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Men Like Us, Boys Like Them: Violence, Masculinity and Collective Identity in Football Hooliganism

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Abstract

Football (soccer) hooliganism is a complex, heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon that should be studied in its different social and historical contexts. Despite the vital importance of cultural, social and historical specificity for fully grasping the nature and dynamics of spectator violence at football matches, some striking cross-national and cross-local similarities can be identified. Six fundamental features seem universal to the construction of ‘hooligan’ identities: excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal; hard masculinity; territorial identifications; individual and collective management of reputation; a sense of solidarity and belonging; and representations of sovereignty and autonomy. The search for such commonalities allows us to develop an approach that transcends the isolated view of single manifestations of football hooliganism and identifies the features and mechanisms that are central to expressions of football-related violence.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades an impressive volume of research into football (or soccer) hooliganism has been produced.¹ This body of research has advanced our knowledge of spectator violence at football matches, yet it has failed to generate a coherent, interdisciplinary theoretical framework for the comparative study of football hooliganism. Key themes that remains insufficiently studied and theorized from an international comparative perspective are the formation of subcultural identities and the social interaction between hooligans and “significant others”. Although a number of British studies have explicitly dealt with one or both of these issues (Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999;

Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002; Hobbs & Robins, 1991; King, 1995, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998), it remains unclear how their important insights can be fruitfully applied to the study of the transnational dimensions of football-related violence. The task of social scientists and analysts is to see both transnational linkages in hooligan culture and the role of local circumstances in shaping different hooligan identities. This issue is particularly relevant because football hooliganism has gradually evolved into a persistent, transnational subculture which continues to attract significant numbers of young men seeking excitement and adventure.

In this article I relate the existing knowledge on the role of violence and collective identity in football hooliganism to my own fieldwork on football fan cultures. The purpose of this exercise is to establish an analytical framework, albeit a preliminary and partial one, for the comparative study of football hooliganism. I should emphasize that I am less concerned here with manifestations of spectator violence at sporting events in general. I acknowledge that football-related riots are not simply the product of ‘hooligans’, and that football matches are “complex crowd events affected by a multitude of different interrelating causes” (Stott & Pearson, 2007: 43). In particular, I am interested here in the more organized forms of crowd violence at football matches (see Spaaij, 2007). At the same time, I am also fully aware that there are variable degrees of participation in and commitment to football hooliganism, along a continuum ranging from merely passive involvement to regular physical participation in collective violence. As I will demonstrate, ‘hooligans’ are by no means a unified or static category. Self-confessed hooligans construct their own meanings in rather flexible ways that often contradict popular perceptions of hooliganism.

The article is divided into four parts. In the first part I will briefly address the methodology of the research presented here. I will then outline the general characteristics of identity formation and othering in football violence. In the third part, I will outline the fundamental features in the construction of hooligan identities in different national and local contexts. In the fourth and final part I will summarize the main argument and discuss the uses and limits of the approach advocated in this article.

Football hooliganism is a complex, heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon that should be studied in its different social and historical contexts. The search for a general theory of football-related violence therefore seems misleading and futile. This does not take away the need, nor preclude the possibility of specific theoretical generalizations concerning the fundamental features and mechanisms underlying the phenomenon. Despite the vital importance of cultural, social and historical specificity for fully grasping the nature and

dynamics of football hooliganism (Spaaij, 2007), I argue in this article that there exist some striking commonalities in the collective identifications of football hooligan formations in different national and local contexts. The search for such commonalities allows us to develop an approach that transcends the isolated view of single manifestations of football hooliganism (i.e. a focus on single hooligan formations at one particular time and place) and which identifies the general features and mechanisms that are central to expressions of football violence.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this text was gathered during a period of six years of fieldwork, from 2001 to 2006, in the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The fieldwork focused principally on six football clubs: Feyenoord and Sparta Rotterdam (The Netherlands, 2001-2003 and 2005-2006); FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol (Spain, 2004-2005); West Ham United and Fulham FC (United Kingdom, 2003-2004) (on the issue of case study sampling, see Spaaij, 2006). The present analysis also benefits from other research projects I have been coordinating in recent years, including empirical research in the south of Spain, Brazil and Australia.

The fieldwork involved multiple methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews (over 400 in total), participant observation, documentary analysis, and analysis of fanzines, Internet websites and media reports. Interviews were conducted with a wide range of actors at each of the aforementioned clubs, mainly self-confessed hooligans, former hooligans, “ultras”, supporters, club officials, police officers, fanzine editors, club historians, and journalists. Initial fan contacts were the basis for further contacts with supporters, hooligans and ultras. Once introduced to some of the “gatekeepers” within local hooligan or ultra formations I was able to gradually, albeit slowly, expand my network through snowballing (see also Giulianotti, 1995: 7). Interviews with members of hooligan and ultra groups were usually conducted, either individually or collectively (in small groups), on non-match days in bars, restaurants, at people’s homes or, occasionally, at my own place or office.

I must stress that I only interviewed a section of these formations and certainly not all group members. In each hooligan formation there were, of course, significant numbers of people who were not willing to be interviewed, depending in part on local circumstances, for example bad timing due to ongoing police investigations or a particular history of suspicion towards outsiders (cf. Giulianotti, 1995: 5). This was particularly the case at West Ham

United and FC Barcelona, where I did not “integrate” myself within the hooligan gatherings to a major extent, although I was able to conduct interviews and observations (for a detailed description of my fieldwork experiences, see Spaaij, 2008).

The research was in all cases openly presented as “for a book”. Scholars such as Armstrong (1998) and Giulianotti (1995) successfully adopted this strategy in initiating their respective fieldwork. This research stance had a twofold effect. On the one hand, at each of the six clubs a small number of self-confessed hooligans seemed particularly interested in my work. For example, in the case of Sparta Rotterdam I was the first researcher to scrutinize their activities. Key members of the self-styled hooligan group were, once a degree of trust had been established, highly co-operative and provided me with video footage, photographs and newspaper cuttings. They also invited me to travel with the group on various occasions, organized collective and individual interviews and allowed me to tape record most of the interviews. On the other hand, some hooligans were most certainly alarmed by my “for a book” approach. They suspected, unfoundedly, my allegiances to police or security staff. In fact, on a number of occasions even my proposal to conduct an informal, non-recorded interview was turned down with great suspicion. This suspicion was fuelled in part by manifest conflicts between hooligans, club officials and police (e.g. at FC Barcelona) but also by my lack of productivity: the compilation of the book took me nearly four years, which cast aspersions on my dedication or credentials, a problem previously recognized by Giulianotti (1995: 7). Fortunately, several Dutch hooligans were already familiar with a previous book (Van der Torre & Spaaij, 2003), which they were eager to tell their friends about and which, in some cases, increased my credibility.

Part of the fieldwork consisted of observations at football grounds and related spaces, including public houses, nightclubs and railway stations. Observation did not concentrate exclusively on football fan behaviour, but also on clubs’ security policies, police strategies and interactions between supporters and law enforcers. In the early stages of fieldwork at a new site observations were mostly made from a distance from a strategic position (in a specific section of the ground, in the streets, in a pub) without actually positioning me among hooligans. It was only after establishing direct rapport with the hooligan subjects that observations became more genuinely participant, albeit to varying extents depending on local circumstances and the degree of closure and hostility towards the researcher/outsider. The degree of participation generally shifted during the research from “passive” to “moderate” observation.² Observations were not merely a means for collecting specific data, but equally for obtaining a feeling, albeit a rather restrained one, for what it is like to be in a particular

social situation. On the basis of such experience the researcher is more able adequately to make sense of what self-declared hooligans and fanatical fans have to say and the ways in which they describe their social world (Marsh et al., 1978: 119).

UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES IN FOOTBALL VIOLENCE

Hooligan formations construct their collective identities in terms of the perceived differences between self and the other (Armstrong, 1998). These others principally include rival hooligan groups, but also non-hooligan supporters and the authorities, in particular the police. There exists a common framework of interaction in which there is space for contact and co-operation as well as for distinction enacted by the threat or use of violence. What is involved in the interaction between opposing hooligan formations is not a deep-seated conflict of interest, since both parties share a commitment to engage in confrontation, but the emphasizing of minor, but nevertheless fundamentally perceived differences between groups that tend to have much in common (in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, class, language, and leisure interests) (Blok, 1997: 164). This is what Freud described as the “narcissism of minor differences” in his 1917 paper *Das Tabu der Virginität*: how simply by displacement, by finding adversaries toward whom dislike can be directed, suspicion and dislike is set aside in the formation of groups (Freud, 1947). In other words, when people are alike in most respects, it is precisely the minor differences which will be made to serve as the basis and rationale for the aversion to otherness. In this process, minimum objective distance in the social space coincides with maximum subjective distance (Bourdieu, 1990: 137).

For football hooligans, violence and the willingness to “be game” constitute the compelling form of social intercourse out of which their social group arises (King, 2001: 571-572). But does this mean that a degree of shared identity exists among different hooligan formations, not only within one country but also across societies? Can we speak of football hooliganism as a kind of “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), whose members will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion?

The answer to this question must generally be yes, especially in large parts of Europe. In their detailed account of British hooligan formations, Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002: 218) correctly argue that:

The hooligan network is an informal and increasingly transnational phenomenon [...] In most instances, it comprises individual hooligans from different formations who have met (usually fortuitously) and exchanged personal details, with a view towards sharing subcultural information regarding fan violence or other common interests.

Modern technologies play a vital role in the facilitation of transnational hooligan networks and the diffusion of cultural styles and action repertoires. On hooligan-related websites prospective participants and self-confessed hooligans alike are involved in day-to-day interaction, ranging from provocations and threats to the dissemination and exchange of information, such as photographs, fanzines, video clips, and other memorabilia.

A shared cultural practice of self-styled hard-core football hooligans is their involvement, to varying degrees, in violent confrontation with opposing hooligans. A key aim of all hooligan groups is to successfully challenge their rivals through intimidation and violence as a way of securing or enhancing their status as a good “firm” in the hierarchy of hooligan oppositions (Armstrong, 1994: 299). Their identification with football violence and their willingness to be game distinguish them from non-hooligan supporters, while at the same time their proclaimed loyalty to the football club sets them apart from ordinary street gangs.³

Hooligan formations in different localities thus converge in their explicit interest in violent confrontation with rival fan groups. This key characteristic of football hooliganism can be found not only in Western European countries, but also, for example, in Eastern Europe (Duke & Slepíčka, 2002; Harsanyi, 2005), Brazil (Reis, 2006) and Argentina. Consider for example the Argentinian term *aguante*. The term designates wider meanings than its strictly etymological reference (*aguantar* means to bear) and is linked to a rhetoric of the body and to a collective resistance against hardship and the other (other fans, the police) (Alabarces, 2002: 36). In Argentinian fan discourse, *aguantar* means *poner el cuerpo* (“putting the body in”), that is, physical violence. *Aguante* is essentially other-directed. It is through *aguante* that male football fans can distinguish themselves from the *no-machos*, who are disqualified as *hijos* (“little boys”) and *putos* (“homosexuals”, or “sons of bitches”), and demonstrate to one another that they are real men, that they are macho. Violence is thus not only a practice that is not rejected, instead it is deemed legitimate and more or less obliged (Alabarces, 2005: 1; Garriga Zucal, 2005: 39-48).

Among hooligan formations there are broad, yet variable, definitions of how masculine honour can be won and lost. Importantly, honour and dishonour are not established

by objective *a priori* rules but merely by intersubjective agreement, that is, “by calls to order from the group” (Bourdieu, 1977: 15). Informal rules of engagement and their application to particular incidents are always negotiable, both within hooligan groups and between rival formations. Individuals of greater status are likely to have a greater influence in the course of this negotiation (King, 2001: 573; 580; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 218).

One such informal rule of engagement is that the competitive violence between hooligan formations is a matter of hooligans only; hooligans should only fight each other (or the police) and not non-hooligan supporters (i.e. women, children or non-violent male fans). Honour can only be legitimately claimed through challenging, or responding to the challenge of, an equal (Bourdieu, 1977: 105). A member of the Inter City Culé (ICC), a small fan group following FC Barcelona, expressed this as follows:

We consider ourselves hooligans, which means we only fight rival hooligans, people who are willing to engage in violence. I would never attack a father attending a football match with his son even if he happens to support Real Madrid. That makes no sense and is considered inappropriate.

This informal code of legitimate action is occasionally broken and may cause fragmentation within hooligan formations or polarization of inter-group relations. Challenging an equal also applies to the collective level, since only those hooligan formations that are considered of sufficient reputation are regarded as worthy of confronting. As one Feyenoord hooligan put it:

Why would we attack inferior groups? I mean, of course you have to respond to challenges and this may happen spontaneously, but we wouldn't go out and seek to confront them. They simply aren't worth it, you know. And there is usually no particular rivalry with these groups either.

The perceived status of, and threat posed by, rival formations determines the actual size and intentions of the hooligan group. If the threat, and therefore the challenge, is perceived as big comparatively many peripheral and temporary hooligans will be recruited, especially males with a reputation for being tough (e.g. local “hard men” or bouncers). For example, while the core of the hooligan formation at Feyenoord currently consists of approximately 100 persons, for high-profile fixtures the number of participants may swell to over 400. At Sparta, another team from the city of Rotterdam, the comparatively small self-

styled hooligan group comprises a core of 15 young males, but for major fixtures the formation can increase to up to almost 50 people. In the following section I will examine in more detail the fundamental commonalities in the formation of collective identities in football hooligan violence across localities.

KEY FEATURES OF FOOTBALL HOOLIGAN IDENTITIES

Football hooliganism is a multi-faceted phenomenon that needs to be studied in its different social and historical contexts. There are nevertheless some striking similarities in the construction of hooligan identities in different national and local contexts. Six features seem universal to football hooligan identities: excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal; hard masculinity; territorial identifications; individual and collective management of reputation; a sense of solidarity and belonging; and representations of sovereignty and autonomy. In conjunction, these features enable a better understanding of the ways in which collective identities are negotiated within and between hooligan formations. Identifying these themes enables us to link different traditions of football hooliganism and to establish an analytical framework, albeit a preliminary and partial one, for the comparative study of football-related violence.

Let me make two important points to which attention should be paid when examining the six features. First, although the social mechanisms and interactions involved have a lot in common, their specific content depends heavily on local circumstances, as the examples given in this article will demonstrate. As such, social and historical context remains crucially important for fully grasping the nature and dynamics of football hooliganism. Second, the identified features should always be viewed in conjunction. In this context, it is important to note that some of the features discussed below have been discussed elsewhere.⁴ In addition, on the basis of my belief that the study of football hooliganism has become too much of an isolated subfield, I have sought to incorporate insightful concepts from studies of youth culture, crime and juvenile delinquency.

Doing violence: excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal

A central aspect of football hooliganism is the pleasurable excitement associated with violent confrontation. Accounts of hooligans reveal how they experience an overpowering ‘buzz’ or ‘adrenaline rush’ when confronting their opponents. Their search for adventure, excitement

and thrills exists side by side with values of security and routinization. They involve what Elias and Dunning (1970) have called a “quest for excitement in unexciting societies”. Displays of daring and the search for excitement – as opposed to the routine – are acceptable and desirable in society at large, but only when confined to certain circumstances such as sport, recreation and holidays. In contemporary (Western) societies the opportunities for risk taking have deteriorated, and sporting events provide individuals with a need for excitement that is often lacking in other aspects of life (Apter, 1992).

Whereas for most sports spectators the excitement and emotional arousal of a sports match suffice, hooligans cherish the peak experiences associated with symbolic and physical violence in the football context. Fighting is one of their main acts to counter boredom and experience high emotional arousal. Many hooligans perceive conventional lifestyles and careers as boring and unchallenging; though their attraction to hooliganism is usually temporary and largely confined to adolescence.⁵ The following extracts from interviews with Sparta fans capture this well:

People say, like, you’ve got your studies and your job so why engage in fighting. But university is just so fucking boring, you know. Most students are absolute wankers, you know, and the classes are boring. Being with my mates and planning a fight is sort of an outlet, to get away from it all.

It’s fun for now, you know. But it’s not going to last forever. I mean, it’s already changing for me now I have a girlfriend and lots of other things going on in my life. You see the same thing with many others. Like “B”, he used to hang around with us all the time, but now he has other things going on and is less interested in attending matches.

Group membership and inter-group confrontation provide a chance to experience immediate sensation in the form of pleasurable excitement, which is often referred to as an adrenaline rush and “better than sex”. As one Feyenoord hooligan expressed it:

The kick of fighting your rivals is overwhelming. You cannot really understand it unless you’re in it. It gives you a sense of power, a sense of control. It’s an absolute high. It’s something I don’t often find in normal life. That’s why a lot of guys are

drawn to it in the first place and why some of them stay involved even when they are in their forties.

Previous research has also stressed the interest of (prospective) hooligans in the pleasurable excitement engendered in hooligan confrontations (Dunning et al., 1988; Kerr, 1994; Giulianotti, 1999; Bairner, 2006). In their seminal piece *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, Dunning and his colleagues (1988: 209-210) relate the meaning of fighting directly to lower-working-class culture. They argue that for lower-working-class males:

Fighting is an important source of meaning, status and pleasurable emotional arousal. ... Correspondingly, there is a tendency for them to “back down” less frequently than males from other areas and also on occasions actively to seek out fights and confrontations. Of course, males generally in our society are expected to defend themselves if attacked, but they are less likely than lower-working-class males to be the initiators in this regard.

However, the hooligan lifestyle is an important source of identity and pleasurable emotional arousal not merely for lower-working-class males but for a wider variety of young males. The pleasurable excitement of football violence should not be understood as merely an epiphenomenon of social class, but rather as a constituent element of football hooliganism worldwide. Football hooliganism emerged as a specifically working-class youth subculture in the 1960s in England but over time the phenomenon has come to attract a wider variety of male adolescents who adopt a similar aggressive masculine style (Spaaij, 2006).

Intimately related to the “buzz” of hooligan violence is the issue of (overcoming) fear. The narratives of football hooligans reveal that fear is a recurrent theme in preparing for and participating in inter-group confrontations. Courage is demonstrated not by a complete absence of fear, but rather by showing sufficient discipline to perform when one is afraid (Collins, 1995: 189-190). Overcoming fear is crucial, for example, in confronting a quantitatively superior group, and it is precisely the overcoming of fear that generates the greatest pleasurable emotional arousal. Football hooliganism therefore has to retain an element of physical or emotional risk in order to enable intense peak experiences. Without the element of danger, excitement would be reduced dramatically (Kerr, 2005: 111).

Performing toughness: the construction of hard masculine identity

Hooligan formations celebrate a hard masculine identity based on physical prowess. Hooligans' hard, hyperheterosexist masculine identity is constructed primarily in relation to difference, as "something which is "not not-masculine" rather than as something possessing an essence and substance of its own" (Frosh, 1994: 89). The masculinity of the other (i.e. opposing hooligans) is contested through ritual denigration of their physical and heterosexual prowess (real men versus "poofs" or "little boys"; heterosexual dominant versus gay subordinate), the object of which is to attain an unambiguous sense of one's own masculinity by questioning the masculinity of opponents (Free & Hughson, 2003: 151).

In this process, individuals may seek to present an idealized form of collective self utilizing media channels for wider, public communication and negotiation. On 16 February 1997, Feyenoord and Ajax rival hooligan formations arranged a fight near a highway, but the pre-planned confrontation never materialized. Ajax hooligans retreated after observing the larger, heavily armed group of their Feyenoord rivals. The police quickly arrived at the scene and forced the Feyenoord fans to return to their vehicles. Further down the A10, police searched every car for offensive weapons. No arrests were made despite the large number of weapons found by the police, such as baseball bats, chains and knives. The event strengthened Feyenoord hooligans' self-image as the most fearsome and toughest hooligan formation in the Netherlands. In the aftermath of the event, a well-known Feyenoord hooligan challenged his rivals on national television, arguing that the Ajax hooligans were "real pussies" because they fled the scene. Ajax hooligans responded to these accusations by appearing on a local television channel, claiming that their rivals had violated prior agreements by gathering 300 people instead of 50 people as agreed.

The researcher may also be used as an intermediary for such public negotiation, which points to a manifest danger faced by the participant observer: the influence that his or her research subjects may seek to have on his or her conclusions (Giulianotti, 1995: 10). Several hooligans put it to me that their group is "the hardest" in their respective country, or at least harder than their main (regional or intra-city) rivals. Consider the following typical comment by a Spanish hooligan: "Some of the guys you've probably talked to, they're a bunch of losers really. They are all talk. If you look at recent fights, they haven't done anything, whereas we have had our successes. We are still top of the league."

At the same time, there exists a variable degree of admiration and mutual respect among hooligan formations, as demonstrated by Sparta hooligans' admiration for the

widespread reputation of their counterparts at Feyenoord: “You have to respect them because of what they have done. They are one of country’s leading hooligan groups.” This admiration is based principally on the opponent’s perceived authenticity, that is, on being regarded as “real” hooligans. This also applies to the individual level. As an Espanyol ultra expressed it:

Even though he [a well-known FC Barcelona hooligan] is a Barça fan, I hold great respect for him because he is authentic. I have seen him lead impressive invasions of opponents’ sections of the ground. He is both intelligent and a good fighter, and he doesn’t mess about.

Football hooligans’ construction of hard masculine identity is also linked to the deployment of race categories. Several Espanyol and FC Barcelona hooligans deploy such categories in constructing their own positional superiority, denigrating “blacks” and “blackness” as inferior categories. In contrast, at West Ham United and Feyenoord several black participants are endowed with a hypermasculinity to be feared. Performatively constituted through the discursive associations of black masculinity and violent criminality (Blackshaw & Crabbe, 2005: 339), black hooligans are often perceived by fellow group members as superior fighters and as having great mutual solidarity, appearing as daunting oppositional threats: “... this large black guy, he was [absolutely] mental” (Feyenoord hooligan); “these riot negroes are crazier than the whole lot” (Sparta hooligan about black Feyenoord hooligans nicknamed “riots negroes”) (cf. Armstrong, 1998: 280). In these cases, it appears that “blackness” is reproduced as a racial category “equated to raw physicality, to the sheer *embodiment* of masculine labor power, hence a caricatured hypermasculinity against which white hooligans’ masculine performances could be measured” (Free & Hughson, 2003: 141; emphasis in original).

Although an overt concern with an idealized form of hypermasculinity is characteristic of all hooligan formation under study, the construction of hard masculine identity is always located in particular spaces and times. There is no singular pattern of masculinity to be found everywhere (Connell, 2000: 10). Masculinities are not homogeneous, simple states of being, but they are continually produced and reproduced. Football cultures do not exist on their own as locations for the construction and contestation of hooligans’ aggressive masculinity, but rather in complex interrelationships with other cultural sites, including the family, schools, labour markets, media representations and the legal system (see also Mac an Ghaill, 1996: 394). Nor do hooligans develop just one form of masculinity. Outside football, they adopt

other masculine roles as partners, parents, children, workmates and friends (Giulianotti, 1999: 156).

Diversity also exists within a given setting. A striking example of changing conceptions of hard masculinity can be found at FC Barcelona. FC Barcelona and Espanyol hooligans construct their collective identities not only in terms of physical prowess and sovereignty but also in terms of political allegiance. Many Espanyol “ultras” have been identifying, publicly as well as privately, with Spanish neo-fascism from the mid-1980s, largely in response to their local rivals’ allegiance to Catalan nationalism. While at FC Barcelona self-confessed hooligans and many young male fans in general celebrated a form of masculinity that was closely related to separatist ideologies, this conception has changed dramatically over time. The rise of neo-fascist skinheads on the terraces of the Camp Nou stadium in the late 1980s, with their emphasis on aggressive masculinity and violence as a means for acquiring prestige among peers and provoking outsiders, fundamentally challenged the hegemonic notion of masculinity, resulting in serious intra-group conflict and fragmentation. Neo-fascist hooligans at the club have regularly abused and assaulted individuals who are considered as “inferior” members of society. In this particular context violence against non-hooligans was also deemed legitimate. In a 1993 television documentary, a leading skinhead member of Espanyol’s most radical ultra group justified this type of violence in the following way:

I am fascist and a skinhead is just that ... because he wants to throw all the foreign rubbish out of Spain, niggers, Jews and the whole bunch. Senseless violence is not all the skinheads do. They defend what is theirs and this means to fight the reds [communists], separatists, Jews, punks and other scum of society. (TVE, *Informe Semanal*, 26 October 1991)

In contrast, hooligan formations at West Ham and Feyenoord publicly celebrate the core values of their traditional working-class communities and industries, notably a focus on physical strength and the ability to “look after oneself”. Here we see a strong cultural connection between admired masculinity and violent response to threat. Violence is not merely glorified, it is also so closely tied to masculinity that “aggression becomes central to the boy’s notion of manhood” (Campbell, 1993: 31). From a young age, these boys cultivate “looking hard”: “I cultivated a way of walking. I mean, I walked perfectly normal up until I

was about nine [years old], but then I learned to walk hard, you know. Everybody did. And you cultivated that because it looked hard” (West Ham hooligan).

Hooligans’ hard masculine identities are not only socially constructed and context-dependent, they are also inextricably related to the body as a meaningful construction itself. Messerschmidt (1999: 200) has shown that different masculinities emerge from practices that reflect different bodily resources, arguing that “our bodies constrain or facilitate social action and, therefore, mediate and influence social practices.” For some young men, their bodies facilitate masculine agency, enabling successful construction of self as superior to other boys. Due to the capacity for power that they embody, the fighting group is an arena where these male adolescents can bodily express themselves through physical confrontation or by displaying their willingness to be game. Individual and collective reputation and status rely heavily upon bodily capacity and upon the willingness to put oneself in dangerous situations regardless of physical injury. The response of peers to their conduct co-shapes the masculine meaning constructed by these hooligans through the practice of putting themselves in dangerous situations: “People looked up to me ’cos I was big for my age and a good fighter, you know. I was always with older boys and the most notorious gangs in the area” (former West Ham hooligan).

Two issues need to be addressed with regard to the construction of the body and the performance of hard masculinity. Firstly, it must be emphasized that hooligans do not equally possess this bodily capacity and that the “good fighter” role is certainly not the only social role available to members of hooligan formations. Other social roles include “organizers”, “nutters”, and “chant leaders”, among others (see Marsh et al., 1978). These roles are both accorded to individuals by the group, and performed by the individuals themselves, with varying degrees of seriousness (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 219).

Secondly, the construction of the body is context-dependent. For example, Espanyol skinheads construct bodily capacity not merely in terms of fighting ability, but also in terms of physical and mental health. As part of their neo-Nazi ethos, they celebrate the muscular, athletic body and abstention from drug use – for example, the consumption of marijuana is considered as *algo de rojos* (communists) or *de musulmanes* (Muslims, especially North Africans). This anti-drugs stance has in large part been forced upon the entire group by an influential section of long-standing group members. It is communicated in the group’s fanzines and enforced through informal social control, and has occasionally generated intra-group conflict. As a former group member expressed:

I simply don't feel at ease there anymore, because I don't like it when people tell me what to do. I go to football to relax, to get away from the daily routine. I don't need someone to tell me that I cannot smoke a joint when I feel like it simply because he opposes drugs. That is my business and nobody else's.

This anti-drugs stance is first and foremost an expression of an idealized form of collective self, as part of the narcissism of minor differences. The following comment reveals the ambiguity of these claims:

Look, publicly we oppose to drug use. I mean, I would never use drugs and I don't want to see it in our group. 'Cos it's poison, you know, it kills you. It's a sign of inferiority. But of course there are some people who use or trade drugs, although they would always do it in private. And that's OK really, as long as we don't see it.

In contrast with Espanyol ultras' idealization of the muscular, athletic body, in Argentinian football hooliganism *ser gordo* (being fat) is considered a major virtue, since it is a sign of a bodily capacity to fight and resist. For Argentinian fans, the "fat man" is better prepared for fights than muscular, well-trained bodies or than those of normal weight. These overweight bodies should be viewed as "non-hegemonic" or oppositional: they are part of an aesthetics that is different from the dominant masculinity in Argentinian society (Alabarces, 2005: 2). Furthermore, the consumption of drugs is viewed as a symbol of hard masculine identity and distinguishes the "real man" from the "non-male".

Communicating performance: individual and collective management of reputation

Participation in football hooliganism enables supporters to gain status and prestige among peers. Within hooligan formations, individual and collective reputations are established principally by demonstrating a willingness to 'be game' and an aura of hypermasculinity. Reputations for toughness are established through successfully challenging rival hooligans, and it is crucial that these results are communicated effectively, both internally and externally. Apportioning honour between contestants is very rarely settled in full. For example, the legitimacy of an attack by West Ham hooligans on a pub frequented by their Tottenham Hotspur rivals, on 29 October 2003, was heavily contested by the latter group, claiming that the attack did not constitute a "defeat" but rather a dishonourable attack, since there were no

hooligans inside the pub at that time. Contestation also occurs within hooligan formations, as in the case of older Feyenoord hooligans' condemnation of their younger counterparts' occasional "queer-bashing" activities:

Those guys have no respect for anyone. They go too far sometimes. I mean, what's the point in attacking innocent people who have nothing to do with football hooliganism? There's no honour in that.

The dramaturgic metaphor introduced by Goffman (1959) is helpful to understanding hooligans' presentation of self. Goffman argued that all social interaction is like a theatrical performance in which actors perform one of the many roles available to them, depending on the situation in which they find themselves. Extending Goffman's analysis of self-presentation, Emler and Reicher's (1995: 112-113) notion of reputation management identifies two great problems for all actors on the stage of everyday life: reputations can decay without constant attention, but they can also persist to frustrate all efforts at personal change or betterment. Reputation management therefore requires that "one must as far as possible act in ways that are consistent with the reputation to which one lays claim. Additionally, one must attend to publicity, as "there is no guarantee one's achievements will be broadcast." Friends and enemies must be informed. As a Sparta hooligan commented:

The Internet facilitates a new way of communicating with other hooligan groups. I think it is crucial for discussing and evaluating fights. And of course for keeping others up to date with your activities, to show what you have done. Basically all confrontations are listed on websites, so you can also find out what has been going on at other clubs. Of course it will also attract police, so you have to be a bit more careful. That's why most message boards are members-only now, but we still have access to them. It's instant communication and a kind of PR.

As Goffman observed, in all performances there can be problems of "expressive control" caused by momentary lapses, slips and accidents which would convey impressions other than those intended. Therefore, one must also be prepared for reputation repair work, that is, to "put the record straight". To retain or re-establish its honour and reputation, the hooligan formation has to respond effectively to (the threat of) defeat. Once an attack by a

rival gang becomes public knowledge, “a failure to respond threatens to make retrospectively ridiculous the pretensions of all in the attacked group” (Katz, 1988: 141).

Collective management of reputation is thus central to the evolvment and escalation of inter-group rivalry. Past events and disagreements between opposing groups can become important reference points in sustaining great hostility and triggering violent responses. In such deep-seated inter-group hostilities serious injuries and deaths are relatively likely to occur. Less prestigious groups are often particularly eager to inflict damage on the reputation of more prestigiously perceived groups as a way of enhancing their status in the hierarchy of hooligan oppositions. A similar dynamics can be observed at an interpersonal level in singling out informal hooligan leaders or notorious fighters: “Everybody was talking about this Rolo, like he was a real mean bastard, you know. He was the one to take on. So on match day I told my mates, look, I will get this Rolo and beat the shit out of him” (former West Ham hooligan).

Contesting public spaces: football hooligans’ territorial identifications

Hooligan encounters are essentially related to the contestation of specific public spaces, notably the defence of home “turf” and the invasion of foreign territory (i.e. the ground and surrounding areas). Space, in this sense, does not simply exist as an ontological fact; it is endowed with social meanings and regimes of signification (Lefebvre, 1991). The emergence of “youth ends” with their exclusive territory within the ground was accompanied by a historical shift in territorial claims on ground space. Groups of young fans increasingly began to regard their specific sections of the ground as home turf to be defended against outsiders, that is, opposing fan groups. Violation of this space was frequently the immediate cause of the severest of conflict displays (Marsh, 1978: 99). Visiting fans attempted to “take” the home territory to demonstrate their toughness, while the home fans would try to expel them.

Territorial identifications are not limited to the football ground. The gradual decline in opportunities for fighting inside football grounds, as a result of increasing controls and impositions, had the unintended consequence of increasingly relocating hooligan encounters from football grounds to new locales. This shift significantly altered the geographical meaning of the football ground itself for football violence (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 224; Spaaij, 2006: 362-365).

Things have obviously changed over the past two decades. Nowadays there are very few opportunities for fighting in and around the ground. The police have most of it under control. That has forced us to go out and plan confrontations and to look for our rivals in a more proactive way. (Feyenoord hooligan)

Contested public spaces include the areas surrounding the ground, pubs or railway stations.

What we wanted to do as a group, we wanted to defend our territory in the East End of London, which was West Ham, but we also wanted to go out to other parts of London and up and down the country to say “we are the hardest, we are the best and we can take on anybody if we want to.” (Former West Ham hooligan)

Importantly, home turf is defended only against opposing groups of young fans who share, fundamentally, the same values. There is no question of excluding everyone else except your own immediate group (Marsh, 1978: 99). Honour is lost rather than earned when a hooligan formation allows or promotes attacks on non-hooligan supporters or bystanders. Notwithstanding this broadly shared, yet regularly violated, moral convention, important cross-national and cross-local variations occur in hooligans’ specific sense of how honour and reputation are won. As we have seen, among certain groups of right-wing skinhead fans individual and collective prestige can also be won by assaulting or intimidating ethnic minorities, transvestites or members of rival, non-hooligan youth subcultures (i.e. punks, left-wing skinheads). For those rejecting the adoption of extremist political ideologies in the football context, this type of violence is both futile and undesirable:

The political violence that’s going on in Italian and Spanish football, that’s crazy really. I mean, that’s unthinkable in Holland. I look at football violence only in terms of rivalries between football clubs and groups. You fight for your club, to defend the honour of your club. We’ve had a few incidents with some right-wing skinheads in the 1980s, but nothing major really. Nobody is interested in politics. (Feyenoord hooligan)

Special reference should be made here of the expression of intra-city hooligan rivalries in cities with two or more professional football clubs. In these intra-city rivalries there is, at the everyday level, a stronger contextualization of time and space in distinguishing the legitimate and illegitimate pursuit of hooligan rivalries (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 229).

To enable the continuation of other forms of social identity the intra-city rivals' full dispensation to initiate violence is rather inhibited. In the majority of social spaces oppositions between hooligan formations tend to be functionally suppressed and intra-city rivalries are often regarded as sanctioned only within match-day contexts. For example, two hooligan rivals living only two streets away from each other in a central district of Barcelona seem to have achieved some form of informal agreement as to the suspension of their animosities in everyday life:

Of course, we run into each other all the time. Usually I just nod and walk on. Honestly, there is no point in confronting him in the streets, is there? I mean, where would that end? He knows where I live and I know where he lives. It's a different story when our groups meet on match days. I mean, we have fought each other on various occasions over the years. But during the week there is this kind of mutual understanding. (Espanyol hooligan)

Or, as a West Ham hooligan previously working as a bouncer in a London night club commented: "In all my years as a bouncer I have never been assaulted by rival hooligans. They knew I was working there, but there was no point in mixing up these things, you know. My work had nothing to do with football." Rival hooligans have also occasionally jointly organized and worked as bouncers at lucrative dance parties and sporting events.

In many cases some form of balance in the distribution of access to leisure resources is achieved. Particular pubs, nightclubs and streets are routinely regarded as established territory for one side or another. The entry of opposing groups to these spaces is therefore regarded as deliberately transgressive and assumed to be intimidating, unless other explanations exist (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 229). At other moments, however, hooligan encounters at concerts, dance events or political manifestations have erupted into fighting. Furthermore, the personalization of animosities between individual rivals, usually founded in prior engagements, can threaten to break into a restoration of collective violence. In the Netherlands, a series of relatively minor conflicts between opposing hooligans during dance events have increasingly transformed such events into legitimate sites for contestation. As one The Hague FC hooligan expressed:

We know that they [Ajax hooligans] will be there [a dance event], so we will prepare for a confrontation. And they know it too. Sometimes we communicate with the

Feyenoord or Utrecht lads to see if we can cooperate. If you look at the incidents at dance events in recent history, you just know that that's where major fights are most likely to occur in the near future. There's still hardly any police at these events.

A sense of solidarity and belonging

Violent confrontation is the highpoint of the hooligan's existence and crucial to the construction of collective and individual reputations. Yet it is not the only source of meaning and identity in football hooliganism. Hooligan formations also provide their members with a highly romanticized sense of belonging, solidarity and friendship. As one Sparta hooligan commented:

For many of us friendship, belonging and adventure are just as important as fighting, if not more important. I mean, if it was only about violence you could just beat up anybody in the streets. Hooliganism is much more than that.

Narratives of hooligans reveal how group members claim to 'look after one another' and 'stick together'. Group members are often also among their closest friends and collective experiences strengthen their sense of togetherness: "When I was in jail, my mates looked after my mum. I'll never forget that, you know. They are my true friends" (Feyenoord hooligan). It is the combination of belonging, recognition and reputation that enables the young males to achieve a sense of personal worth and identity. The group is commonly perceived by core hooligans as a major influence in their lives, at least for some time, and some view the group as a substitute for family: "I always felt that the West Ham lads were my family more than my home family, despite me coming from a stable family. [...] Maybe we found a family we never had at home" (West Ham hooligan). Affection for the group tends to be deepest among small numbers of long-standing members and within close-knit subgroups rather than in the periphery of the group or in the group as a whole.

The group is ultimately a place where many things are happening at the same time in a more or less chaotic and spontaneous manner. The very unpredictability of actions and reactions makes "being with the mob" predictably exciting (Katz, 1988: 144). The group is also a source of unofficial protection and remedy for grievances. Relations with members of the in-group are characteristically those of protection rather than aggression. Even when there is conflict within a group it is normally less serious or significant than conflict between

groups (Patrick, 1973). However, partly contradicting hooligans' romanticized notion of belonging, some degree of intra-group conflict can be found in most hooligan formations. At Feyenoord, conflict between subgroups from different neighbourhoods and towns as well as tensions between "old" and "new" generations have been manifest, leading them to operate in a rather autonomous way. These subgroups will usually merge only in anticipation of confrontation with long-standing rivals, such as Ajax or German fans.

Only very occasionally do intra-group conflicts overshadow inter-group hostilities. A notable exception is contemporary football hooliganism at FC Barcelona, which is characterized by an exceptionally high level of intra-group conflict. Despite their allegiance to the same football club, left-wing and right-wing group members increasingly emphasized political allegiances in their construction of collective identity, fomenting increasingly exclusivist in-group and out-group perceptions. This eventually led to the fragmentation and decline of the original hooligan formation and the formation of new subgroups competing for control over public spaces. What we find in this case is that when subgroup differences become more and more emphasized, collective identity gradually breaks down and gives way to newly emerging oppositional identities, resulting in overt hostility and confrontation, and, eventually, in the collapse of the hooligan formation and the rise of new fan identities. This example highlights the dynamic and relational character of collective identities in football fan subcultures.

Besides benefits from group membership there are also duties and risks. Individual interests are linked with those of the hooligan group as a whole. There is an interdependence of individual action and group fate. Individuals must protect the group's honour, even at the risk of personal injury, if they are to enjoy the benefits which come from membership of the group (King, 2001: 574). I vividly recall an incident among Sparta hooligans. In the aftermath of a confrontation between Sparta and FC Dordrecht hooligans, one Sparta hooligan was questioned by other group members as to his whereabouts during the fight, since they suspected he had run off during the fight. He claimed that he got hit by a riot police officer's baton and suffered a concussion. This story was confirmed by other group members who witnessed the incident. Although his story was eventually accepted, unconvinced group members paid very close attention to his behaviour on following occasions: "There are just too many guys who say they want to fight but who shit their pants when it goes off. We cannot rely on people like that" (Sparta hooligan).

On the other hand, when faced by a much larger group, collective fleeing is sometimes deemed appropriate, although it does mean the group will “lose face”. As one Feyenoord hooligan commented:

A lot of people say, like, “I never run away, I always stand my ground.” That’s just non-sense. Listen, if I had never run away during a fight, do you think I would still be here today? I mean, if they confront you with fifty or one hundred people and you are there with ten men, you have to run, don’t you? It’s simply too dangerous, especially since they might be armed with knives or whatever.

The pressure to participate in violent confrontation does not merely come from the in-group. Even if a person wishes to avoid a fight, this wish may be ignored by the opposing group. Merely as a member of a rival group this person becomes a target. In fact, individuals do not even have to be in a group in order to become the focus of aggression, they only have to be identified as members of another hooligan group. Just as in-group pressures can commit individuals to confront members of the out-group, so out-group assumptions can draw people into conflict without it being individually wanted (Emler and Reicher, 1995: 198).

Communicating the threat: representations of sovereignty and autonomy

Football hooligans seek to present an idealized form of collective self as capable of “looking after oneself”. Like street gangs, hooligan formations find violence “compellingly attractive as a means of sustaining the aura of dread that is an essential element in their project of elite rule” (Katz, 1988: 137). But violence is not the only way in which sovereignty can be displayed. An important element of hooligan rivalries is the great deal of symbolic opposition and ritualized aggression involved. In its purest form, this “aggro” is “the art of subduing one’s rival simply by conning him into thinking that his cause is lost from the outset. The aim is to achieve the end that a violent assault might but without resorting to violence” (Marsh, 1978: 17). A key component of aggro is bluff; taunts, “eyeing each other up” from a distance, symbols and graffiti are very much part of this act. With regard to the latter form, an example is the graffiti I encountered on a wall outside the ground of German football club 1. FC Union Berlin the night before a local derby against BFC Dynamo Berlin, on 21 August 2005. It read: “You will bleed for Union.”

Aggro is closely related to another routine practice of hooligan formations: parading. Parading – within the ground, on local streets and on foreign turf – is the process of walking in apparent unison past a relatively stationary public while displaying insignia of membership in a diffusely threatening group (Katz, 1988: 142). Parading plays an important part in the collective management of reputation, allowing the group to sustain its tough image. Aggro and parading are also routine practices that, in addition to violence, are universally employed to raise the spirit of the group and to prevent boredom.

The threat of boredom is closely related to the pressures exercised by agents of social control. Although on the one hand police surveillance and security measures in and around football grounds enable relatively non-injurious symbolic opposition, on the other hand they limit opportunities for fighting and thus for experiencing pleasurable emotional arousal. This may explain why hooligan encounters nowadays tend to occur away from football grounds and why hooligans may go to great lengths to escape police observation, including pre-arranged confrontations. When intent on confronting opponents, parading is considered undesirable since it frustrates attempts to remain unnoticed by the police. I recall an incident with a group of Sparta hooligans on an inter-city train. One hooligan provoked passengers and revealed the identity of the group by shouting abuse and chants. He was told off by the group's informal leaders for attracting the police's attention even before they got off the train: "We don't want them to await us at the platform, do we?" On other occasions, when opportunities for fighting are seen as limited or when a group fears the opponent (e.g. on foreign turf) or is not prepared to fight, parading can become the main practice for that day.

Hooligans' presentation of self as sovereign rulers is closely related to their romanticized notion of autonomy, which is their perceived ability to make their own decisions about what to do rather than being influenced by someone else or being told what to do. Two issues are of particular interest here. First, hooligans' sense of autonomy develops in relation to the subtle yet vital interactions between themselves and agents of social control. Formal policies are tacitly negotiated, producing informal sets of rules (O'Neill, 2005). Police officers are generally accepted as being part of the "game", yet hooligans regularly attempt to manipulate, disrupt or circumvent security regimes.

Second, several hooligan groups have been successful in playing up their public image as "paramilitary forces" that engage in meticulously planned confrontation. Indeed, a whole mythology has built up around their activities. Their concern for style means that they are extremely concerned with the attentions of the media (Hobbs & Robins, 1991: 567). Self-confessed hooligans regularly appear in television news features and documentaries, in

newspapers and magazines, and in books. Experienced hooligans are particularly recognizant of the mediated nature of fan and hooligan reputations, resembling the “post-fan” described by Giulianotti (1999). However, unlike the post-fan, they are, to varying degrees, still involved in violent confrontation.

DISCUSSION

Football hooliganism is a heterogeneous phenomenon that should be studied in its different social and historical contexts. Cultural, social and historical specificities are crucially important for fully grasping the nature and dynamics of football violence. However, as I have argued, this does not preclude the possibility of specific theoretical generalizations concerning fundamental features and mechanisms underlying the phenomenon. While acknowledging the vital role of local circumstances, I have identified some striking commonalities in the identity constructions of football hooligan formations in different national and local contexts. Identifying such commonalities allows us to develop an approach that transcends the isolated view of single manifestations of football hooliganism and reveals the features and social mechanisms that are central to patterns of meaning and expressions of identity in football violence.

The transnational features of football hooliganism described in this text are necessarily general. A more specific comparative analysis would inevitably need to address more extensively the variable social, cultural and historical circumstances in which manifestations of football hooliganism are embedded, which is beyond the scope of this article (see Spaaij, 2006). The social composition of hooligan formations is context-dependent and we can therefore not make any substantial generalizations beyond the fact that football hooligans tend to be young males. Due to this relatively high level of generality, one could argue that the identified categories apply well beyond football hooligan formations and fit several types of male youth ‘gangs’ with an orientation towards violence. I think this is indeed the case as far as the expressions of collective identity are concerned. It is for this reason that I would argue for a cross-fertilization of football hooliganism research and studies of juvenile delinquency and youth culture.

I have deliberately called the proposed approach “partial and preliminary”. Partial, because by focusing on collective identity I have paid little attention to other aspects that need to be addressed in order to adequately explain football hooliganism. These aspects include the more structural-processual underpinnings of football violence, the role of fan cultures and

labelling processes, and the interdependence of football fans, hooligans and agents of social control. Preliminary, because the empirical evidence on which the analysis is based contains a Western European bias. Although I have briefly touched upon resemblances to Argentinian and Brazilian football violence there are also obvious differences, for example with regard to the structural-processual underpinnings of public violence. The available research literature on traditions of football violence in other parts of the world is generally more limited and future research could reveal striking dissimilarities in the construction of fan and hooligan identities.

NOTES

1. Theoretical perspectives on football spectator behaviour have come from a wide range of academic disciplines. The most widely known and consulted explanations of football hooliganism are: Taylor (1971); Clarke (1978); Marsh et al. (1978); Dunning et al. (1988); Giulianotti (1993; 1999); Armstrong (1998); and Stott and Reicher (1998).
2. Passive observation means that the ethnographer is present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent. Moderate observation occurs 'when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation' (Spradley, 1980: 60). It is important to note that I have deliberately sought to avoid 'active' or full participation in the sense of trying to learn and master the behaviour of hooligans and to participate in it to the fullest possible extent.
3. Hooligans vary in their knowledge of and commitment to football. Several hooligans are committed football fans with a broad knowledge of watching and playing the game (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002: 216; Van der Torre & Spaaij, 2003). Others, including many temporary recruits, are principally attracted to football matches as a site for fighting.
4. This is the case for: pleasurable excitement, hard masculinity, and territorial identifications. Dunning et al. (1988) have covered all three issues extensively with regard to English football violence. For different interpretations of pleasurable excitement see Kerr (2005), Giulianotti (1999) and Bairner (2006); on aggressive masculinity see Hobbs and Robins (1991), Armstrong (1998) and Free and Hughson (2003); on territoriality see Marsh (1978) and Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002).

5. Although certainly not confined to adolescence, experimenting with certain forms of deviant or aggressive behaviour is characteristic of this life phase. Boys tend to seek prestige among peers by adopting a tough or masculine attitude. Participation in delinquency appears to be a rather normal part of (male) adolescents' lives.

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