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TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF
FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM AS A WORLD PHENOMENON

ABSTRACT. In this article a sociological diagnosis of football hooliganism as a world phenomenon is given. The author uses mainly English (newspaper) data about football violence (in and outside Britain) as an empirical base to explore how hooliganism can be theorised and understood. These data can usefully serve as a rough indication of the worldwide incidence of football hooliganism in the twentieth century. The author favours the figurational/process-sociological approach to football hooliganism which is historical and developmental. It also involves an exploration of the meanings of hooligan behaviour *via* an analysis of verbatim statements by the hooligans themselves, locates the football hooligans in the overall social structure, especially the class system, and examines the dynamics of the relationship between them and groups in the wider society. It is important, nevertheless, to stress that it is unlikely that the phenomenon of football hooliganism will be found always and everywhere to stem from identical social roots. As a basis for further, cross-national research, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the problem is fuelled and contoured by, among other things, what one might call the major 'fault-lines' of particular countries. Effective policies are urgently needed if the great social invention of football is to be protected from the serious threat posed by a combination of hooligan fans, complacent politicians and money-grabbing owners, managers and players.

KEY WORDS: comparative research, hooliganism, prevention policies, sports riots, sports violence

Writing in 1966, the only year in which the English inventors of the game staged and won the Finals of the football World Cup, journalist Lawrence Kitchin pithily described the soccer form of football¹ as "the only global idiom apart from science".² Since neither soccer nor science have spread throughout the entire world and the degree of their diffusion was even less at the time when he was writing, it would, of course, have been better had Kitchin referred to them as 'emergent' global idioms rather than as idioms which are global *tout court*. Moreover, although it was not so well-known or well-publicised at that time, Kitchin might have added that forms of

¹'Soccer', the term by which Association football is known especially in the United States, Canada and Australia, is used to distinguish it from their own forms of the game. It is an abbreviation of the word 'association'.

²Lawrence Kitchin, The contenders, *The Listener*, 27 October 1966.



'hooliganism',³ that is, crowd and fan⁴ disorderliness, have historically been a near-universal addendum to this emergent 'global idiom' and that, at particular times and places (e.g. England in the 1980s), they have constituted a threat to the popularity of the game and perhaps even to its continuing viability as a top-level spectator sport.⁵ In this article, I shall endeavour to construct a sociological diagnosis of football hooliganism as a world phenomenon, exploring how far it can be theorised and understood using data generated in England as an empirical base. My first task must be to attend to the question of definition.

Probably the most important thing to stress in this connection is that the label 'football hooliganism' is not so much a social scientific or social psychological concept as a construct of politicians and the media. As such, it lacks precision and is used to cover a variety of forms of behaviour which take place in more or less directly football-related contexts. These forms of behaviour also vary in terms of the kinds and levels of violence that tend to be involved. More particularly, the politicians and media personnel who employ the term are liable to use 'football hooliganism' in a 'cover-all' sense which includes *inter alia*: forms of verbal as well as physical violence; the throwing of missiles at players, match and club officials and other fans; the vandalising of club and private property; fist fights, fights involving kicking, and fights involving weapons such as knives and even guns. It is also important to realise that such behaviour takes place, not only at or in the immediate vicinity of football grounds, but also involves fights between groups of males who share a claimed allegiance to opposing football clubs and which take place on days other than as well as on match days and in contexts, e.g. pubs, clubs, railway and bus stations, which are sometimes far removed from football stadia *per se*. In terms of these political and media usages, the label 'football hooliganism' is also sometimes loosely used to cover politically orientated behaviour, e.g. that of groups on the political right. It is also used in relation to protests against the owners and managers of clubs and in the condemnation of racist behaviour in football-related contexts as well as of more or less directly football-related fighting. As

³The term 'hooligan' apparently entered common English usage in the late nineteenth century as a term for describing 'gangs of rowdy youths'. It is possibly a corruption of 'Houlihan', the name of an Irish family who lived in London at that time and who were renowned for their love of fighting (Pearson 1983, p. 40).

⁴'Fan' is an abbreviation of the term 'fanatic'.

⁵When discussing how politically to tackle the problem of football hooliganism in the wake of the Heysel tragedy, Prime Minister Thatcher apparently asked leading figures in the Football Association whether spectators were an essential ingredient at matches.

one can see, 'football hooliganism' is a complex and many-sided phenomenon. Let me examine some data, generated *via* an analysis of English newspaper coverage, which shed light on football hooliganism as a world phenomenon.

In the early stages of the research into football hooliganism that my colleague Patrick Murphy and I started at the University of Leicester in the late 1970s,⁶ as a sideline to the main study which was systematically historical as well as contemporary in its focus, we examined a range of English newspapers and recorded references to football-related violence involving fans rather than players which was reported as having occurred *outside* Great Britain. We looked at newspapers from 1890 onwards, ceased recording at the end of 1983 and did not use newspapers as a data source again until 1996. This means that, whilst our figures cover most of the twentieth century, they do not cover the 13 years between 1983 and 1996. In that sense, they are incomplete. Nevertheless, until more systematic and intensive research along similar lines has been carried out, they can usefully serve as a rough indication of the worldwide incidence of football hooliganism in the twentieth century. More particularly, in the course of this part of our research we came across reports of 101 incidents of football-related violence involving spectators or fans which were said to have occurred in 37 countries between 1908 and 1983. The countries referred to and the number of incidents are cited in Table I.

As you can see, 16 of the reported countries – 17 if one includes the former USSR – were European. This was the highest geographical concentration of reported incidents. Central and South America, with hooliganism reported as having occurred in five countries, came second. Among the European countries, Germany, with 17 incidents reported between 1931 and 1982, Italy with 13 incidents reported as having occurred between 1920 and 1982, and Ireland with 12 reported incidents between 1913 and 1982, 'topped the poll'! Interestingly, if the data reported in a 20-page dossier recently published by the Council of the European Union are adequate as a measure of the nation-by-nation incidence of football hooliganism – and the behaviour of a group of German hooligans in Lens, France, in 1998 suggests that they may be – Germany continues by a long chalk to lead what the authors of the dossier call "the division of dishonour".⁷ This ostensible fact contrasts markedly with the dominant stereotype which continues to mark out football hooliganism as a mainly 'English disease'.

⁶Together with our former Research Assistant, John Williams, we wrote three books on the subject: *Hooligans Abroad* (1984, 1989); *The Roots of Football Hooliganism* (1988); and *Football on Trial* (1990). Our latest position prior to the present article is summarised in *Sport Matters* (1999).

⁷Reported in *The Guardian*, 7 October 1999.

TABLE I

Worldwide incidence of football-related violence as reported in English newspapers, 1908–1983.

<i>Argentina</i> (ca) 1936, 1965, 1968	<i>Italy</i>	1920, 1955, 1959, 1963 (2 incidents), 1965 (2 incidents), 1973, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982
<i>Australia</i> 1981	<i>Jamaica</i>	1965
<i>Austria</i> (ca) 1965	<i>Lebanon</i>	1964
<i>Belgium</i> 1974, 1981	<i>Malta</i>	1975, 1980
<i>Bermuda</i> 1980	<i>Mexico</i>	1983
<i>Brazil</i> 1982	<i>New Zealand</i>	1981
<i>Canada</i> 1927	<i>Nigeria</i>	1983
<i>China</i> 1979, 1981, 1983	<i>Norway</i>	1981
<i>Colombia</i> 1982	<i>Peru</i>	1964
<i>Egypt</i> 1966	<i>Portugal</i>	1970
<i>France</i> 1960, 1975, 1977 (2 incidents), 1980	<i>Rumania</i>	1979
<i>Gabon</i> 1981	<i>Spain</i>	1950, 1980 (2 incidents), 1981, 1982
<i>Germany</i> ^a 1931, 1965 (2 incidents), 1971, 1978, 1979 (2 incidents), 1980, 1981 (3 incidents), 1982 (6 incidents)	<i>Sweden</i>	1946
<i>Greece</i> 1980 (2 incidents), 1982, 1983	<i>Switzerland</i>	1981
<i>Guatemala</i> 1980	<i>Turkey</i>	1964, 1967
<i>Holland</i> 1974, 1982	<i>USSR</i>	1960, 1982
<i>Hungary</i> 1908	<i>USA</i>	1980
<i>India</i> 1931, 1982	<i>Yugoslavia</i>	1955 (2 incidents), 1982 (2 incidents)
<i>Ireland</i> ^b 1913, 1919, 1920 (3 incidents), 1930, 1955, 1970, 1979 (3 incidents), 1981		

Source: Williams et al. (1984, 1989).

^aApart from the reported incident in 1931, these incidents were reported as having taken place in the former Federal Republic (West Germany).

^bIncludes incidents reported as having taken place in both Eire and Ulster as well as incidents reported before the partition.

Just one more comment on the figures in Table I is in order. This is that the overwhelming majority of the incidents referred to in the Table were reported in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. More particularly, 17 were reported in the 1960s, 20 in the 1970s, and no fewer than 40 in the first three years of the 1980s. This pattern arguably reflects both a factual increase in the incidence of football hooliganism during that 30-year period and a correlative increase of press interest in football hooliganism as a 'newsworthy' subject. The latter increase also occurred correlatively with growing popular and political interest in football hooliganism as a social problem and with what one might jargonistically call the 'tabloidisation' of the popular press, that is, the rise to prominence, largely as a result of intensifying competition with television news, of popular newspapers in the sensationalising tabloid form, a process which had as one of its repercussions a parallel, though lesser,

trend towards the sensationalising of reporting in the more 'serious' or 'broadsheet' press.

Probably more than any other single incident, it was the Heizel tragedy which took place in Brussels at the 1985 European Cup Final between Liverpool and Juventus that fixed the idea of football hooliganism as an 'English disease' firmly in the minds of people around the world. What happened on that occasion was that a charge of Liverpool hooligans across an inadequately segregated and under-policed terrace led the targeted Italian fans (who were not 'ultras', the Italian equivalents of English football hooligans, although 'ultras' were there in force in other parts of the ground) to flee,⁸ the build-up of pressure leading a defective wall to collapse and 39 Italians to lose their lives. If asked, it seems likely that a majority of people, perhaps especially in Western countries, would identify Heizel as the worst directly hooligan-related football tragedy to have occurred in modern times. The data in Table II, however, suggest that this is not the case and that football and football hooliganism *outside* Europe have involved a greater number of fatalities and perhaps also a greater incidence of murderous violence than is the case with their counterparts in Europe, the continent where people consider themselves to stand at the apex of 'civilisation' and where, if Norbert Elias (1939, 1994a) is right, a 'civilising process' can be demonstrated factually to have occurred since the Middle Ages.

TABLE II

Selected matches at which serious crowd violence was reported.

Country	Year	Match	Number of deaths	Number of injuries
Argentina	1968	River Plate <i>versus</i> Boca Junior	74	150
Brazi	1982	San Luis <i>versus</i> Fortaleza	3	25
Colombia	1982	Deportivo Cai <i>versus</i> Club Argentina	22	200
Peru	1964	Peru <i>versus</i> Argentina	287–328	5000
Turkey	1964	Kayseri <i>versus</i> Sivas	44	600
USSR	1982	Moscow Sparta <i>versus</i> Haarlem	69	100

Source: Williams et al. (1984, 1989).

⁸Skirmishes between Liverpool and Juventus fans took place in several parts of Brussels, especially in and near the city centre, in the hours before the match. Whilst the Juventus 'ultras', the closest to Italian equivalents of the English football hooligans, were mainly housed at the match on segregated terracing, the Liverpool hooligans shared a terrace with non-hooligan Italians, many of whom had been sold tickets on the day of the match in violation of UEFA's regulations. It was the latter fans who were attacked in a terrace charge and it was from their ranks that the 39 victims came.

Sketchy though they are, the figures on football-related murders in Table III point in the same direction. Italy, the European country with the highest incidence of football-related murders reported in the years 1996–1999, had five, whereas Argentina, largely as a result of the activities of the notorious *barras bravas*, had a reported incidence of 39, almost eight times as many.

The Heysel tragedy occurred at or near the crest of a rising wave of English-inspired hooligan incidents in continental countries, the first of which occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Williams et al. 1984, 1989). One of the correlates of this wave was the imitation of English hooligan styles by continental fans but I propose to ignore that in this context.⁹ More to the point for present purposes is the fact that Heysel and the overall reaction to it also represented a peak in the politicisation of the English hooligan problem. It did so in the sense of leading for the first time to direct Prime Ministerial involvement in the problem and contributing to the introduction in Parliament of the Football Spectators Bill, Part I of which demanded computerised entry to matches. It also led the *Union Européenne de Football Association* (UEFA) to ban English clubs – though not the national side – from European competition *sine die* and to an annual attempt by the English Football Association (FA) to secure their readmission. Between them, the passage of the Football Spectators Bill through Parliament and the annual attempt of the FA to secure the readmission of the English clubs helped to sustain media and popular interest in the hooligan problem at a high level.

In its turn, the intense media searchlight led to large numbers of incidents being regularly observed and reported, amplifying the problem in each of two senses: firstly perceptually, by making it appear that more (and more

TABLE III

Number of football-related murders reported in selected English newspapers, June 1996 – October 1999.

Country	Number of murders
Argentina	39
England	3
Italy	5
The Netherlands	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>48</i>

⁹Continental fans in the 1970s and 1980s also began to imitate English/British fan behaviour more generally, e.g. their songs and chants. The adoption by English fans of the ‘casual’ style was, of course, an example of diffusion in the opposite direction – from Italy to England and Scotland.

serious) incidents were occurring than was objectively the case; and secondly factually, by providing the oxygen of anonymous publicity which so many hooligans crave, in that way helping to sustain and even to increase the frequency of their hooligan involvements. The Hillsborough tragedy of 1989 in which 96 people lost their lives at an (abandoned) FA Cup Semi-Final match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest constituted another watershed in this connection. The tragedy was *indirectly* related to hooliganism in two senses: firstly, as part of the official attempt to contain and control the hooligan threat, terrace fans in England – those who (used to!) stand rather than sit to watch matches¹⁰ – were forced to watch from inside what were, in effect, wire cages; and secondly, the police interpreted an attempt by Liverpool fans to escape from a lethally overcrowded terrace at the Leppings Lane end of Sheffield's Hillsborough Stadium as a hooligan pitch invasion, leading them to keep the fans caged in and the 96 people to be crushed to death.

The central relevance of Hillsborough for present purposes, however, lies in the fact that, in his official enquiry into the tragedy, Lord Justice Taylor concluded that computerised entry was more likely to *increase* than to *decrease* the incidence of crowd fatalities. As a result, the Government was forced to climb down and, in 1990, Part I of the Football Spectators Bill was withdrawn. This contributed in its turn to consequences such as the following: the depoliticisation of the hooligan problem; the correlative withdrawal by UEFA of its ban on English clubs; a decline in the 'newsworthiness' of the hooligan problem; a decrease in the frequency with which it was reported; and a growing impression that, in England, football hooliganism was becoming 'unfashionable', a 'thing of the past'.

This impression was given graphic expression by sociologist Ian Taylor when he wrote in 1991 that: "An astonishing sea-change is taking place in the culture of some of (England's) football terraces." He attributed this supposed process to a conjuncture of what he called "the BBC's packaging" of 'Italia 90' with the removal of perimeter fences from grounds in response to the report of Lord Justice Taylor. According to Ian Taylor, the dynamics of this process worked according to something like the following pattern: the removal of 'cages' reduced the frequency of 'animal-like' behaviour among the fans, and this interacted with the TV packaging of the 1990 World Cup Finals in which, as Ian Taylor put it, "the opera of Pavarotti; would meld ethereally into a poetic display of European football", producing

¹⁰Standing terraces were made illegal at grounds staging top-level English matches as a result of the implementation of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations in his enquiry into the Hillsborough tragedy of 1989.

a re-emphasis on 'style'. As a result, Ian Taylor argued, "hooliganism (became) suddenly decidedly unfashionable, passé, irrelevant" (Taylor, *Independent on Sunday*, 21 April 1991).

Despite the elegance of Ian Taylor's language, the problem with this kind of impressionistic, non-research-based analysis is that it involves a gross oversimplification regarding the hooligan problem and is in many respects simply empirically false. What happened in England during the 1990s was that, in conjunction largely with its depoliticisation, the *reporting* of football hooliganism became unfashionable, not so much the phenomenon itself. This was the case especially as far as the reporting practices of the national media were concerned and regarding 'bread and butter' domestic matches. On account, among other things, of their higher profile, it was less the case regarding internationals. For example, the 1990 World Cup Finals were accompanied in England by a hitherto virtually unprecedented form of hooliganism, namely outbreaks around the country of rioting, fighting and attacks on foreigners and foreign cars by fans who had been watching England's Italia '90 matches on TV. Similar outbreaks occurred during Euro '96 and the 1998 World Cup Finals. Events during Euro '96 are particularly instructive in this regard.

It is widely believed that Euro '96 passed off without the occurrence of hooliganism on a substantial scale. For example, discussing the hopes of the English FA that FIFA might allow England to host the 2006 World Cup, journalist Martin Thorpe wrote of Euro '96 that: "UEFA's ability to turn a handsome profit on a tournament in which England matched the best teams on the field and avoided trouble off it will go down well with FIFA when it chooses a venue for the second World Cup of the new century" (*The Guardian*, 12 October 1996). The England team's standard of play – they reached the semi-finals only to be beaten by Germany in a penalty shoot-out – the standard of football produced in the tournament overall, and the carnival atmosphere generated by the majority of people in the crowds cannot be disputed. What is in doubt is whether trouble was avoided off the field. There is ample evidence that it was widespread. For example, crowds gathered in London's Trafalgar Square following England's game against Spain on 22 June and had to be dispersed by riot police. Disturbances were also reported in Hull, and fights between Englishmen and Spaniards were reported as having broken out in Fuengirola and Torremolinos on Spain's Costa del Sol (*The Independent*, 24 June 1996). By far the most serious rioting occurred, however, following England's defeat by Germany in the semi-finals when trouble was reported, not only in London, but in Basingstoke, Bedford, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Bradford, Brighton (where a Russian teenager was mistaken for a German, stabbed in the neck

and almost killed), Dunstable, Exeter, Haywards Heath, Mansfield, Norwich, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Shropshire and Swindon (*Daily Mail*, 28 June 1996). The events in London's Trafalgar Square were reported in the *Daily Mail* as follows:

The agonising moment when Gareth Southgate's penalty was saved [. . .] was the trigger for a night of sustained hooliganism. Draped in flags and brandishing bottles, thousands spilled out of the pubs and bars [. . .] within moments of Germany's victory [. . .] The worst flashpoint came in Trafalgar Square [. . .] (I)t was the centre of [. . .] orchestrated rampage [. . .] Up to 2,000 people poured into the square shortly after 10.06 pm [. . .] (T)he situation rapidly deteriorated [. . .] Cars and motorists [. . .] found themselves engulfed in the rapidly-escalating violence with German Volkswagens and Mercedes singled out. A hard core of 400 hooligans [. . .] burst out of the square and attacked a police patrol car. The two officers inside had to flee for their lives as in less than a minute the car was smashed to pieces. The hooligans surged towards the Thames, shattering windscreens, turning one vehicle over and setting fire to a Japanese sports car [. . .] Between 10.10 pm and midnight, police received over 2,500 calls requesting urgent help. Of these 730 were related to violent disturbances [. . .] The final toll around Trafalgar Square was 40 vehicles damaged, six overturned and two set alight. Seven buildings were damaged with 25 police officers and 23 members of the public injured across London, as well as a further 18 casualties, both police and civilians, in Trafalgar Square itself [. . .] Nearly 200 people were arrested across London with 40 held during ugly scenes in Trafalgar Square. (*Daily Mail*, 28 June 1996)

These events were the most violent among a series, varying in violence and scale, which took place across England during Euro '96. They took place despite a co-ordinated police effort which had been planned for some three years, cost an estimated £20 million (BBC 1, 10 July 1996), and involved the well publicised arrest of 'known hooligans' up and down the country before the tournament. *Times* sports correspondent John Goodbody realistically concluded that: "What Wednesday night emphasised is that whenever the English supporters are taking part in an international tournament, it is inevitable that there will be trouble. However careful the preparations, troublemakers will ensure that there will be confrontations" (*The Times*, 28 June 1996).

Events in France in July 1998, especially in Marseilles, proved John Goodbody right. Earlier, England fans had rioted in Sweden in 1992, in Amsterdam and Rotterdam in 1993, and in Dublin in 1995. In Dublin, they forced the abandonment of an Ireland – England match. Proponents of the 'hooliganism is a thing of the past' thesis (e.g. Helgadottir, *The European*, 23 September 1991; Taylor, *Independent on Sunday*, 21 April 1991) can only account for such incidents by claiming with tortuous logic that the English hooligans have become peaceful at home and only engage in

violence abroad. Alternatively, they suggest that the fans of Premiership teams have become peaceable as a result of an interaction between more effective police and club controls and fashion changes among fans in the direction of both more carnival-like and consumer-orientated behaviour (Giulianotti 1999). Hooliganism, they suggest, remains more stubbornly entrenched at the lower levels of the game. However, the evidence is against them, suggesting the use of a kind of Ptolemaic logic on their part.¹¹ Take the figures in Tables IV, V and VI. Table IV offers a selection of incidents known to the police which took place at or in conjunction with Premiership, Football League and other top-level (e.g. pre-season 'friendly') matches during 1992–1993. Table V summarises data furnished by the British Transport Police (BTP) for the period 21 August 1990 to 22 December 1993, a period during which they recorded 655 incidents of varying levels of seriousness which had taken place at or in the vicinity of railway stations or on trains.

Table VI is based on 69 reports of football hooliganism which appeared in 13 English newspapers between June 1996 and October 1999. A total of 110 incidents were referred to and/or described in these reports. Sixty-nine of them were reported as having occurred in England or Wales, and a further 20 as having involved English fans abroad. In 12 of the latter cases, the English fans were reported as aggressors and in the remaining eight as victims. Of the 21 incidents that remain, five were reported as involving Dutch fans, four Argentinian fans, four Italian fans, two German fans, two Russian fans, one an Iranian fan and the final one a Scottish fan. Twenty-four of the incidents were reported in 1996, 19 in 1997, 59 in 1998 and eight in the months January to October 1999. The larger numbers reported in 1996 and 1998, the years of Euro '96 and the last World Cup respectively, are clearly a reflection of the heightened interest in hooliganism that is generated in conjunction with major tournaments.

Who are the football hooligans and why do they behave as they do? An examination of some popular and academic explanations will start to shed light on these issues. In England, five main popular explanations of football hooliganism have been proposed, each of them espoused by the media, politicians and members of the general public. These explanations – some of them at least partly contradictory of the others – are that football hooliganism is 'caused' by: excessive alcohol consumption; violent incidents

¹¹The implication here is that their arguments are reminiscent of the convolutions of Ptolemy of Alexandria and subsequent pre-Copernican astronomers as they struggled to fit empirical observations into their 'geocentric' or earth-centred view of the solar system.

on the field of play or biased and incompetent refereeing; unemployment; affluence; and ‘permissiveness’. None of them is supported by the available evidence, at least as far as playing a deeper, more enduring role in the generation of football hooliganism is concerned. Alcohol consumption cannot be said to be a ‘cause’ of football hooliganism because not every fan who drinks in a football context fights, not even those who drink heavily. The converse is also true – that not all hooligans drink before fighting because they need a clear head in order to direct operations and avoid being caught unawares by rivals or the police (Dunning et al. 1988). There *is* an *indirect* connection between hooliganism and alcohol consumption, however, in that the masculinity norms of the groups involved tend to stress ability to fight, ‘hardness’ and ability to ‘hold one’s ale’ as marks of being a ‘man’, and tests of masculinity are one of the things that football hooliganism is all about.

Violence on the field of play and refereeing that is or is perceived as biased, can similarly be dismissed as lying at the roots of football hooliganism. That is because incidents take place before and after as well as during matches, often at considerable distances from grounds. Nor can unemployment – the favoured ‘cause’ of the political left – be said in some simple sense to produce football hooliganism. For example, during the 1930s when unemployment in England was high, the incidence of reported match-related violence was at an all-time low. Similarly, when English football hooliganism began to enter its current phase in the 1960s, the national rate of unemployment was at its lowest ever recorded level. And today, the rate of participation in football hooliganism by the unemployed varies regionally, being higher in areas such as the North of England where unemployment is high and lower in usually low unemployment areas such as London and the South-East. In fact, almost every major English club has its hooligans, independently of the local rate of unemployment, and fans from more affluent areas used in the 1980s regularly to taunt their less fortunate rivals by waving bundles of £5 or £10 notes at them *en masse*, singing (to the tune of ‘You’ll never walk alone’) ‘You’ll never work again’! However, unemployment can be said to be an indirect cause of hooliganism in the sense of being one among a complex of factors which help to perpetuate the norms of aggressive masculinity which appear to be involved.

The fourth popular explanation of hooliganism, namely that ‘affluence’ rather than unemployment is the principal ‘cause’, tends to be favoured by the political right. Not only is it in direct contradiction of the explanation by reference to the supposed ‘causal’ role of unemployment, it is also sometimes associated with the explanation in terms of ‘permissiveness’, e.g. when it is suggested that football hooliganism is an attribute of the ‘too much, too soon’ generation. However, whatever form it takes, the

TABLE IV

Selected hooligan incidents at or in conjunction with Premiership, Football League, international, pre-season friendly and other matches in England and Wales.

Date	Match/fans involved	Type of incident
7.10.92	Notts. Forest <i>versus</i> Stockport	CS gas used, 8 policemen hurt
18.10.92	Sunderland <i>versus</i> Newcastle	30 arrests, 200 ejected
31.10.92	Leyton Orient <i>versus</i> Swansea	Fights in London (Marble Arch)
31.10.92	Grimsby <i>versus</i> Portsmouth	Missiles thrown at players
14.11.92	Darlington <i>versus</i> Hull	Pub fights in city centre and station
16.11.92/ 24.11.92	Stoke <i>versus</i> Port Vale	Fights inside/outside ground/town centre
19.12.92	Chelsea <i>versus</i> Manchester Utd.	CS gas thrown in Covent Garden pub
12.1.93	Southend <i>versus</i> Millwall	Pitch invasion, pub fights
16.1.93	Tranmere	Fan beaten to death (racial more than football-related)
19.1.93	Cardiff <i>versus</i> Swansea	Pitch invasion, pub fights*
30.1.93	Leicester <i>versus</i> West Ham	Fights outside ground, CS gas thrown in pub
20.2.93	Tottenham <i>versus</i> Leeds	300 in fight, CS gas thrown in pub*
5.3.93	Tottenham and Blackpool fans	Fighting in Blackpool prior to Spurs/Man. City match
7.3.93	Man. City <i>versus</i> Tottenham	Pitch invasion, fighting outside ground*
17.3.93	England U18 <i>versus</i> Ghana	Attack on police
17.3.93	Sheffield Wed. <i>versus</i> Sheffield Utd.	Fighting, murder*
24.3.93	Peterborough <i>versus</i> Leicester	Pitch invasion, arson
3.4.93	Millwall <i>versus</i> Portsmouth	Pub fights, missiles thrown*
28.4.93	England <i>versus</i> Holland	Pub fights, police attached
1.5.93	Reading <i>versus</i> Swansea	Fighting inside/outside ground, pitch invasion*
2.5.93	Aston Villa <i>versus</i> Oldham	Disturbances in Oldham; riot police used
4.5.93	Exeter <i>versus</i> Port Vale	Attack by fans on referee
8.5.93	Millwall <i>versus</i> Bristol Rovers	Pitch invasion, missiles thrown*
8.5.93	Halifax <i>versus</i> Hereford	Mounted police used. Fighting inside ground
Div 1 Play-off Semi-Final	Portsmouth <i>versus</i> Leicester (at Nottingham's City ground)	Fights outside the ground
Div 1 Play-off Final	Swindon <i>versus</i> Leicester City (at Wembley)	Leicester fans ransacked Wembley pub. Disturbances in Swindon

*Denotes police judgement of disturbances sufficiently serious to 'stretch' available police resources. These data were provided by Ian Stanier, a Leicester post-graduate student.

explanation in terms of 'affluence' is contradicted by the available evidence and seems largely to result from a mis-reading of the fashion-switch on the part of young British football fans during the 1980s from the 'skinhead' to the 'casual' style. The skinhead style was, of course, openly working class; the casual style, by contrast, is apparently 'classless'. The clothes worn by devotees of the latter style, however, may be but are not necessarily expensive. Sometimes they are stolen and sometimes only apparently expensive, e.g. when 'designer labels' are sewn onto cheap, sometimes stolen sweaters. Of course, some hooligans are at least temporarily affluent, either because they have well-paid jobs, prosperous parents or because they make money through black market activities or involvement in crime. But the bulk of the available evidence runs counter to the 'affluence thesis'. Reasonably reliable data on the social origins of football hooligans first began

TABLE V

Football-related incidents known to the British Transport Police, 1990–1993.

Season		Number of incidents
1990–1991	(21.8.90–5.6.91 includes end-of-season play-offs)	204
1991–1992	(17.8.91–3.6.92 includes end-of-season play-offs and one international)	260
1992–1993	(8.8.92–31.5.93)	127
1993–1994	(24.7.93–22.12.93 first half season only)	64
<i>Total</i>		<i>655</i>

The remaining 12 incidents known to the BTP took place in conjunction with pre-season matches.

to become available in the 1960s and they have been, on the whole, remarkably consistent since that time, suggesting that, while hooligans come from all levels in the class hierarchy, the majority come from the ranks of the working class and have low levels of formal education (Dunning et al. 1988), I shall return to this issue later.

The popular explanation in terms of ‘permissiveness’ appears to be similarly deficient. It is superficially plausible in that the advent of the so-called ‘permissive society’ in Britain in the 1960s coincided with the growing perception of the behaviour of football fans as problematic by the authorities and the media. However, football hooliganism in Britain as a fact if not by name can be traced back to the 1870s and 1880s (Dunning et al. 1988) and the *coup de grace* for the ‘permissive society’ argument is given by the fact that, since football hooliganism began to be recognised in Britain as a social problem in the 1960s, football matches have become more heavily policed and subject to tighter controls – watching British football has become anything other than ‘permissive’. Moreover, during the 1980s, members of the Thatcher government sought explicitly by means of ‘authoritarian’, ‘law and order’ policies to reverse what they saw as the

TABLE VI

Number of hooligan incidents reported in selected English newspapers, June 1996 – October 1999.^a

Incidents reported as occurring in England and Wales	69
Incidents reported as involving English fans abroad as:	
<i>Attackers</i>	12
<i>Attacked</i>	8
Incidents reported as involving fans from Argentina (4); France (2); Germany (2); Iran (1); Italy (4); the Netherlands (5); Russia (2); Scotland (1)	21
<i>Total</i>	<i>110</i>

^aTwenty-three of these reports appeared in *The Guardian*, 18 in the *The Leicester Mercury* and 15 in *The Observer*.

generally deleterious 'permissiveness' of the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, football hooliganism, along with crime in general, continued to grow. Let me turn now to the principal academic explanations of football hooliganism that have so far been proposed.

Besides the 'figurational' or 'process-sociological' approach on which the present article is based,¹² five main academic approaches to the study of football hooliganism can be distinguished: the 'anthropological' approach of Armstrong and Harris (1991) and Armstrong (1998); what is perhaps best called the 'quasi-ethnographic, postmodernist' approach of Giulianotti (1999); the Marxist approaches of Taylor (1971, 1982) and Clarke (1978); and the approach in terms of 'psychological reversal theory' advocated by Kerr (1994). Each of these explanations has its particular strengths. However, each has its particular weaknesses, too.

The anthropological work on football hooliganism by Armstrong and Harris is based on rich, in-depth description of the behaviour of hooligan fans from Sheffield, a two-club town. It is theoretically eclectic, present-centred and, as is often the case with ethnographic or participant observation research, its principal author (Armstrong) seems insufficiently aware of the limitations which derive from reliance on the unsupported testimony of a single individual. This is true of the work of Giulianotti, too. Insufficient attention is also paid by Armstrong to the ways in which the dynamics of fan behaviour and relationships may have been affected by the fact that Sheffield is a two-club town; and the need for comparative observation with one-club towns such as Leicester and other two-club towns such as Liverpool and Nottingham was apparently not seen. Nor, and this again holds good for the work of Giulianotti, is sufficient attention paid to change over time. These limitations are compounded by the author's peremptory dismissal of virtually all research in the field other than his own, a stance which is not conducive to open dialogue and hence to the possibility of publicly establishing the degree to which the, in many ways rich, deep and dense, Sheffield findings confirm or refute the findings of others.

The work of Taylor and Clarke is set more directly within the sociological canon of replicable, testable work than that of Armstrong and Giulianotti. It is also insightful regarding the ways in which developments in English football have been bound up with the capitalist character of the economy. However, neither of these authors carried out systematic in-depth research into hooliganism and both apparently fail to grasp the significance of the fact that football hooliganism principally involves conflict between working

¹²'Figurational' or 'process sociology' is the synthesising approach to the subject pioneered by Norbert Elias. See e.g. his *What is Sociology* (1978).

class groups which only regularly become involved in conflict with the football authorities and the police – and less directly with other representatives of the state – as part of an attempt to fight among themselves. In his early work, Taylor even romantically described football hooliganism as a “working class resistance movement”. Marsh et al. do not make such mistakes. However, their work lacks an historical dimension with the consequence that they tend to see hooligan fighting – or what they call ‘aggro’ – as an unchanging historical constant. Moreover, in their stress on ‘aggro’ as ‘ritual violence’ – as violence which is mainly symbolic or metonymic in the sense of involving aggressive posturing but not the completion or ‘consummation’ of aggressive acts, they fail to see that ritualised aggression can be seriously violent.

Finally, through his use of ‘reversal’ theory, Kerr seems to do little more than dress up in complex psychological jargon some relatively simple sociological ideas. For example, he writes:

The metamotivational state combination operative during most types of soccer hooliganism activity is paratelic-negativistic-autic-mastery. The paratelic-negativism element within this combination (with accompanying high levels of felt arousal and felt negativism) gives rise to the type of provocative, playful paratelic aggression that characterises so many examples of soccer hooligan activity. Hooligan behaviour in these circumstances is not necessarily malicious, but is engaged in with the major purpose of generating excitement and the pleasures of release from rules. (Kerr 1994, p. 109)

Kerr seems to think that the football hooligans’ quest for excitement through violent, deviant and delinquent acts in football-related contexts can be explained as a simple ‘reversal’ from one “metamotivational state”, “boredom” (Kerr 1994, pp. 33ff.), to another, ‘excitement’. It is difficult to see how what he writes does more than dress up in psychological language what Elias and I had written more than 20 years before (although we wrote about routinisation in this connection and not simple boredom) (Elias and Dunning 1986) at the same time reducing a complex and graduated socio-behavioural reality to a crude dichotomy. Above all, there is no reference in what he writes to what is also arguably at stake in football hooligan fighting, namely norms of masculinity. These figure centrally in the figurational/process sociological explanation.

The figurational/process-sociological approach to football hooliganism is historical and developmental. It also involves an exploration of the meanings of hooligan behaviour *via* an analysis of verbatim statements by the hooligans themselves, locates the football hooligans in the overall social structure, especially the class system, and examines the dynamics of the relationship between them and groups in the wider society. Shortage of

space means that I can only briefly examine some of our data on the meanings and social locations of English football hooligans in the present context. Here are some verbatim quotations which shed light on the characteristic values and motives of English football hooligans. As one can see, they have remained relatively stable over time. Reminiscing about the emotions experienced during his days of active hooligan involvement in the 1960s, E. Taylor wrote in *The Guardian* in 1984 of:

The excitement of battle, the danger, the heightened activity of body and mind as the adrenaline raced, the fear and the triumph of overcoming it. To this day, when trouble starts at a game I come alive and close to getting involved. I may not forget the dangers of physical injury and criminal proceedings but I do ignore them." (*The Guardian*, 28 March 1984).

Similar sentiments were expressed by a 26-year-old lorry driver interviewed in conjunction with the 1974 Cardiff City *versus* Manchester United game, a match where serious trouble had rightly been anticipated by the authorities and the media. He said:

I go to a match for one reason only: the aggro. It's an obsession. I get so much pleasure when I'm having aggro that I nearly wet my pants [. . .] I go all over the country looking for it. [. . .] (E)very night during the week we go round looking respectable [. . .] (T)hen if we see someone who looks like the enemy, we ask him the time; if he answers in a foreign accent, we do him over, and if he's [. . .] got any money on him, we'll roll him as well. (Harrison 1974, pp. 602–604)

Here is how one of our Leicester informants put it in 1981. His words illustrate the sort of rationality which tends to be involved:

If you can baffle the coppers, you'll win. You've just gotta think how they're gonna think. And you know, half the time you know what they're gonna do 'cos they're gonna take the same route every week, week in, week out. If you can figure out a way to beat 'em, you're fuckin' laughin': you'll have a good fuckin' raut. ('Raut' is Leicester slang for a fight).

Finally, when interviewed in 1984–1985 for the Thames TV documentary, *Hooligan*, a member of West Ham United's 'Inter City Firm', England's most notorious football hooligan gang at the time, said:

We don't – we don't well, we *do* go with the intention of fighting, you know what I mean [. . .] We look forward to it . . . It's great. You know, if you've got, say, 500 kids coming for you, like, and you know they're going to be waiting for you, it's – it's good to know, like. Like being a tennis player, you know. You get all geed up to play, like. We get geed up to fight [. . .] I think I fight, like, so I can make a name for meself and that, you know. Hope people, like, respect me for what I did like.

Despite the fact that they cover a period of more than 30 years, these statements are consistent. What they reveal is that, for the (mainly) young men involved, football hooligan fighting is basically about masculinity, territorial struggle and excitement. For them, fighting is a central source of meaning, status or 'reputation' and pleasurable emotional arousal. Thus, Taylor spoke of 'battle excitement' and 'the adrenaline racing'; the ICF member referred not only to the excitement generated in fighting but also to the respect among his peers that he hoped his involvement would bring; and the lorry driver spoke of 'aggro' as a pleasurable, almost erotically arousing obsession. This latter point received substantiation when Jay Allan, a leading member of 'the Aberdeen Casuals', a Scottish football hooligan 'firm', wrote of fighting at football as being even more pleasurable than sex (Allan 1989). Another non-English expression of this kind of sentiment was provided in 1994 by a 17-year-old Brazilian *torcida* who told a reporter for the Rio paper, *Journal do Brazil*: "For me fighting is fun. I feel a great emotion when the other guy screams in pain. I don't care about how other people feel as long as I'm happy" (*The Australian*, 15 December 1994). This is similar to the delight taken in injuring and inflicting pain on others reported of some leading members of the Chelsea 'Headhunters', a neo-Nazi hooligan crew exposed by Donal Macintyre in a documentary on BBC 1 on 10 November 1999.

What about the social class antecedents and locations of the football hooligans? Social class raises complex and contentious sociological issues of definition and measurement. However, although the available data on the social origins and current stratificational rankings of English football hooligans remain relatively scanty and cannot be described as definitive or 'hard' such as they are, they suggest that while football hooligans come from *all* levels of the class hierarchy, the majority, some 70–80%, are working class in terms of their social origins and most usually in terms of their present stratificational standings as well. That is, the majority of their parents had low levels of formal education and worked or work in manual occupations, whilst the majority of the hooligans themselves have failed to rise above their parents' social level. The data also suggest, with one main possible exception, that this sort of distribution has remained relatively stable since the 1960s when English football hooliganism first began to attract public concern. More particularly, the data of Harrington (1968) on the 1960s, Trivizas (1980) on the 1970s, and the Leicester group (1985, 1988) as well as Armstrong (1998) on the 1980s, and the Leicester group, again, on the 1990s, all suggest that the majority of English football hooligans (and some of their German counterparts as well) come from the lower reaches of the social scale. However, a small proportion is recruited from around

the middle and an even smaller one are from at or near the top. Let me explore this pattern and the data which support it in greater detail.

Harrington's 1968 analysis of the occupations of 497 convicted hooligans showed a preponderance of labourers and unskilled workers (see Table VII). Over a decade later, Trivizas (1980) reached a similar conclusion. More particularly, on the basis of data about 520 offences committed at 'football crowd events' in London's Metropolitan Police Area during the years 1974–76, he found that:

More than two-thirds (68.1%) of those charged with football-related offences were manual workers [. . .] Only 8 football-related offences were committed by people in 'intermediate' occupations. 6 were committed by students, 3 by individuals in professional occupations, and 3 by members of the armed forces. (Trivizas 1980, pp. 281–283)

Harrison's impressionistic account of Cardiff City's 'committed rowdies' in 1974 paints a similar picture. He depicted them as coming from "Canton and Grangetown, rows of terraced houses with few open spaces, and from Llanrumney, a massive council estate with an appalling record of vandalism" (Harrison 1974, p. 602). Although Marsh et al. did not directly address the issue of social class in their 1978 study of Oxford United fans, some of their informants did provide relevant comments. For example, one of them said: "If you live up on the Leys (an Oxford council estate) then you have to fight or else people piss you about and think you're a bit soft or something" (Marsh et al. 1978, p. 69). In fact, over half the large contingent of Oxford fans arrested during serious disturbances at the Coventry City – Oxford United FA Cup match in January 1981 came from the estate in question (*Oxford Mail*, 9 January 1981). Evidence from Leicester supports this general picture. One council estate alone contributed 87, or 20.32%, of the 428 local persons arrested in a football context in the years 1976–80. In 1981 and 1982, the years in which the participant observation part of the Leicester research was carried out on this estate, the occupations of 23 active football hooligans from the estate were as follows: two drivers, one barman, one slaughterhouse man, three bouncers, one bookmaker's assistant, three factory workers (two in the hosiery trade and one in boots and shoes), one milkman, one apprentice printer, one apprentice electrician, one builder's labourer, and eight unemployed.

The possible change in this overall pattern that I referred to earlier is pointed to by the data in Table VII, more particularly by the fact that Harrington's 1968 data suggest that 12.9% of his arrested football hooligans were skilled workers, compared with 24.1% in the Dunning et al. figures

for West Ham United's 'Inter City Firm' (ICF) in 1985, and 46.8% in Armstrong's 1987 data on Sheffield United's 'Blades'. In a word, these data suggest that an increase in the participation in football hooliganism of skilled relative to unskilled and semi-skilled males may have occurred in the 1980s as compared with the 1960s and 1970s.

Assuming that it did, in fact, occur, this putative increase in the participation of young skilled workers in football hooliganism seems to have corresponded with the abandonment by football hooligans and young football fans more generally of the 'skinhead' style which was avowedly working class and their adoption of the apparently middle class or classless style of the so-called football 'casuals'. Although the figures it contains are very scanty and perhaps more than usually unreliable, the data culled from English newspapers and reported in Table VIII appear to provide confirmation of the continuation of this pattern into the late 1990s. It should be noted, however, that the occupations of two Germans are included in this table and that the description of himself as a 'property tycoon' by one English hooligan may have been a 'wind-up'.

Research on the social class of football hooligans in Scotland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy suggests that hooligans in other countries tend to come from social backgrounds similar to those of their English counterparts. A study of Scottish 'football casuals', for example, found that:

All the evidence points to the fact that 'football casuals' come predominantly from the lower levels of the social scale and are basically working class youths. (In the Edinburgh survey, 75% of the 'casuals' arrested fell into the 'unskilled manual' or 'unemployed' category. None came within the 'managerial-professional' category). (Harper 1989, p. 90)

TABLE VII

Trends in the occupational class of employed English football hooligans, 1968–1987.^a

Occupational class	Harrington 1968		Stuttard/Dunning 1985		Armstrong 1987	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Professional	2	0.5 ^b			3	2.1
Intermediate			8	5.7	7	4.9
Skill non-manual	19	4.9	2	1.42	24	16.8
Skilled manual	50	12.9	34	24.1	67	46.8
Semi-skilled	112	28.8	10	7.0	14	9.8
Unskilled	206	52.9	25	17.7	289	19.6

^aFigures exclude those for schoolboys, apprentices, the unemployed and those with occupations unclassifiable in terms of the Registrar General's scheme.

^bProfessional and intermediate classified together.

TABLE VIII

Occupational data from selected British newspapers on arrested English and German hooligans, 1997–1998.

<i>Upper and middle class</i>	
Property tycoon	1
<i>Intermediate and indeterminate</i>	
IT worker (City of London); clerical worker; engineer; bank worker; self-employed glazier; tattoo shop manager (German)	6
<i>Working class</i>	
Hospital worker; factory worker; parceller worker; post-office worker; postman; railway workers (2); floor layer; roofer; RAF fireman; tiler; soldier; mould operator; builder; apprentice mechanic (German)	15
<i>Total</i>	22

Sources: *The Times*, *The Leicester Mercury*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*.

Similarly, a study of hooliganism in Belgium concluded that “most of (Belgium’s) ‘hard core’ football hooligans [. . .] had a short and frustrating school career. Most [. . .] come from unstable working class families. Almost none [. . .] have a regular job [. . .] Their material situation is poor, the casuals get their expensive clothes by theft.” (Van Limbergen et al. 1987, p. 8) According to the research of Van der Brug in Holland, typical Dutch hooligans tend to resent and resist formal education; are more likely than non-hooligans to be unemployed; have parents who display a relatively tolerant attitude towards the use of violence and aggression; and gain prestige and status from fighting and generally displaying *macho* characteristics (Van der Brug 1986). Finally, on the basis of a survey of Bologna ‘ultras’, Roversi concluded that:

The majority of young ‘*ultras*’ are from the working class. The group in employment contains 169 males and 46 females. In this group the skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers visibly predominate, both compared to workers of other kinds and within the sample as a whole; they represent 80.3% and 51.9% respectively. They are warehousemen, porters, shop-assistants, bricklayers, carpenters but above all shop-floor workers [. . .] It must be emphasised that only 3.9% of the entire sample admitted to being unemployed. (Roversi 1994, pp. 359–381)

Despite differences of theoretical, conceptual and ‘methodological’ orientation, there is substantial consistency between these Scottish, Belgian, Dutch and Italian findings and those of Harrington, Armstrong and Trivizas with those of the Leicester research. It is important, nevertheless, to stress

that it is unlikely that the phenomenon of football hooliganism will be found always and everywhere to stem from identical social roots. As a basis for further, cross-national research, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the problem is fuelled and contoured by, among other things, what one might call the major 'fault-lines' of particular countries. In England, that means social class and regional inequalities; in Scotland and Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism; in Spain, the linguistic sub-nationalisms of the Catalans, Castilians, 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. One of the differences that these variable patterns may make is, for example, that sectarianism and city particularism as bases for football hooliganism may draw in more people from higher up the social scale. Arguably, though, a shared characteristic of all these 'fault-lines' is that they involve variants of what Elias (1965, 1994b) called 'established-outsider figurations' in which intense 'we-group' bonds and correspondingly intense antagonisms towards 'they-groups' or 'outsiders' are liable to develop. However, let me make myself perfectly clear. I do not consider this as having the status of anything more than a working hypothesis. It needs to be subjected to public discussion and tested by means of systematic, theory-guided, cross-national empirical research. Doubtless in that context, it will need to be revised, expanded, modified and perhaps even rejected altogether. It is my hope, though, that this article will serve as a basis from which a programme of cross-national research on football hooliganism can be constructed which will enable more effective policies for tackling the problem at both the European and national levels to be developed and put into place than those which powerful groups have offered so far. Such policies are urgently needed if the great social invention of football is to be protected from the serious threat posed by a combination of hooligan fans, complacent politicians and money-grabbing owners, managers and players.

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