colourblind to Entitlement Racism Online', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 14 (14 November 2021): 2637–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1825758; Evelyn Stratmoen, Tiffany J. Lawless, and Donald A. Saucier, 'Taking a Knee: Perceptions of NFL Player Protests during the National Anthem', *Personality and Individual Differences* 137 (January 2019): 204–13, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.09.009; Lucia Trimbur, 'Taking a Knee, Making a Stand: Social Justice, Trump America, and the Politics of Sport', *Quest* 71, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 252–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2018.1551806; Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[5] Kean Birch, ed., *Assetization: Turning Things into Assets in Technoscientific Capitalism*, Inside Technology (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020).

[6] See, for instance, Nisha Kapoor, *Deport, Deprive, Extradite: 21st Century State Extremism* (London ; New York: Verso, 2018); Yasmin Gunaratnam, 'On Researching Climates of Hostility and Weathering', in *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, ed. Kevin Smets et al. (Los Angeles: SAGE Reference, 2019), 129–41; Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*, Cultural Studies and Marxism (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018).

colonialism,"[7] which sees large tech companies profiting from monopolizing data. I then consider how online platforms couch conflicts over race in reputational terms, with like and share counts, comment tallies, and abundant metacommentaries foregrounding reputation as a platformed asset; and with platforms,' players' and posters' reputations at risk. Reading the football final's online aftermath in light of W.E.B. Du Bois' account of the compensatory, "public and psychological wage" given to white workers, in the form of deference and courtesy;[8] Cedric Robinson's writing on racial capitalism;[9] and Cheryl I Harris' account of reputation as linked to white privilege,[10] suggests the need to arrive at an account of assetized, late-neoliberal racial capitalism, which recodes racism as an uneven distribution of online reputational risk.

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[7] Nick Couldry and Ulises Ali Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*, Culture and Economic Life (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

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[9] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[10] Cheryl I. Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1734–35.

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