

Sport's Fetishistic Disavowal: Exploring the Contradictions of Sportswashing.

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Sport's Fetishistic Disavowal: Exploring the Contradictions of Sportswashing

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Abstract

Is it possible to remain a sports fan when prominent sports teams and events are utilized to “sportswash” human rights abuses and other controversies? Indeed, while there is an abundance of analyses critiquing different instances of sportswashing, the exploration of the role of sportswashing and its connection to the “sports fan” presents an essential and necessary area of investigation and theoretical inquiry. To unpick this dilemma, this article proposes the concept of “fetishistic disavowal” to help theorize the impact of sportswashing, as well as its relation to the sports fan and critical sports academic. This argues that, as spectators and fans of sport—and, moreover, as critical academics—we often acknowledge and accept that sport is used to perpetuate and even maintain a variety of social, economic, and political inequalities. While we are aware of such knowledge, we nonetheless remain fully capable of disavowing this very knowledge as an accepted part of sport. In this paper, it will be argued that the fetishization of sport provides a suitable conduit for the fetishistic disavowal that sportswashing requires, with the concept offering a unique way of approaching sport’s inherent contradictions, while also theorizing how subjects relate to these contradictions as part of their sporting investment. Ultimately, this provides a theoretical lens through which analyses of sport, and its ethical significance, can be critiqued.

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