

Football Hooliganism as a Transnational Phenomenon: Past and Present Analysis: A Critique – More Specificity and Less Generality

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Despite the ongoing globalization of football culture and societies at large, there remain important cross-national and cross-local variations in the level and forms of football hooliganism. These dissimilarities thwart efforts to conceptualize and explain football hooliganism as a homogeneous phenomenon and, more specifically, seriously limit the applicability of dominant sociological theories on the subject. The author illustrates his argument with an examination of international research literature and empirical data on the social composition of one Spanish and one Dutch hooligan group. He argues that comparative research into football hooliganism should move beyond general explanations in terms of societal fault lines and towards a more detailed analysis of hooligans' subcultural identities and social interactions.

Two decades after spectator violence at football matches was first officially recognized as an international cause for concern, with the ratification of the European Convention on Spectator Violence in 1985, the common stereotype of football hooliganism as an exclusively 'English disease' no longer prevails. It has been replaced by a belief that, while in Britain football-related violence may be on the decline, hooliganism on the Continent is perhaps more serious and less effectively controlled. Despite the growing public and media focus on hooligan behaviour in other parts of the world, academic research into football hooliganism still concentrates disproportionately on the British situation. In this contribution I want to move away from this narrow focus towards a discussion of the diversity of football hooliganism worldwide. I argue that sociologists tend to overlook cross-cultural variations in the level and forms of football hooliganism. These dissimilarities have important

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implications for the applicability of sociological approaches that tend to explain football hooliganism in terms of the specific class bases of football-related violence or of historical developments in British football. Both types of explanations cannot fully account for the characteristics of football hooliganism in non-British contexts.

Before examining cross-national and cross-local variations in football hooliganism, it is necessary to first define and conceptualize the phenomenon. This task is not unproblematic and raises a number of critical issues as to what is different about football hooliganism in comparison with other forms of spectator violence at football matches. In the second part of the paper I discuss the main sociological approaches to the study of football hooliganism and their limitations in a comparative context. In part three I introduce data from two case studies on hooligan groups in Spain and the Netherlands. The purpose of these illustrations is to demonstrate the practical heterogeneity of the phenomenon. I conclude by examining some directions for future comparative research into football hooliganism.

What is Football Hooliganism?

There is no precise definition of 'football hooliganism'. The phenomenon lacks a legal definition and a precise demarcation of membership, and the concept is used to cover a variety of actions which take place in more or less directly football-related contexts. [1] Contemporary scholars such as Frosdick and Marsh tend to acknowledge the problems in defining football hooliganism yet they avoid any attempt to propose a (working) definition of the subject in their own studies. [2] The label 'football hooliganism' is, in fact, a construct of the media and politicians rather than a social scientific concept. It is often used in a 'cover-all' sense, in which various forms of minor and more serious 'violence' are grouped together under the umbrella term 'football hooliganism' to refer to football fans who cause 'harm' to society.

In search of a more precise conceptualization of football hooliganism, an ideal typical distinction can be drawn between spontaneous incidents of spectator violence and the behaviour of socially organized fan groups that engage in competitive violence, principally with fan groups of opposing football clubs. [3] The distinction between spontaneous violence and more socially organized and premeditated forms of spectator violence is historically observable in a shift from a pattern in which attacks on match officials and opposing players predominated over attacks on rival fans to a pattern in which inter-fan group fighting and fighting between fans and the police became the predominant form of spectator disorderliness. [4] This shift has taken place in various European countries, but at different times.

The genesis of football hooliganism as a widely recognized matter of concern lies in (the media coverage of) the increasingly violent 'youth end' rivalries that emerged in the 1960s in England, particularly in the aftermath of the 1966 World Cup Finals. Compared to the inter-group rivalries that developed from the 1960s onwards, the spectator violence that took place at football matches in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century was relatively unorganized, spontaneous and ad hoc. As Holt observes:

There are manifest continuities between the rites of violence in contemporary Britain and earlier periods. But the *specific forms* of hooliganism are new; football crowds were not segregated by age before the 1960s; youth did not congregate around parts of football clubs as their territory – they had a larger territory and community which they shared with their older relatives. When there were fights at football matches there was no dramatic media coverage. [5]

The concept of football hooliganism in its contemporary sense thus refers to the social genesis of distinctive fan subcultures and their engagement in regular and collective violence, primarily with rival peers. [6]

In a limited number of cases, traditions of football hooliganism existed before the 1960s. For example, in Scotland, violent confrontations between rival fan groups of Glasgow Celtic and Glasgow Rangers have occurred since at least the 1920s. [7] In the mid-1950s, Yugoslavian football witnessed a wave of spectator violence known as ‘Zusism’, consisting of armed confrontations between rival groups. [8] In Catalonia, the deep-seated rivalry between fan groups of FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol (previously written in Castilian as RCD Español) first turned radical in the 1920s. Espanyol’s fan club Peña Deportiva Ibérica was founded in 1923 within Barcelona’s fascist circles to ‘defend’ the colours of Espanyol, not only in football but also in regional political conflict. At stake was ‘the affirmation of the principles of national unity in all areas of public life’. [9] In 1925, the fan group transformed from a sports grouping into a political body (Peña Ibérica) seeking to promote *Hispanidad* (Spanishness) among all sectors of Catalan society. [10] The group initially had a few hundred members, among whom were civil servants, students and army officials. Its main activity in the early years consisted in combating the ‘anti-Spanish’ and ‘separatist’ politics of FC Barcelona, both ideologically and physically. Peña Ibérica obtained a fearsome reputation for provoking (armed) confrontations at local derbies, which regularly resulted in injuries among spectators. At FC Barcelona, the *Penya Ardèvol*, led by the Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling champion Emili Ardèvol, regularly intimidated and assaulted fans of rival teams, most notably those of local rival Espanyol. [11] These early traditions of football hooliganism differ from their modern equivalents in that they were mostly local or regional and did not involve the regular attendance of large groups of young fans.

The proposed definition of football hooliganism as the competitive violence of socially organized fan groups is a useful analytical tool. However, we should be aware that it cannot fully account for the complexity and variability of the phenomenon. At least five conceptual dilemmas can be identified. First, while football hooliganism primarily consists of competitive violence between rival fan groups, hooligans’ violent behaviour is not restricted to inter-group fighting but may include missile throwing, vandalism, attacks on police or non-hooligan supporters or racial abuse. At least in some countries, hooligan groups may consider police a ‘legitimate opponent’,

especially in the process of trying to separate warring parties. [12] Second, the violent behaviour of hooligan groups takes places not only at or in the immediate vicinity of football grounds, but also in other contexts, for example city centres, pubs, clubs or railway stations. [13] Third, football hooliganism involves a great deal of symbolic opposition and ritualized aggression which is easily confused with ‘real’ violence. [14] For many supporters identifying with football hooliganism, violence ‘is not as central to their association as is sometimes assumed and rather the result of the “game” of confrontation and their willingness occasionally to turn symbolic opposition into physical encounter’. [15]

Fourth, even when self-declared hooligans are committed to the use of violence, their behaviour may be triggered by more spontaneous elements such as aggressive policing or events on the pitch. The term ‘organized’ may in such cases be misleading. A common error, for instance within journalist and police circles, is to over-stress the degree of formal organization involved in football violence. This view portrays hooligan groups as paramilitary organizations in which ‘ring leaders’, ‘generals’ or ‘lieutenants’ initiate and coordinate riots. In reality, the degree of organization involved in football hooliganism appears to vary across cultures and localities. Even within British football the degree of organization involved in football hooliganism tends to vary significantly, as is suggested by the National Criminal Intelligence Service: ‘The amount and quality of this organization varies greatly between groups, from a highly disciplined, hierarchical criminal group that associates continuously throughout the week to a more casual grouping that comes on the occasion of a football match with the intention of committing violent acts.’ [16]

Fifth, dissimilarities between countries complicate the conceptualization of football hooliganism. Self-declared hooligan groups have equivalent counterparts throughout northern and central Europe. Quite distinctive fan subcultures exist in more southern parts of Europe and in Latin America. In countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and (parts of) France, so-called ‘ultras’ are militant fan groups, but their proclivities to violence vary substantially. [17] Ultra groups usually feature a comparatively high degree of formal organization, including official membership and recruitment campaigns. [18] Their basic function is to provide expressive and colourful support to the team, and therefore they are not necessarily concerned with defeating or humiliating their peers through intimidation or violence. [19] Although militant fan groups in Latin America (*barras bravas*, *hinchadas* or *torcidas organizadas*) resemble European hooligan groups in some respects, there are also important differences. For example, the *barras bravas* engage in political activity and, in addition, orchestrate violent confrontations with rival supporters. [20] Configured like paramilitary task forces, the *barras bravas* ‘carry out illegitimate tasks by means of violence and compulsion, and are used by sporting and political leaders for that purpose’. [21]

The aforementioned dilemmas confirm the idea that football hooliganism is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon. The level, seriousness and forms of football hooliganism seem to vary across countries and localities, presenting a case of great cross-national and cross-local variability. A fundamental question for

sociologists in the field should be how and to what degree existing theoretical frameworks can account for these variations. As we will see in the next section, there is reason to suggest that the dominant sociological approaches cannot fully account for the practical heterogeneity of the phenomenon.

Sociological Approaches and their Limitations

Scholars studying football hooliganism have long avoided cross-cultural comparisons. From the 1980s onwards, an academic consensus began to emerge that football hooliganism was by no means exclusively an 'English disease' and that investigations of other, non-English, forms of football fan behaviour constituted a potentially valuable addition to the growing body of research into the matter. A transnational research community slowly began to develop, evidence of which were various international conference proceedings and non-English research publications on football fan behaviour. [22] More recently, some important publications have further contributed to the expansion of this field of research, most notably the volumes edited by Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, and by Eric Dunning and his associates. [23] However, taking into consideration the very general nature of the analytical frameworks proposed, it is important to note that such approaches represent 'a foundation for further research rather than an end-product'. [24]

Despite the trend towards some form of cross-cultural comparison, Giulianotti's earlier claim that 'there has been little endeavour by British academics to engage fully in an international dimension on football hooliganism' is still valid today. [25] A major cause of this situation is the traditional dominance of English sociological theories coupled with their almost exclusive focus on domestic forms of spectator violence at football matches. Within Britain, theoretical perspectives on football fan behaviour have come from a wide range of academic disciplines, including various strands in sociology, urban ethnography, anthropology, psychology, criminology, political science, public administration, communication science and cultural studies. In contrast, the theoretical input of international scholars has been very limited, and there are no obvious international schools of theory. [26]

Among sociological studies of football hooliganism, three quite clearly delineated theoretical approaches can be distinguished: (i) the Marxist approaches by Ian Taylor and John Clarke; (ii) the figurational approach of the 'Leicester School'; and (iii) the postmodernist approaches by Giulianotti and Redhead. These approaches will only be outlined in brief here, since they have been discussed at some length elsewhere. [27]

Marxist Approaches

In his earlier contributions sociologist Ian Taylor explained the emergence of football hooliganism in Britain in terms of the economic and social changes in society and

football. [28] Major changes in football itself, traditionally a male working-class sport, were believed to have alienated working-class fans from the game: commercialization, internationalization and professionalization. The sense of alienation experienced by working-class fans was further exacerbated by a more general alienation of parts of the working class resulting from changes in the labour market and the decomposition of traditional working-class communities. Football hooliganism, Taylor argued, should be interpreted as a kind of working-class resistance movement, as ‘the democratic response by the rump of a soccer subculture to the bourgeoisification of their game’. [29]

A broadly similar approach was developed by John Clarke. [30] He argued that hooliganism originates in the way in which the traditional forms of football watching encounter the professionalization and spectacularization of the game: ‘It is one of the consequences of the changing relationship of its audience and the game.’ [31] Clarke stressed that specific subcultural styles enable young working-class males to resolve essential conflicts in their lives. Post-war youth subcultures were all examples of these symbolic attempts to resolve structural and material problems. Football hooliganism, closely associated with the skinhead subculture in the 1960s and 1970s, is one such symbolic attempt.

The explanations of both Taylor and Clarke have been criticized as speculative, politically motivated theories lacking empirical confirmation. In his later work, Taylor developed a different theoretical approach to football hooliganism. [32] Reformulating his original thesis, he now argued that the rise of a ‘new’ hooligan results from the culture of the upwardly-mobile, individualistic section of the (male) British working class, which has done relatively well out of the restructuring of British industry and business in the 1970s and 1980s. The ‘new’ hooligan, in turn, has produced the jingoistic, racist and xenophobic behaviour of some English football fans abroad. [33]

The Figurational Approach

Responding to what they called an ‘orthodoxy’ of theories of football hooliganism, including the early approach of Ian Taylor, Eric Dunning and his colleagues at the University of Leicester developed an alternative explanation of the phenomenon. Their ‘figurational sociological’ approach draws heavily upon Norbert Elias’s theory of the civilizing process. [34] One of that theory’s basic assumptions is that throughout recent history values of ‘civilized’ behaviour have penetrated the social classes in Europe; however, they have not yet fully penetrated the lower strata of the working class. The figurational approach explains football hooliganism in terms of the structure of the lower strata of society and the traditional relationship between members of these strata and football itself. According to Dunning and his colleagues, fighting is one of the few sources of excitement, meaning and status available to males from the lower working class. Their specific aggressive masculinity does not, however, derive simply from the manner in which lower working-class communities are

integrated into society at large. Lower working-class communities also tend to generate norms or standards which, relative to those of groups higher up on the social scale, are conducive to and tolerant of a high level of aggression in social relations. The 'rougher' sections of lower working-class communities appear to be characterized by feedback processes which encourage fall-backs on aggressive behaviour in many areas of social relations, especially on the part of males. [35] In short, although they emphasize that young men from the lower working class are not the *only* football hooligans, Dunning and his colleagues stress that these youths 'seem to be the most central and persistent offenders in the more serious forms of football hooliganism'. [36]

The work of the 'Leicester School' is by now the most widely known and consulted body of enquiry into the causes and nature of football hooliganism. [37] It has been an inspiration for many European scholars in the field for nearly two decades and has been praised on a theoretical as well as on a methodological level. [38] The theoretical framework and methodology employed by Dunning and his colleagues have, however, been criticized on various occasions. [39] It has been suggested that their theoretical approach operates on a high level of generality and has an aura of universalistic applicability and 'irrefutability'. [40] As King puts it, 'in its less self-critical moments, Dunning's approach tends towards teleology'. [41] The figurational approach nevertheless remains the most widely consulted body of enquiry into the matter.

Postmodernist Approaches

Steve Redhead's publications highlight the 'postmodernist' influences in football culture. [42] It is no longer possible, he argues, to explain football hooliganism through the classical prism of moral panics. [43] Redhead claims that, towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, important changes occurred in masculine football culture. Football hooliganism 'disappeared' into post-fandom, signalling a transition of football culture into popular fan and media culture. Redhead's work concentrates on the relationships between supporter styles and pop music subcultures, within which he locates the 'style wars' of the football 'casuals' (seen as the new type of hooligans).

Richard Giulianotti has provided more strongly theory-based and ethnographically detailed descriptions of football fan behaviour. [44] Like Redhead, he claims that football hooliganism 'in the modern sense' has evolved into a postmodern phenomenon. Giulianotti's work primarily concentrates on supporters of the Scottish national team. He argues that Scottish football fan behaviour derives from specific cultural and historical forces rather than from social structural factors. Scottish fans, especially those following the national team, are seen as seeking to distance themselves from the 'British hooligan' label and particularly from the unruly behaviour of English fans abroad. Their anti-Englishness has led them, in turn, to create a 'friendly' image for themselves. Giulianotti also uses the concept of

'post-fandom' to explain changes in football culture and hooliganism. Post-fans 'represent an epistemic break from older forms of football fandom in that they are cognizant of the constructed nature of fan reputations, and the vagaries of the media in exaggerating or inventing such identities'. [45] Giulianotti asserts that the postmodernist epoch of football hooliganism is signalled most obviously by changes in its political and media treatment.

It is not entirely clear in Giulianotti's analysis whether these transformations have come to replace more 'modern' forms of football hooliganism or coexist with them in various constellations depending on the specific situations at different clubs and in different countries. Moreover, there appear to be important variations in the national trajectories of football culture and hooliganism, which thwart the division of spectator cultures into the categories 'traditional', 'modern' and 'postmodern'. Giulianotti acknowledges these issues himself with regard to differences between the English and the Scottish experience. He points out that, in England, the attempt to construct a normalized, pacified, 'post-hooligan' identity sits uneasily with the continuing activities of real football hooligans.

British Theory and European Evidence: A Reappraisal of Sociological Approaches

It has been suggested that, despite obvious differences between the dominant sociological approaches to football hooliganism, they can be located within a common framework with regard to their predictions of the gender, race, age and class backgrounds of the typical football hooligan. In short, hooligans are male, white, working-class young adults. [46] In my view, the reduction of these theories to such simple equations may have some merit as to identifying the core of the debate, but misjudges the diversity of, for example, Giulianotti's approach. For present purposes, I would like to draw attention to another commonality of sociological explanations of football hooliganism. I argue that, due to their almost exclusive focus on domestic (British) forms of football hooliganism, the approaches converge in undervaluing cross-cultural variations in football hooliganism.

The range of international research published on the subject in the 1990s and early 2000s casts doubt over the universal applicability of the theories presented above. It seems unlikely that Giulianotti's notion of a 'post-hooligan' identity or that of the 'new' hooligan identified by Taylor are easily transferable to non-British contexts. The applicability of the work of the 'Leicester School' to other European countries, which lack the highly specific social class structures found in England, may also be limited, despite Dunning's claim that 'research on the social class of football hooligans... suggests that hooligans in other countries tend to come from social backgrounds similar to those of their English counterparts'. [47] Dunning's interpretation of European research into football hooliganism seems to overlook significant contradictions.

With regard to Scottish football hooligans, Harper has stressed that they 'come predominantly from lower levels of the social scale and are basically working-class

youths'. [48] In contrast, Giulianotti has emphasized the hooligans' social and economic incorporation within mainstream society rather than their structural exclusion. [49] Similar contradictions can be observed in the work of Italian sociologists. In 1991, Roversi stressed that Italian ultras come predominantly from the working class. A decade later the same author suggested that 'Even though the self-producing mechanism of the ultras groups closely resembles the principle of ordered segmentation proposed by Dunning, the social basis of the ultras does not consist predominantly of the lowest and roughest strata of society'. [50]

Roversi's findings are flawed by his failure to distinguish between the 'genuine' ultra fan – engaging in the active and colourful support of the team – and the hooligan-type fan 'intent' on competitive violence. His findings probably tell us more about the class backgrounds of young Italian football fans in general (the ultras) than about those of football hooligans. There are also important dissimilarities in the social composition of Italian ultra (and perhaps hooligan?) groups in different localities. Two local studies carried out in Bologna and Pisa suggest that the social origins of the ultras vary according to demographic context [51] – especially that ultras based in the richer north of Italy tend to come from more prosperous backgrounds. [52] A similar pattern of local and regional variation appears to exist in German football hooliganism. Ek has noted that West German hooligans come from all social classes and that, in the 1990s, there was an increasing dominance of young men from middle- or upper-class milieux within hooligan groups. [53] In contrast, football hooliganism in East Germany traditionally contained a strong element of social protest and provocation which can be located within the identity crisis of the East and its depressing social circumstances. [54]

In a more recent publication, Eric Dunning acknowledges the significance of cross-cultural variations for the explanation of football hooliganism. Dunning suggests that football hooliganism may be 'fuelled and contoured' by, among other factors, the major fault lines of particular societies:

In England, that means social class and regional inequalities; in Scotland and Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism; in Spain, linguistic sub-nationalisms of the Catalans, Castillians, Gallegos and Basques; in Italy, city particularism and perhaps the division between North and South as expressed in the formation of the 'Northern League'; and in Germany, the relations between East and West and political groups of the left and right. [55]

One of the differences that these variable patterns may make, Dunning argues, is that sectarianism and city particularism as bases for football hooliganism may draw in more people from higher up the social scale. A shared characteristic of all societal fault lines is that they involve variants of 'established-outsider figurations' in which intense 'we-group' bonds and correspondingly intense antagonisms towards 'outsiders' are liable to develop. [56] The concept of societal fault lines may provide an important new departure in the study of football hooliganism and corresponds,

to some extent, with the concept of cleavage structures coined by political scientists Lipset and Rokkan. [57]

Recent attempts to account for cross-cultural variations in football hooliganism by identifying the general fault-lines of particular societies have increased sociologists' awareness of the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, comparative research into football hooliganism has paid relatively little attention to more localized processes and variations. I would argue that the undervaluing of cross-local variation still constitutes an important omission in the study of football hooliganism.

Transnational Linkages and the Continuing Importance of the Local

Football hooliganism transgresses national boundaries and has undergone processes of globalization. Hooligan subcultures historically revolved around British terrace culture. On the continent, the British subcultures underwent a process of cultural creolization as indigenous fan groups merged the adopted patterns with their own distinctive cultural forms. [58] This diffusion of cultural practices also occurred in a reverse direction, as for example seen in the introduction into British fan culture of Continental designer-clothing (casual) styles in the early 1980s. Furthermore, the ultra subcultures dominant in countries such as Italy, Spain and parts of France have come to influence supporter groups in northern Europe, with similar fan groups being formed, to varying extents, in countries such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and parts of Scandinavia. In the 1990s British fan subcultures also started to experiment with aspects of the Southern European model, through the use of Latin chant patterns and musical bands. [59] In 2004 an ultra-style group named Leeds Ultras emerged at Leeds United.

The intensity and rapidity of today's global cultural flows contribute to the misleading belief that the world is becoming a 'single', a more unified place. [60] Recent changes in the football industry, for example the expansion of the Champions League, are believed to enhance the homogenization of football cultures. Transnational cultural flows have, however, not affected different countries to a similar extent. [61] Football is a social sphere in which the complex and dynamic intertwinement of the local and the global can be observed par excellence. The fan cultures of particular clubs 'share ritual elements, but at the same time each fan culture exhibits distinct forms of prescribed formal ritual behaviour and symbolism'. [62] Local historical and cultural traditions and legacies continue to exert a strong influence over patterns of behaviour. Although (British) football culture appears to be changing with unprecedented speed, notions of post-fandom and post-hooliganism do not (yet) correspond to an evenly distributed and widely recognized phenomenon. In his detailed account of Millwall fandom, Robson correctly argues that:

[T]hough growing numbers of individuals characterizable as ... *post-fans* do clearly exist, it is far from clear that the bases of participation for the majority have radically changed. This is likely to be most true, as is the case with Millwall, of small

and medium-sized clubs with little or no appeal beyond their own historical and social-ecological limits. [63]

Dissimilarities in the level and forms of football hooliganism need to be understood in terms of the way hooligan subcultures are nested within the ritual and collective symbolism of each fan culture. [64] We must therefore take into account variations in football hooliganism not only *between* but also *within* countries, regions, cities or fan communities. This approach contradicts, to some degree, the concept of fault-lines, since the latter operates on a high level of generality. Although the fault-lines of particular societies may help to explain cross-national resemblances and dissimilarities in football hooliganism, they fail to account for specific spatial (local, regional) and temporal variations.

Within the context of cross-local diversity we should also examine the interactional dynamics of football hooliganism. Localized forms of football hooliganism revolve around social interactions between the authorities, the local football club, the fan community and hooligans. One way of approaching these interactions is to focus on the effects of official attempts to curb football hooliganism. Murphy and his associates have correctly argued that

as the controls imposed by central government, the football authorities and the police have grown more all-embracing, tighter and sophisticated, so the football hooligans in their turn have tended to become more organized and to use more sophisticated strategies and plans in an attempt to evade the controls. At the same time, football hooligan fighting has tended to become displaced from an immediate football context and to take place at times and in situations where the controls are, or are perceived to be, weak or non-existent. [65]

Approaches of this kind tend to highlight the large number of measures designed to curb football hooliganism: the segregation of home and away fans, fencing, closed-circuit television (CCTV), conversion to all-seater stadiums, identity card schemes, intelligence-led policing and so forth. In recent years social psychologists have developed a more dynamic approach to studying the interactions between police officers and football fans. Whereas most scholars tend to concentrate on explaining football hooliganism in terms of the macro-social origins of conflictual norms, these authors emphasize more strongly the ways in which understandings and behaviours develop in context such that even those who initially and ordinarily eschew violence may come to act violently. [66] I would argue that, while cross-national differences in policing in western Europe seem to have diminished, [67] the contents and effects of police-supporter interactions still vary considerably across localities, depending, among other factors, on police professionalism and culture and on fans' perceptions of the police. Analysis of the cross-national and cross-local variations in football hooliganism should also include other forms of (symbolic) interaction, notably the relations between hooligans and clubs and anti-hooligan initiatives within fan communities. There are, for example, important dissimilarities with regard to the

extent to which, and the forms in which, football clubs engage in the prevention of football hooliganism. [68]

To illustrate the diversity of football hooliganism within western Europe, I will now present some empirical evidence on the social composition of one Spanish ultra group (Brigadas Blanquiazules) and one Dutch hooligan group (Sparta Youth Crew). The data presented here were gathered by the author as part of ethnographic research in the Netherlands and Spain between 2001 and 2005 and consist of over 200 interviews with self-confessed hooligans and ultras.

The Social Composition of Football Hooligan Groups: the Spanish and Dutch Experiences

Football Hooliganism in Spain: The Case of Brigadas Blanquiazules

The Spanish ultra subculture has been appealing to young men and women from all social classes from its very beginnings, yet there are important regional and local variations. [69] Two recent sociological studies seem to confirm this idea. An ethnographic study of militant fan groups in Andalucía suggests that 77 per cent of the ultras are students, though comparatively many of them are engaged in vocational studies (no percentage is noted). Thirteen per cent work, and a further ten per cent are unemployed. [70] A survey of 246 ultras from Frente Atlético (Atlético Madrid) concludes that almost half of the ultras are students, of which 24 per cent are at a university level. Nine per cent of the ultras are unemployed. [71] Regrettably, both authors fail to draw a distinction (which is, I agree, problematic) between 'non-violent' ultras and those fans regularly engaging in competitive violence with rival supporters. Nor do they distinguish effectively between different types of work or education. The social composition of Spanish ultra and hooligan groups vary in time as well as place. Even within one city or within one fan community, opposing ultra groups or hooligan cores may have very different characteristics. For example, in Barcelona, where FC Barcelona's radical fan group Boixos Nois has traditionally had a mixed social composition, the ultras of RCD Espanyol have historically come from higher up the social scale.

The foundation of the ultra group Brigadas Blanquiazules in 1985 at RCD Espanyol indicated an important development in Spain's and in Barcelona's political far right: the eruption within right-wing circles of youth groups originating from football grounds and peripheral districts. Rather than being influenced or led by official right-wing formations, these ultras emerged in the absence of a formally organized far right, which was fragmented and incapable of confronting the more dynamic and successful independence movement in Catalonia. The autonomous character of Brigadas Blanquiazules was also determined by the fact that, in the 1980s and early 1990s, right-wing formations such as Juntas Españolas, Frente Nacional and the Círculo Español De Amigos De Europa (CEDADE) refused to integrate football ultras within their ranks. The ultras were perceived to generate unrest and lack party

discipline, thereby damaging the public image of the political groups. [72] From its early beginnings, however, leaders of the ultra group maintained loose relationships with traditional right-wing organizations, for instance with *Juntas Españolas* and its juvenile branch *Juntas Jóvenes*, within which they acted as an unofficial liaison and participated in meetings.

As in most Spanish ultra groups, the politicization of members and affiliates of *Brigadas Blanquiazules* tends to take place by osmosis and through contacts with specific environments – football matches or (skinhead) music concerts – rather than as a result of ideological training or fixed and consistent political ideologies. [73] Many group members do not express a profound knowledge of national socialism or (neo-)fascism, but they nevertheless identify with the values or actions closest to it. The ultras' political militancy and aesthetics illustrate their search for social visibility and provocation and their (symbolic) resistance to the 'system'. Their collective identity, based on a mixture of club loyalty, neo-fascism and Spanish nationalism, is diametrically opposed to *Boixos Nois*'s historical ties with Catalan nationalism. Members of *Brigadas Blanquiazules* have identified with the use of violence from the group's early beginnings. These ultras hold a fearsome reputation for their involvement in various types of violence within and outside the football context, including attacks on immigrants and violent robberies. Police have suggested that most of these robberies are not committed for financial gain, since the perpetrators often belong to 'well-off families', but merely serve as a justification for starting a fight. [74]

The social composition of *Brigadas Blanquiazules* has changed substantially over time. Initially the majority of group members were young men from (upper) middle-class families. The ultras' sociopolitical identity appealed to many young fans from higher up the social scale, and the club's location in the upmarket *Sarrià* district meant that the group drew a large part of its support from this area. Several of these 'well-off' ultras, so-called *niños pijos* ('posh kids'), held a widespread reputation for their violent and racist proclivities. Journalistic and police descriptions of football hooliganism at *Espanyol* have repeatedly emphasized the central involvement of *pijos* in *Brigadas Blanquiazules*. [75]

Although several group members can still be categorized as 'middle class', the class composition of *Brigadas Blanquiazules* has become more heterogeneous over time as a result of the group's explosive growth in the second half of the 1980s. The number of group members increased rapidly during this period, from 80 in 1985 to approximately 300 only years later, and the group came to attract growing numbers of working-class youths. The group's rapid expansion resulted from a combination of factors: the increasing popularity of the ultra and skinhead subculture among young males throughout the country; the group's growing reputation within Catalonia; the unprecedented media attention for the ultra and hooligan subculture; *Espanyol*'s league success in the 1986–7 season (finishing third in the Premier League) and the club's successful UEFA Cup run in the 1987–8 season; and the decline of other youth fan groups at the club. The presence and influence of ultras and hooligans from middle-class milieux nevertheless remains very significant at *Espanyol*. [76]

In using the case of the Brigadas Blanquiazules as an illustration of the diversity of football hooliganism in a comparative context, I do not suggest that Spanish ultras and hooligans in general tend to come from higher up the social scale, or that social class is not a relevant factor. The matter is, in fact, far more complex. In Cádiz, for example, the social backgrounds of members of left-wing ultra group Brigadas Amarillas tend to correspond with the deprived social circumstances in the area. The unemployment rate in Cádiz is among the highest in the country, around 30 per cent. Taking account of these important local and regional variations, historian Carles Viñas correctly argues that ‘the ultras form a complex variety in terms of their social situations, academic formation and family life’. [77]

Football Hooliganism in the Netherlands: The Case of the Sparta Youth Crew

The emergence of football hooliganism in the Netherlands, in the early 1970s, should be located within the context of post-war social changes. Youth began to emerge as a distinct social category with their own cultural practices and styles, and were increasingly influenced by British youth subcultures. In the country’s main cities large numbers of working-class youth from different districts and suburbs began to attend football matches. [78] The first supporter ‘sides’, similar to British youth ‘ends’, emerged in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. At first the incidents provoked by ‘siders’ were only sporadic and mostly related to events on the pitch, such as missile-throwing directed at the referee or opposing players. [79] From the mid-1970s onwards the fan groups in the four main cities began to evolve into more cohesive entities with their own names and symbols, and similar fan groups started to emerge in other Dutch cities. Their involvement in competitive violence increased rapidly. Despite the sides’ working-class traditions, the social composition of contemporary football hooligan groups in the Netherlands appears to be rather diverse. In most of the current *harde kernen* or *jongerenkernen* (self-styled hooligan [youth] cores), especially at clubs without deep-seated working-class traditions, we have found a mixture of social backgrounds. [80]

Variations in social backgrounds can also be found at a local level. In Rotterdam, where Feyenoord’s hooligan group holds an internationally recognized reputation, modest local rival Sparta Rotterdam was traditionally perceived as a ‘friendly club’ without hooligans. This situation changed in 1999 when a group of young fans ‘interested’ in confronting their cultural peers began to form the Sparta Youth Crew (SYC). Inspired by their precursors in Britain and the Netherlands, within years the SYC transformed from a spontaneous, relatively unorganized group of like-minded friends into a more cohesive fan group that regularly engages in violent confrontation with opposing hooligan groups. The SYC differs from the hooligan formation at Feyenoord in size as well as in character. The youth crew consists of a core of 15 young men in their late teens and early 20s, but for high-profile matches their numbers push 50 – compared to their local rival’s maximum of about 400. Importantly, while Feyenoord’s hooligan group resembles in some respects Suttles’s

concept of 'ordered segmentation' as applied by Dunning and his colleagues, the SYC certainly does not. [81]

Few of the SYC's core members actually live in Rotterdam and those who do are not concentrated in one area of the city. Most hooligans still live with their parents in towns such as Brielle, Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, Vlaardingen, Zevenkamp and Delft. Although the hooligans celebrate a hard masculine identity based on physical prowess, their collective identity is also constructed in relation to Feyenoord hooligans and certain other Dutch hooligan formations. Whereas the latter are portrayed as 'rough, hard-core criminals', the Sparta hooligans view themselves as a more sophisticated, fashionable 'fighting crew' and hooliganism is commonly regarded as a temporary lifestyle. As one hooligan put it:

Feyenoord hooligans have very different backgrounds. I mean, many of them have no education, both parents on drugs, brought up in a culture of violence. Our group is completely different. We come from stable families, quite well-off, have certain values in life, an education. They will probably still be doing their business when they're 35. I certainly won't. I have others goals in life, you know.

Many SYC members are enrolled in universities, while some have already completed their university degree. Full-time occupations vary from teaching in primary or secondary schools to healthcare professionals and a printing-office employee. Only one of the group's core members is a builder. [82]

An ethnographic study on core members of FC Haarlem's hooligan group FCH Fanatics has reached very similar conclusions. Six out of ten studied at university level or had obtained a university degree (BA, BSc or MA). The vast majority (around 80 per cent) of the self-declared hooligans claimed neither to perceive themselves as 'working class' nor to have been raised in an environment conducive to aggression or the use of violence. In fact, they rejected the use of violence in everyday life, but were 'addicted' to the adrenalin rush they got from engaging in, organizing and fantasizing about football-related violence. [83] In conclusion, it seems that the social backgrounds of Dutch football hooligans have become more heterogeneous over time and vary significantly across localities.

Conclusion

This text has sought to demonstrate the great practical heterogeneity of football hooliganism. Cross-national and cross-local variations in the extent and nature of football hooliganism seriously limit the applicability of the main sociological approaches due to their focus on the specific class bases of football-related violence or historical developments in British football. Despite these variations it is, however, possible to assert, at least to some extent, the theoretical unity of the phenomenon. This could be achieved by the construction of a comparative framework that accounts for the key elements of football hooliganism worldwide. A useful starting point for the establishment of a comparative analytical framework may be, as Dunning

suggests, the identification of the fault-lines or cleavages of particular societies. These fault-lines may help us understand the origins and development of specific insider and outsider relations; of the 'us' and 'them' in football rivalries.

However, I see three major reasons why the fault-lines concept does not provide a sufficient framework for the explanation of football hooliganism in comparative perspective: (i) it operates on a high level of generality, disregarding more specific aspects which co-shape the nature and development of football hooliganism, for example local football-related 'cleavages' and rivalries; (ii) it cannot fully account for more specific social interactions between hooligans and significant others, and specific processes of cultural diffusion; and (iii) it fails to account for some of the striking commonalities in football hooliganism worldwide. Key common elements are, for example, the hard masculine identity and territorial identifications involved, and the psycho-social pleasure that football hooliganism arouses in its participants – all of these not necessarily epiphenomena of social class but constituent parts of football hooliganism worldwide.

A comparative framework of the kind I suggest has yet to be developed. There are still large gaps in the body of comparative research into football hooliganism. Academic accounts of hooliganism in countries outside Britain remain relatively scarce despite recent contributions towards rectifying this imbalance. Gaps in coverage remain in parts of eastern Europe and Latin America, but also in western European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden. It is to be hoped that further comparative research into football hooliganism will also focus more explicitly on regional and local variations in the circumstances and forms of football hooliganism as well as the contents and outcomes of social interactions between hooligans and their social environment.

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Notes

- [1] Dunning, 'Towards a Sociological Understanding', 142; Williams, 'The Costs of Safety', 1.
- [2] Frosdick and Marsh, *Football Hooliganism*, 27–9.
- [3] Spaaij, 'The Prevention of Football Hooliganism', 1; Giulianotti, 'A Different Kind of Carnival', 141; Stokvis, *De Sportwereld*, 148–52.
- [4] Dunning, 'The Social Roots', 136.
- [5] Holt, *Sport and the British*, 343 (emphasis in original).
- [6] Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*, 49.
- [7] Murray, *The Old Firm*.
- [8] Dunning et al., 'If You Think You're Hard Enough', 342.
- [9] Culla, 'L'Extrema Dreta', 50.
- [10] Artells, *Barça, Barça, Barça*, 190.

- [11] Sobreques, *FC Barcelona*, 271–2.
- [12] Galvani and Palma, ‘La Hinchada de Uniforme’, 161–82.
- [13] Dunning, ‘Towards a Sociological Understanding’, 142.
- [14] Marsh, *Aggro*.
- [15] Armstrong and Harris, ‘Football Hooligans’, 434.
- [16] Private correspondence, Dec. 2002.
- [17] Giulianotti, ‘A Different Kind of Carnival’, 142; Spaaij and Viñas, ‘Passion, Politics and Violence’, 80–1.
- [18] De Biasi, ‘The Policing of Hooliganism in Italy’, 216–18.
- [19] Giulianotti, ‘A Different Kind of Carnival’, 142; Mignon, ‘Le Francais Feel-Good Factor’, 173.
- [20] Duke and Crolley, ‘Football Spectator Behaviour in Argentina’, 286–9.
- [21] Alabarces, ‘“Aguante” and Repression’, 34.
- [22] For example: O’Brien, *Proceedings of the European Conference on Football Violence*; Roversi, ‘Football Violence in Italy’; Horak, ‘Things Change’; Giulianotti et al., *Football, Violence and Social Identity*.
- [23] Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*; Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Fear and Loathing in World Football*; Dunning et al., ‘Towards a Global Programme’.
- [24] Dunning et al., ‘Towards a Global Programme’, 218.
- [25] Giulianotti, ‘Social Identity and Public Order’, 30.
- [26] Young, ‘Sport and Violence’, 388. The ‘societal vulnerability’ thesis of Belgian scholars van Limbergen and Walgrave may be considered a notable exception. This approach will not be discussed here separately since it has much in common with the ‘Leicester School’ approach. See van Limbergen and Walgrave, *Sides, Fans en Hooligans*.
- [27] For example: Armstrong, *Football Hooligans*; Giulianotti, ‘Social Identity and Public Order’; Frosdick and Marsh, *Football Hooliganism*.
- [28] Taylor, ‘Soccer Consciousness and Soccer Hooliganism’; ‘Football Mad’.
- [29] Taylor, ‘Football Mad’, 369.
- [30] Clarke, ‘Football and Working Class Fans’; *Football Hooliganism and the Skinheads*.
- [31] Clarke, ‘Football and Working Class Fans’, 50.
- [32] Taylor, ‘Putting the Boot into Working Class Sport’; ‘On the Sports Violence Question’; ‘Hillsborough’.
- [33] See also Williams, ‘Having an Away Day’, 173.
- [34] Williams et al., *Hooligans Abroad*; Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*; Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.
- [35] Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 208–9.
- [36] Dunning et al., ‘Spectator Violence at Football Matches’, 240.
- [37] Robson, ‘No One Likes Us, We Don’t Care’, 29.
- [38] For example King, *The End of the Terraces*, 4; Young, ‘Sport and Violence’, 388.
- [39] See among other works Armstrong, *Football Hooligans*; Armstrong and Harris, *Football Hooligans*; Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*.
- [40] Williams, ‘Having an Away Day’, 177.
- [41] King, *The End of the Terraces*, 4.
- [42] Redhead and McLaughlin, ‘Soccer’s Style Wars’; Redhead, ‘Some Reflections’; Redhead, *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues*.
- [43] Concept coined by Stanley Cohen in his analysis of the criminalization of British youth subcultures in the 1950s and 1960s. See Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.
- [44] Giulianotti, ‘Social Identity and Public Order’; Giulianotti, ‘Football and the Politics of Carnival’; Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*.
- [45] Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*, 148.
- [46] Frosdick and Marsh, *Football Hooliganism*, 84–5.

- [47] Dunning, 'Towards a Sociological Understanding', 159.
- [48] Harper, 'A Study of Football Crowd Behaviour'.
- [49] Giulianotti, 'Hooligans and Carnival Fans', 32.
- [50] Roversi and Balestri, 'Italian Ultras Today', 197–8.
- [51] Roversi, *Calcio, Tifo e Violenza*; Francia, 'I Sostenitori del Pisa'.
- [52] Podaliri and Balestri, 'The Ultras, Racism and Football Culture in Italy', 94.
- [53] Ek, *Hooligans: Fakta, Hintergründe, Analysen*, 73.
- [54] Pilz, 'Eskalation von Gewalt in Zusammenhang', 117–19.
- [55] Dunning, 'Towards a Sociological Understanding', 161.
- [56] See Elias and Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*.
- [57] Lipset and Rokkan, *Part Systems and Voter Alignments*.
- [58] Dunning et al., 'Towards a Global Programme of Research', 223; Giulianotti, 'A Different Kind of Carnival', 143.
- [59] Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology*, 64.
- [60] Featherstone, 'Global Culture: An Introduction', 1–2.
- [61] Hannerz, *Transnational Connections*, 6.
- [62] Back et al., *The Changing Face of Football*, 43.
- [63] Robson, '*No One Likes Us, We Don't Care*', 6 (italics in original).
- [64] Compare Back et al., *The Changing Face of Football*, 43.
- [65] Murphy et al., *Football on Trial*, 89–90.
- [66] Stott and Reicher, 'How Conflict Escalates'.
- [67] Della Porta and Reiter, 'Introduction', 6.
- [68] Spaaij, 'Het Succes van de Britse Voetbalwet'; Spaaij, 'The Prevention of Football Hooliganism'.
- [69] In this text I use the term 'ultra' for the sake of brevity, even though its use in Spain is heavily debated. I agree with Viñas that the use of this label to refer to all militant fan groups in Spanish football is, in fact, incorrect since some fan groups do not identify themselves as such but rather as 'anti-ultras'. See Viñas, *El Mundo Ultra*.
- [70] Rodríguez Díaz, 'Football Fans Groups in Spain', 12.
- [71] Adán Revilla, 'Ultras. Culturas del Fútbol', 91.
- [72] Casals, *El Fascismo*, 71–2.
- [73] Spaaij and Viñas, "'¡A Por Ellos!'", 160.
- [74] *El Periódico*, 19 Dec. 1993.
- [75] For example *El Periódico*, 24 Feb. 1991; *El País*, 9 Dec. 1986; *El Periódico*, 3 Nov. 1991.
- [76] Spaaij, *Understanding Football Hooliganism*; Salas, *Diario de un Skin*.
- [77] Viñas, *El Mundo Ultra*, 190.
- [78] Stokvis, 'Voetbalvandalisme in Nederland', 181.
- [79] Van der Brug, 'Football Hooliganism in The Netherlands', 176.
- [80] Spaaij, *Supportersgedrag en Hooliganisme*.
- [81] Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum*; Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*. For an analysis of football hooliganism at Feyenoord, see van der Torre and Spaaij, 'Rotterdamse Hooligans'.
- [82] These data were gathered in 2003 and 2004 and may therefore be somewhat dated.
- [83] Korthals, 'Fanatieke Supporters', 33–34.

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