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From *The Anfield Wrap* to *Boss Night* and the Paris Protests: Football, Politics, Identity and the Cultural Evolution of Fan Media and Supporter Activism in Liverpool

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Abstract

There have been significant recent developments in media produced by football fans, from social media and online magazines to podcasts, YouTube channels and live events. 21st century technologies have facilitated new types of supporter-produced media, rendering the means of production more accessible to fans. In Liverpool, fan channels have emerged, influenced by the city's musical heritage and political and cultural identity. For instance, modern events such as *Boss Night* and podcasts produced by *The Anfield Wrap* (TAW) have helped provide an authentic voice for the city's contemporary football culture, political identity and connected social activism. Due to globalised media networks, they can also offer an educational mobilising hub for those interested in Liverpool's current idiosyncratic cultural and political civic context. This research is informed by literature on fan media and activism and draws on collective identity theory and Bourdieu's notion of habitus. In-depth interviews were conducted with experienced supporters and various individuals closely associated with the production of fan media. Structurally, the paper outlines Liverpool's historical, cultural, sporting and fan media context. It then analyses data detailing the evolution of *Boss Mag* to *Boss Night* events and examining *The Anfield Wrap* as an innovative site of content creation. Contextually, the paper explores fan activism through the mediated protest of Liverpool's ownership and collective expressions of political identity. Finally, it draws on the experiences of supporters at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris and the use of technology and fan media in capturing and responding to the mistreatment of supporters.

Keywords Fan media · Activism · *Boss Night* · *The Anfield Wrap* · Liverpool

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1 Introduction

Contemporary football fans are served by extensive mediated coverage of matches and analysis. Some supporters also utilise specific platforms to interact with fellow fans, with communicated analysis, discussion and debate concentrating on team performances, cultural identity and even issues of supporter activism (Ryan, 2021). Many contemporary fans engage in the production and consumption of football-related digital content via a variety of media formats, some of which are influenced by previous iterations, notably fanzines. Developments in modern technologies and accessibility to computer and mobile devices and internet connectivity has shaped the growth of such supporter-produced media. This allows for the spectrum of fan experiences to be captured and communicated more fully than at any time in the past. Many fans now consume content that relates more specifically and directly to the clubs they support, sometimes alongside more traditional and generic football media. In some cases, such forms of content creation have shaped participation and engagement in cultural forms of fandom and activism linked to football.

On Merseyside, influential fan channels relating to Liverpool F.C. and Everton F.C. have emerged largely thanks to networks of supporters, some of whom have been involved in the production of materials relating to football and youth culture over the last 40 years. These fans can be seen to be engaged in what Toffler (1980), or Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) called ‘prosumption’ or what Bruns (2011) describes a ‘produsage’, effectively the point where those that once merely consumed media and culture now become producers. The Punk, Indie and Acid House movements in music had long shaped Merseyside football culture, whilst the influential 1980s fanzine *The End* – which was co-created by consumers – was edited by some of those who would go on to help form *Spirit of Shankly* at Liverpool, the UK’s first independent supporters’ union (see Breen & Hoey, 2022). Thus, modern fan events like *Boss Night*, fanzines such as *Boss Mag* and *When Skies are Grey*, and podcasts produced by *The Anfield Wrap* (TAW) and *All Together Now*, have partly drawn on the cultural voice and anarchic spirit of *The End* to communicate a seemingly authentic vision of the contemporary culture and identity of Merseyside, whilst providing a fertile space for the articulation of a new era of social and political activism surrounding football in the city of Liverpool (Grant, 2022). Crucially, due to globalised media networks, they can also provide an educational mobilising hub for those engaged in Liverpool’s contemporary idiosyncratic political and cultural civic context.

Liverpool is a city synonymous with football, shaped by a significant history. Everton F.C. were formed in 1878 as the city’s original football club, becoming a founder member of the Football League. Following a rent dispute in 1892 they left their original home in Anfield, relocating to a site a mile across Stanley Park. Former Everton director John Houlding founded Liverpool F.C. in the same year, adopting Anfield as their stadium and selecting a name with “city-wide appeal to... attract more supporters” (Lupson, 2008, p. 37). Both clubs have enjoyed periods of success, but Liverpool have ultimately proven the more dominant force in domestic and European competitions. This has influenced the global appeal, pioneering cultural

movements and specific socio-political identity of the respective clubs and their fan-bases. This article focuses on fan media and supporter activism primarily amongst Liverpool fans, but also refers to and draws comparison with Everton. This paper is informed by key literature and developments pertaining to fan media and activism. It addresses the growing prominence of some new political movements in football and the associated activism facilitated by networked supporters. Theoretically, it draws on collective identity and Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Within the context of football fans in Liverpool, this habitus provides a means of 'seeing' the world around them, mediating between an individual's ideological outlooks and the social structures and institutions they experience. Rather than a mere spectacle or form of entertainment, football can provide people with a means of navigating particular cultural and political worlds.

Key aspects of the cultural and football-related history of the city of Liverpool and its namesake club are then outlined to contextually underpin the article. The work then details the evolution of *Boss Mag* (in its traditional fanzine format) to *Boss Night* events which provide a platform for various local musical artists, celebrating civic and Liverpool F.C. culture. The research then addresses *TAW* as a commercial enterprise and innovative site of content creation, partly framed in reference to the emergence of alternative fan media companies. Contextually, this longitudinal work examines supporter activism through the mediated protest of Liverpool's previous American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillet, between 2007 and 2010. It also analyses expressions of political sentiment and identity, assessing the position of Liverpool (and to a lesser extent Everton) fans in the context of national and European narratives in the period from 2005 to 2023. Finally, it draws on the experiences of supporters at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris Saint-Denis and the use of technology and fan media in capturing and responding to the mistreatment of supporters and subsequent investigations.

2 Methods

The majority of data presented in this paper are derived from 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method was utilised to give voice to the 'lived experience' of individuals who are closely connected to media creation and consumption in the specified context (Kelly & Bairner, 2018). Seven experienced match-going Liverpool fans were interviewed, with each having attended at least 20 home games and ten away matches per season for each of the preceding three seasons. These fans were recruited from the first author's network of Liverpool supporters. The four media personnel were interviewed in order to obtain relevant and current insights into fan media and supporter activism in Liverpool. This process involved both authors and was conducted in 2023. The latter interviews included a founder member and journalist employed by *TAW*, one of the founders and editors of *Boss Mag* and *Boss Night*, the editor of *The End* and a Liverpool-based football author. The interviews conducted in 2022 and 2023 followed an extensive PhD and post-doctoral

study undertaken by the first author partly relating to fan identity and activism, for which interviews were carried out between 2007 and 2014. Select extracts from relevant exchanges are included in this paper.

This longitudinal qualitative study involved a mixed methods approach undertaken between 2005 and 2023. Interviews were supplemented by participant observation which was carried out at 35 Liverpool matches in this study by the first author during this period. This process involved undertaking structured observations, voice recordings and notetaking whilst travelling to, during and following home and away Liverpool matches in both domestic and European competitions (Rookwood & Millward, 2011). This combination of methods has been applied to various studies of football fandom and media, such as Lawrence's triangulated examination of the "complex, productive and interconnected cultural processes" and "exclusionary as well as inclusionary practices and customs" of football spectator communities (2015, p.282). All data were subjected to a thematic analysis to enable insights to be interpreted, obtained from the lived world of football fandom (Guest et al., 2011). Although it may be possible to 'jigsaw identify' some of the respondents, none of the participants are named. Instead, a coding system is employed to denote the method from which the data derives (interviews or participant observation), the type of respondent (fan, journalist, editor or author), the number to differentiate between respondents from the same category, and the date (e.g., 'I-F-3, 12.03.12').

2.1 Theoretical Framework One: Identity Theory, Bourdieu and Habitus

This work is underpinned by two theoretical constructs, namely collective identity and Bourdieu's notion of habitus, our approach to which is outlined here and in the following section. As a construct, identity has been applied to numerous sometimes overlapping studies of culture, politics, sport, media and activism, which are the central contextual pillars of this research. Identity theory (IT) and social identity theory (SIT) are eminent research frameworks emanating from the disciplines of sociology and psychology respectively, particularly from the 1970s. IT was developed partly to explain how individuals create and define their role in social groups, and how one's self-concept can derive from perceived membership to such groups. The theory aims not just to identify the circumstances under which individuals think of themselves and others as group members or otherwise, but also considers the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and collective behaviour (Burke & Stets, 2023). SIT is often framed as an interactionist social psychological theory addressing the role of self-conception and associated cognitive mechanisms and social beliefs in intergroup relations and group processes (Hogg, 2016).

Davis et al. (2019) proposed collective identity theory (CIT) as a convergence between the two programmes (IT and SIT). They suggest CIT maps closely onto IT's group identity, which relates to identification with socially situated identity categories. Their conceptualisation positions collective identity, in this instance, among those following a vegan diet, as a form of group or social identity, whereby activist collectives are integrated into the model of identity theory. Although their

methodology and context differ from our study, we apply IT here to an investigation of football fans engaged in social movements and associated activism.

This theoretical convergence also emphasises connections between individual and collective forms. Our approach adopts an individualist framework, whereby identity is formed in the mind of the individual, the aggregate of which helps create collective identities. The relational component is important to emphasise here, whereby individuals may be influenced by the social actions of others (both within and beyond their own groups), which may impact upon individual identity. A relevant question here becomes how fans use cultural capital as a means of social stratification.

Individual and group identities can be established by exposure to, and perceptions of, sameness and differentiation over space and time shaped by ceremony and ritual. In many contemporary societies sport can prove a significant symbolic marker of identity. National and domestic sports teams and clubs can serve as vehicles for the affirmation, expression and contestation of identity. For those who choose to adopt an allegiance to such entities, they can offer opportunities to express and affirm collective identities as well as a means of classifying themselves and others. Football has proven particularly relevant in this space, as a receptacle for identities loaded with significance (Lee, 2018). Attachments to football identities can generate loyalty, influence attitudes and shape behaviour, the consequences of which may vary from mild amusement to activist participation and even violent conduct. Collective identities can be constructed, negotiated and performed through symbolic and active participation in football fan culture collectives (Rookwood, 2012). These interactions and identities can prove difficult to measure empirically. However, they can be examined in the context of institutions, roles, relationships, activities, norms and shared experiences and meanings, as they are in this article. They can be seen as a form of football habitus.

For Bourdieu, habitus is the “structuring structure” (1977, p. 72) that gives people a “feel for the game” leading to a mode of behaving within a particular field. It is thus the sense of feeling ‘at home’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Habitus is formed in the social field as a result of the interplay between individuals and their interaction with structures that surround them. The social field, in which individuals and groups vie for hierarchy and standing, is a sociological space defined as “a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities” (Webb et al., 2002, p. 43). Within the social field is acquired ‘cultural capital’: education, knowledge and intelligence, which frames and structures the interaction of individuals and groups. Past experiences and the accumulation of cultural capital within a field frame and mould dispositions on a range of beliefs and cultural and political positions. However, rather than serving as natural occurrences, these experiences and values can be seen as “embodied history”, where the past shapes the present and the future, and are “internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). While people may be born in the Liverpool city region, or with familial and/or cultural links to it, perhaps no-one is born a ‘Scouser’ with the range of views, beliefs and

dispositions associated with the modern identity of many football fans on Merseyside. Liverpool and Everton fans gather the cultural capital and intelligence in learning about the political and cultural events that frame the histories and traditions of the city and their clubs. Thus, according to Bourdieu (1977), the often-unconscious processing of rules, values and dispositions is the ‘habitus’. This can be understood as “the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts” (Webb et al., p. 44). How we process the world and form our beliefs and values, “is always constructed through the habitus... and we are disposed towards certain attitudes, values or ways of behaving because of the influence exerted by our cultural trajectories” (ibid.).

Within the context of this article habitus provides the knowledge and intelligence that frames practices that allow people to fit in with others around them in a football stadium, on a coach going to an away fixture, or even watching in a pub with people like ‘us’ far away from where the game is being played. Thus, for many contemporary football fans, the historic, social and political experience of the past frames their current values. In Liverpool specifically, therefore, traumas like the Hillsborough disaster, events like the managed decline of the city under the Conservative Party in the 1980s, and the 1995–1996 Dockers’ Strike, which people may not have experienced first-hand, nonetheless form a set of dispositions that leads to a collective if not necessarily uniform identity. This in turn has led to the popularisation of anti-Tory sentiment among sections of local support and the collective singing of the ‘Fuck the Tories’ chant which emerged during Jeremy Corbyn’s time as leader of the Labour Party. This habitus can serve as a cultural capital guidebook for younger fans, and those who come from outside of the city, to navigate their way through the specific embodied histories that frame the contemporary social, political and cultural field of the Liverpool City region, whether they choose to accept it or not. This is especially noteworthy within the Liverpool context given that the city region elected more Tory MPs than many other comparable British cities in the post-WWII period, and Liverpool City Council was controlled by the Liberal Democrats as recently as 2007 (Wilks-Heeg, 2018). It can be argued that football has been a site where the gradual movement towards left-wing Labour Party support developed and was fostered in Liverpool. Wilks-Heeg (p. 61) notes that the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 “was a uniquely local source of anti-Tory sentiment, the political impact of which is impossible to quantify, yet obvious to anyone who spends time in the city-region.”

Habitus provides a set of ‘rules’ that frame the cultural experience of being football fans, with supporter activists and fan media producers becoming extensions of what Bourdieu describes as ‘cultural intermediaries’. Such individuals assume a culturally dominant position and communicate their knowledge of the events that frame the habitus, helping shape the experiences and persuasions of fellow fans (Maguire & Matthews, 2014). Although there is a tendency to emphasise this process as one of inclusion, encouraging people to become members of an ‘in group’, it is also necessary to note that this can also be about excluding those with insufficient social capital, banishing them to an ‘out group’. Shaped by degrees of engagement, cultural capital can be used as a means of imposing social stratification here. These cultural spokespersons can also frame political, social and cultural debates that take place in football fan media spaces. Local to Liverpool, this can be seen as an extension of

what Barrett has coined as the modern “Scouse habitus” (2016, p. 226), revealing the structural roots of the cultural and political phenomenon that she describes as contemporary “Scouseness” (p. 155). Writing about Nicky Allt’s box office blockbuster play about Liverpool F.C.’s history, *You’ll Never Walk Alone* (2013), Barrett notes that, “Scouseness goes beyond relating to an accent or dialect and is an embodiment of an identity that is not only related to place but is gendered and class based”, and while *You’ll Never Walk Alone* can be deemed a “parochial and chauvinistic play”, its “communal performances of football and fandom are about much more than that” (p. 232). Quoting Williams, she notes that there is a deep symbolic significance to football politically, culturally, and socially in the Liverpoolian habitus where “the two football clubs acted as collective points of city communion, continuity and neighbourhood solidarity, especially for working class men” (p. 232–233). Contemporary fan-produced media have become important contributions to a social field in which fans of football clubs on Merseyside, in an age of globalised media consumption, can teach others of the highly specific historical, political, social and cultural processes that have framed Scouse identity within the context of Liverpool and Everton. Contemporary “Scouseness” or the Scouse habitus are no longer simply the concerns of local fans and can become internationalised.

2.2 Theoretical Context Two: Fan Media and the Football Habitus

Media created by fans, as opposed to that produced by professional journalists, had been an important facet of British football culture since the heyday of the fanzine movement in the 1980 and 1990s. Shaped by their proximity to fans and perceived authenticity, fanzines in the analogue age provided a small scale yet important challenge to the hegemony of the gatekeepers in print and broadcast media. Following the subsequent mass proliferation of the Internet there has been a marked increase in the production and consumption of fan media, which relates closely to the evolution of fan culture in Merseyside and the Scouse habitus.

There are three distinct waves of fan media in the period under discussion in this article. The first runs from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, encapsulating the high point of the anarchic and subcultural power of print fanzines. The second wave runs from the earliest period of the mass adoption Internet in the mid-1990s, where websites, webzines, forums and nascent podcasts were less sophisticated and less commercially viable than many have become. The third runs from the mid-2000s after the development of Web 2.0, which transformed the opportunities for fans to produce and circulate their own media. The creation of individual forms of fan media in the second and third waves should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a broader movement, as was the case in the first wave.

Contextualising the final wave of fan media, channels like *The Anfield Wrap* and *Redmen TV* emerged, producing content across multiple platforms, developing similarly high production values as that of mainstream producers like the BBC or the *Liverpool Echo*. The Liverpool City Region proved a fertile space for fan media given the centrality of football to local public life and regional identity. It also echoed the explosion in fan media across Britain. *Arsenal Fan TV*, now

legally known as *AFTV*, is perhaps the most successful example. Established in 2012, it has, up to June 2023, accumulated 1.3 billion views on YouTube, built largely on emotional post-match reaction video interviews with fans outside stadiums after Arsenal games. In an age of globalisation, *AFTV* and *TAW* reveal the interplay of, and at times friction between, the hyper-local origins and traditions of British football clubs and the global marketplace of ideas. They are therefore emblematic of the tensions of glocalisation in modern football (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). However, another effect of the potentially global reach of fan media is that the knowledge required to develop social capital in football which was previously rooted in local in-groups can now be accrued by fans further away and who were previously excluded. For example, the *Boss Nights* examined later in this article bring highly localised fan rituals like chants and banners to an international audience which was once excluded from these forms and expressions of social capital.

These channels afforded primarily local fans recurring opportunities to express their thoughts and concerns in their own vernaculars. However, they did so for an increasingly global audience that desired this specificity and ‘authenticity’, at a time when matches were often presented in generic and sterile style by television broadcasters across the world. Podcasts, fan TV channels and vloggers, freed from the economically symbiotic editorial and stylistic constraints imposed within mainstream media, have been central in the development of these contemporary social fields. They reflected the initially subtle shift of power and concentration away from the mainstream gatekeepers to alternative media, which created “new spaces for alternative voices that provide the focus both for specific community interests as well as for the contrary and subversive” (Silverstone, 1999, p. 103). Football fan media was symptomatic of the capacity of new online media to “employ or modify the new communication artifacts, practices and social arrangements... to challenge or alter dominant, expected or accepted ways of doing society, culture and politics” (Lievrouw, 2012, p. 19).

The impact of pioneering fan media in the first wave, which ran from the heyday of fanzines to the first online forums and websites in the 1990s, began to challenge how the mainstream media had talked about football, its supporters and cultures. Some scholars who documented the first wave of Internet-based media examined the specific forms of alternative political entities like *Indymedia*, with their definitions also applicable to football fan media milieu. These are “media that are set up explicitly to fill the gaps left by the mass media, where the alternative media hold that the mass media have failed to represent certain issues or social groups” (Atton, 2002, p. 72).

In the first wave of football fan media, fanzines provided limited opportunities for the mass mobilization of highly committed supporters. They typically had small print runs with sales restricted to match days, mail order, or a small number of specialist shops, thus limiting their growth and impact as well as their social and political power. Their broader influence often involved creating and sharing ideas and information, helping readers develop forms of subcultural capital. Fanzines were produced largely by fans who could be framed as self-selecting Bourdieusian cultural-intermediaries, providing cultural capital for usually small coterie of readers of similar mind. Fanzine readers could be read as an ‘in group’ while those not doing

so are excluded in an ‘out group’. Contemporary fan media has partly functioned to reduce the gap between such groups in Liverpool.

In the second and third waves, podcasts, blogs, forums and webzines articulated football fan experiences and concerns that were largely neglected by older legacy media. Those involved in these spaces were often formerly passive consumers of media but who had switched to becoming producers, “a hybrid role in between: that of the produser. And what these produsers engage in is no longer simply usage or production, but something else altogether: produsage, or the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns, 2011, p.4). In the new online environment of football fandom, these modes helped deliver wider agency and power to supporters, particularly those protesting against the damaging administration and even criminal custodianship from an emerging group of club owners.

Whether coincidence or correlation, or symptomatic of the increasingly fractured political public sphere, contemporary fan protest in British football has often aligned neatly with the developments in social media. Globally networked fans began to sense they were perhaps more than the sum of their parts, and fan media was the site on which this new activism and solidarity was developed. Gillmor, the doyen of alternative media and journalism, coined the term ‘We the Media’ to encompass the shift towards production by ‘ordinary people’ facilitated by computers, the Internet, and smart phones. He noted that, “with powerful yet inexpensive tools, they take to the new-media realm quickly... When they can reach a potentially global audience, they literally can change the world” (Gillmor, 2004, p. xv). Networked fans began wielding power in British football. In 2007, supporters of non-league Ebbsfleet United assumed control of the club, democratically selecting their team each week (Perry & Sinnott, 2007). Elsewhere, fans co-ordinated campaigns against the negligent ownership of their clubs (Fitzpatrick & Hoey, 2022). Such movements developed from existing social, political and professional relationships, reflecting Lievrouw’s (2012, p. 15) contention that these forms of alternative media and activism are “complexly and dynamically networked.” The mobilisation of Liverpool fans in the protests against Hicks and Gillett, partly facilitated by fan media, would prove how dynamically networked these supporters were.

2.3 Liverpool’s Historical, Cultural and Sporting Context

According to Fletcher (2003), the name Liverpool has its origins in the tenth century Norsemen who settled there. They used an inlet known as the Pool as a natural harbour for their long-ships, naming the place Lifrig, with the later corruption and combination of the terms Lifrig and Pool eventually forming its current name. Liverpool grew to be “the mightiest seaport in the world” (Belchem, 2006, p. 20), also framed as “the 1880s New York of Europe” (Allt, 2008, p. 13). Associated with a growing population and thriving maritime economy, poverty and poor housing were also common. The city grew in stature through commerce, but also infamously as the largest slave-trading port city in Europe, even referred to as the “slaving capital of the world” (Moody, 2020, p. 1).

In its Victorian heyday Liverpool operated almost as a ‘city state’, adopting a semi-colonial method of looking at State questions, whilst defining itself against industrial Manchester and in rivalry with commercial London (Rookwood, 2012). However, the last century has been one of upheaval and transformation for Liverpool. Located at the intersection of competing cultural, economic and geo-political formations, the modern city can be difficult to categorise, although its development has been shaped by its geography. Du Noyer (2007a, p. 63) argues, “Liverpool only exists because it is a seaport. Its virtues and vices, its accent and attitude, its insularity and its open-mindedness, are all derived from that primary fact.” He adds that its inhabitants do not view Liverpool as a provincial city, but as.

Capital of itself. It is deeply insular, yet essentially outward looking: it faces the sea and all the lands beyond, but has turned its back on England. There were local men for whom Sierra Leone was a fact but London was only a rumour. They knew every dive in Buenos Aires but had no idea of the Cotswolds (p. 5).

Belchem (2006, p. xxxi) frames Liverpool as highly distinctive, differing sharply in socio-economic structure, political affiliation, speech and cultural image from adjacent industrial districts, as a city “in England but not of it.” Liverpool experienced significant migration from North Wales and Ireland, with Du Noyer (2007b) arguing that, “thanks to that massive post-Famine influx, it became a Celtic enclave in an Anglo-Saxon kingdom: Catholic, chaotic and subversive.” Liverpool’s history has shaped its identity.

For social actors, labels are a key component of identity construction. Liverpool’s inhabitants have adopted and been labelled with various terms. Throughout the nineteenth century locals referred to each other as ‘Dicky Sam’, with ‘Wacker’ becoming a common internal reference up until the 1970s (Crowley, 2020). Liverpool vernacular has drawn on a wide range of languages and is subject to complex influences. This is due to extensive trade, bilateral migration, population change and settlement (Crowley, 2017). For both insiders and outsiders, ‘Scouser’, and ‘Liverpoolian’ became established terms particularly from the 1950s. In contemporary football contexts the former is more dominant, notably as the latter can be employed to distinguish Liverpool supporters from Everton fans.

Scouse is a significant term in the discourse of contemporary culture, originating in a contraction of ‘lobscouse’, a term for a basic dish of stewed meat and vegetables which is used in several northern European languages, emphasising further Scandinavian influence. The transition to the shortened form ‘Scouse’ occurred in Liverpool in the late eighteenth century, largely referring to institutional food. It became a reference to the language and then the people of Liverpool, initially in First World War military slang as a pejorative or at least playfully disrespectful term used by outsiders to refer to inhabitants of Liverpool (Crowley, 2020). The derivative ‘Scouser’ was adopted by locals from the 1950s, with ‘Scouse’ still also internally associated with the dish, reflecting a connection with ordinariness, humility and necessity which partly define the character of Liverpool (Rookwood, 2012). The modern city is frequently associated with the Scouse accent, which Jones and Wilks-Heeg (2004) frame as a recently invented cultural response in dialect form to social

interaction and economic adversity. It emerged as a distinctive voice, a cultural force of linguistic bonding and assertion of collective identity that exaggerated divergence from the rest of the industrial north: “Instantly recognisable, the accent is the essential medium for the projection and representation of the local micro-culture, the ‘Scouse’ blend of truculent defiance, collective solidarity, scallwaggery and fatalist humour which sets Liverpool and its inhabitants apart” (Belchem, 2006, p. 33).

In the 1960s, Liverpool underwent a cultural transformation largely via the mediums of comedy, music and football. Liverpool comedians acquired national celebrity, as Scouse humour and verbal invention became cemented elements of civic identity. The popular music revolution accelerated through the global fame of The Beatles helped propel Liverpool’s status and transform its image. Music emanating from Liverpool and performed in venues such as the Cavern, Eric’s and the Cream during the ensuing decades added to this legacy. In parallel, the primarily working-class city became renowned for sustained football success and innovative fan culture, with both Liverpool and Everton crowned English champions in the 1960s, 1970 and 1980s. The pioneering participatory fan movements emanating particularly from Liverpool’s Spion Kop stand at Anfield gained global recognition, coinciding with Liverpool winning 37 domestic and European trophies from 1964 to 1992. Latter triumphs were set against growing economic decline and political neglect. The resultant stigma attached to the city within popular consciousness from the late 1970s – fused by disproportionate national media coverage of unemployment, crime and violence – reinforced negative stereotypes of Scouse identity.

Liverpudlians were sometimes presented as a lazy, dangerous, militant, self-pitying, tribal people wallowing in economic misfortune, excessive sentimentality and victim status (Scruton, 1999). This extended the cultural chasm, sharpening the sense of Liverpool as an internal and alienated other. This was particularly prevalent during Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government, crystallised by the 1981 Toxteth riots, which reflected anger at high unemployment, economic deprivation and a lack of opportunities for Liverpool’s working-class youth, as well as racial divisions and poor police relations (Butler, 2020). Chancellor Sir Geoffrey Howe wrote to Thatcher about Merseyside’s issues, emphasising “the option of managed decline”, whilst warning against spending the government’s “limited resources in trying to make water flow uphill” (see Parker & Atkinson, 2020, p. 168). The experience of hardship fostered Liverpool’s isolationism, as many amongst the local population increasingly defined their Scouse identity against Englishness, a consciousness conveyed especially through football and music (Fieldsend, 2019): “As the place was virtually brought to its knees... people became more insular and turned to their own arts and sports scene to revive flagging spirits” (Allt, 2008, p. 35).

From the 1960s, English football fan culture and identity altered dramatically. Supporters began travelling to away matches in increasing numbers, sometimes in mob-like groups. The interaction, segregation and ineffective policing of fans, and their attachment to, and disdain for, particular sporting and cultural identities contributed to the exacerbation of ‘football hooliganism’ (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2018). The expansion of this phenomenon and the conditions in which fans watched matches had various consequences. Three tragedies in the 1980s proved catalysts for the transformation of the football industry, as well as its governance and cultures

(Rookwood, 2017). The 1985 Bradford fire, 1985 Heysel disaster and 1989 Hillsborough tragedy claimed the lives of 56, 39 and 97 fans respectively. Heysel and Hillsborough directly involved Liverpool, the legacies of which have reshaped the identity, relations and reputation of the city and the club's fans (Rookwood & Hughson, 2017). The former disaster occurred before the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus. A stampede by Liverpool supporters towards Juventus fans in a 'neutral' section of the dilapidated stadium saw a wall collapse under the pressure of fleeing supporters, resulting in a mass crush (see Kech, 2015).

The latter tragedy transpired at Liverpool's FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest, widely attributed to the failure of police control, crowd management and emergency responses. Prior to kick-off there was no process of filtering fans in congested spaces outside the Leppings Lane turnstiles. Following orders from the inexperienced officer in overall command, a gate was opened to relieve the pressure. Crucially, however, fans entering were not then directed away from already overcrowded central pens. This situation, combined with the failure of the police to recognise and respond to the obvious signs of distress of the injured and dying, resulted in fans being crushed to death, some compressed against fences behind the goal. These metal barriers reflected the "Thatcherite obsession with 'secure containment', resulting in the penning of fans, the acceptance of stadium neglect and the compromising of crowd safety" (Scraton, 2004, p. 196). The implementation of key recommendations of the resultant Taylor Report involved extensive developments in stadium renovation and reconstruction, as well as football legislation, policing, crowd control and fan culture. However, for Liverpool fans and Scousers generally, the sense of injustice in the official and legal response and the deceitful national press coverage of Hillsborough remains painfully evident. In January 2023, the national body for police chief constables finally issued an official apology for the police failures at Hillsborough.

Bereaved families had long campaigned against the 1991 inquest verdict of accidental death, which was finally quashed in 2012. In 2016, a new inquest jury found the victims to have been unlawfully killed due to gross negligence manslaughter, yet no convictions of any offence relating to the disaster or the years of false evidence were applied. Hillsborough became imbedded in the fabric of Liverpool – the club and city – and in the collective memory of fans. A memorial was erected at Anfield, with the monument's eternal flame etched into the club logo. With the notable exception of Everton, few fanbases of English clubs demonstrated collective solidarity and support. Instead, some rival fans have and continue to mock Liverpool supporters, and as Du Noyer (2007a), p. 180) argues: "Hillsborough encouraged Liverpoolians in their insularity... Self-Pity-City became a recurring headline. The evident rift between sentimental Celtic and stoical Saxon England was never wider." He claims that Liverpool F.C.'s anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone' became a statement: "It's our own solidarity that matters. Sod the rest of yer's" (2007b).

2.4 Football Fan Culture, Identity and Media in Contemporary Liverpool

Bryson described Liverpool as "pathetically reliant on football for its sense of destiny" (1995, p. 255), with Du Noyer framing Liverpool's connection to the sport an

“idolatrous passion” (2007a, p. 7). The city once fed on a diet of trophies was largely starved of football success in the 1990s. Liverpool won one league title, FA Cup and League Cup, with Everton’s 1995 FA Cup their last trophy. The once largely cordial relations between Liverpool and Everton fans had also begun to sour. The five-year ban imposed on English clubs after Heysel denied champions Everton (and Liverpool) European Cup football. Domestic success helped ease the animosity, which largely gave way to civic cohesion after Hillsborough. Such solidarity has since been tested in the decades of contrasting fortunes. Liverpool won five trophies in 2001 under French manager Gérard Houllier, and Spanish successor Rafael Benitez secured a first Champions League trophy of Liverpool’s modern era in 2005. Wagg claims that Liverpool’s success in European football did not reflect a connection with the continent, with the club “perceived to be *in* Europe, but decisively not *of* it. They were European victors, but remained obstinately local” (2005, p. 121). He also contends that Europe “was for the most part there to be conquered, but not embraced or understood” (p. 125). The writings of various authors contest these arguments.

To dissociate themselves from other supporter types (namely those who wore club colours), certain groups of match-going fans in Britain began exhibiting specific clothing styles associated with collective yet exclusive identities. From the 1970s, identifiable subcultures emerged including ‘skins’, ‘bootboys’, ‘punks’ and eventually ‘casuals’. The latter proved the most enduring and is often connected to football hooliganism. The genesis of casual culture can be traced to Liverpool fans acquiring apparel in Europe (see Hewitson, 2014). The club won six European trophies between 1976 and 1984 and the repeated exposure to continental cities and styles provided resourceful fans with opportunities to source and sell clothing. The movement and merchandise spread across Britain and beyond. Meanwhile, the experiences and perception of reception instilled in Liverpool fans an admiration for Europe: “The prejudices that Liverpool people face in the UK quickly evaporate once leaving these shores. Being a Scouser... can often mean being held in reverence in other countries” (Allt, 2008, p. 28). As Fieldsend (2019) argues, Liverpool fans often identify strongly with both the city and the continent, with many Liverpoolians (in both senses of the term) feeling disconnected from England.

This identity has been manifested through songs and banners exhibited at Liverpool matches, expressing sentiment including ‘Scouse Separatists’, ‘The People’s Republic of Liverpool’ and especially ‘We’re not English, we are Scouse’. The latter notion first appeared in 1978 but gained momentum as a modern sentiment during European campaigns of the Houllier era. Fans of most English clubs would often display their club name on a St George’s Cross or Union flag at matches (the latter becoming less prevalent in the modern era, emphasising the growing commitment to English over British national identity). In contrast, fans of clubs with sustained exposure and success in Europe – such as Manchester United as Chelsea – began to adopt club colours for such banners. This practice was instigated by Liverpool fans with whom it is far more readily associated and at times politicised.

In 2001 a movement began to ‘Keep Flags Scouse’ (KFS). The “at best semi-serious” campaign included “the Boss Wednesday Agreement – an entirely fictional treaty between entirely fictional KFS factions where the rules of Scouse flagdom are definitively laid out. It was a joke. Sort of” (Wells, 2007). The KFS campaign

reflected and heightened collective consciousness amongst “Middle England-loathing reds” who were “embarrassed and disgusted” to see England flags displayed at Liverpool games by “day-trippers and nouveau fans” with “small-town philosophies and Ing-ger-land attitudes” (ibid.). Such fans are often referred to as ‘Wools’ – a usually derogatory designation of differentiation denoting non-Scouse individuals, attitudes and/or behaviours (see Fieldsend, 2019). One interviewee contextualised a related point with a pejorative reference to a Liverpool fan media channel: “Being from Liverpool doesn’t mean you can’t be a Wool. Look at that Redmen TV” (I-F-3, 30.07.22). Since 2001 the term has also been co-opted by culturally astute Norwegian fans. Continuing Liverpool’s Scandinavian connection, the ‘Norwegian Wools’ banner and those behind it are considered “Funny. Conscious of its credentials... Also has earned its stripes – those lads go everywhere... good company... And they get the ale in: very important” (Wells, 2007). Some Scandinavians talk with what sociolinguists might term ‘code-switching’ Scouse accents. One Norwegian couple moved to Anfield Road, opening a hotel and bar named after their daughter Tia, as in *This Is Anfield*.

In highlighting the perceived importance of conveying culturally compliant sentiment (exhibited in white text on red banners), KFS did emphasise questions of authenticity and identity. It was also a response to the perceived alienation of local and traditional fandom at Liverpool matches, an experience not confined to Merseyside. After the Taylor Report, seating replaced terracing in English grounds in the top divisions. Tickets became more expensive, clubs sought to attract new fans to enhance revenues, and football legislation changed match policing. The ensuing commercialisation, embourgeoisement and globalisation of the newly formed Premier League altered the demographic of support, the fan experience and the generation of atmosphere. This was particularly the case for successful clubs, where working class terrace cultures were especially marginalised.

Liverpool fans responded collectively through the Reclaim the Kop (RTK) movement. A select group of supporters (including the first author) met in November 2006 and formed the loosely organised and short-lived collective. A Kop Charter was drawn up detailing the core priorities and principles of Kopite culture. A decision was then made to approach the club’s hierarchy to request that a block of seats in the Kop be reserved to which specific season ticket holders could be relocated from other parts of the ground. Congregating this core of Liverpool’s support (including those who travelled away to most or all domestic and European games) was intended to help regenerate the Anfield atmosphere. The first author was also present amongst the small group that met with Liverpool’s then CEO, who agreed to allocate 1,892 seats (a nod to the year the club were formed) in Block 306.

When Liverpool was sold to American venture capitalists Tom Hicks and George Gillett for £470 m in February 2007, the club soon became riddled with debt, disunity and broken promises about a new stadium. In January 2008, Spirit of Shankly (SOS) were formed as a fan union, inspired by the totemic manager Bill Shankly. SOS sought to give voice to collective concerns and organised opposition in helping unseat the owners’ “dilatatory and profiteering Anfield regime” (Williams, 2012, p. 426). In 2013, a group of fans formed Spion Kop 1906 (a reference to the year the original stand was built). This collective organise flags and displays on the Kop and

also use social media to coordinate protests tackling issues including ticket price increases, television scheduling and competition reforms. According to a member interviewed its “main mission is to keep the traditions of the Kop alive, make Anfield as unique as possible, and make sure this gets passed down from generation to generation” (I-F-1, 26.02.23).

This turbulent period also coincided with significant developments in fan media. Three Liverpool fans founded *Boss Mag*, which ran between 2007 and 2015. The fanzine focused on issues central to Liverpool fan culture, namely football, music and clothes as well as protest and politics. Many contributors were regular match-going supporters with season tickets in and around Block 306 of the Kop. In 2011 the fans behind the magazine began organising gigs infused with Liverpool’s music and football culture. Various local artists have performed including Jamie Webster, Kieran Molyneux, John Power, Peter Hooton and Ian Prowse. These music events have since been staged in Liverpool, Europe, North America and Asia. 2011 also saw *The Anfield Wrap* founded by a collective of Liverpool broadcasters and journalists. TAW produce podcasts, radio shows, videos, live shows, match reports, and articles on Liverpool F.C. and the city’s culture and music. Parallel entities developed at Everton, including the fan organisation *Blue Union*, independent media channel *Toffee TV* and the podcast *Blue Room*. In October 2010, the American multinational sports holding conglomerate now known as Fenway Sports Group (FSG) purchased Liverpool for £300 m. FSG inherited a club that was underperforming. They appointed talismanic manager Jürgen Klopp in 2015, whose influence, politics and emotional connection with fans has been compared to that of Bill Shankly (McDougall, 2022). Klopp’s reign has spanned the Brexit period, with the UK’s protracted withdrawal from the European Union sharpening the focus on collective identities. The club has extended the capacity of Anfield stadium and won seven separate trophies from 2019 to 2022. However, the larger crowds and a growing fan-base have created further challenges regarding fan identity. As the following sections demonstrate, some fan media outlets and networks have been instrumental in creating content and organising collaborative events. These have provided a significant cultural and educational mobilising hub for many fans, connecting overlapping segments of Liverpool’s idiosyncratic, political, civic and sporting contexts. For those who engage, they have developed the Scouse habitus.

2.5 From *Boss Mag* to *Boss Nights*: ‘My City, My People, My Heart’

The Internet inspired *Boss Mag*... In 2007, the Internet forums, pre-social media, were taking away from the age-old tradition of football fanzines and football culture. There was a real danger that we were going to lose something printed and physical, something you could hold, something that would last. I say this as someone who’s a product of the digital age (I-E-2, 23.02.23).

After some contrasting responses on an online forum to an account of an altercation between Liverpool fans and Chelsea players in 2007, some Liverpool fans “felt we needed something away from that Internet vacuum” (ibid.). *Boss Mag* was created by three Liverpool fans, spearheaded by the above interviewee. Its 16

issues spanned October 2007 to May 2015, with a style deviating little from the first 32-page edition, and a price remaining fixed at £1. The first author was one of 45 supporters who contributed segments, which ranged from comic cultural reflections to music reviews and stories of European away matches. Regular features included the ‘#Scouse – #Wool’ section, whereby specific aspects of match culture and Liverpool life were categorised, statements symbolising negotiated forms of collective identity (Fieldsend, 2019). The fanzine was not widely available to outsiders but was both created and consumed by the core of Liverpool’s hardcore, match-going support. In some ways, therefore, it was both exclusionary and inclusive.

Issue contributors were listed but not alongside their work, providing what one reader termed “a liberating anonymity” (I-F-2, 27.04.14). Its style contrasted with TAW’s approach, and perhaps consciously so. As another interviewee stated:

It wasn’t about getting people’s names in lights, making people famous. It was literally a black and white, photocopied fanzine in the traditional sense, that just recorded what was going on at the time. It wasn’t precious about grammar and spelling. It wasn’t about making people into journalists or releasing books on the back of it (I-E-2, 23.02.23).

Aspects of *Boss Mag* were loosely informed by the 1980s fanzine *The End* but it did not reference or duplicate its style. Prior to the 2011 release of its compilation, issues of *The End* were not generally visible to *Boss Mag* contributors, for some of whom it merely remained “this mythical thing that we knew about” (ibid.). A Liverpool photographer provided *Boss Mag*’s iconic front covers, often captioned by song titles from Liverpool bands. Referencing Echo & the Bunnymen, the final issue was titled ‘Nothing lasts forever’.

In 2011 a launch party was arranged for a new *Boss Mag* issue. Subsequent events “became standard gigs after Liverpool matches... *Boss Night* came about organically. *Boss Mag* was as much about music as football. So it seemed natural to go from showcasing bands... to doing a night ourselves” (ibid.). This interviewee added: “There wasn’t anywhere where regular faces from the match would tend to migrate after games.” *Boss*’ Sunday Sessions were “LFC-centric, but initially it wasn’t about singing terrace songs... Organically it morphed into this L.F.C. terrace chant beast, and that’s really down to the emergence of Jamie Webster” (ibid.). Affectionately described as “a kid from Croxteth sat on the back of the Cambraco Liverpool bus singing songs” (I-A-1, 22.02.23), Webster featured low on early *Boss Night* bills, rising in subsequent sessions to eventually become the headline act. He performed covers and adapted terrace chants, eventually writing and releasing his own music. Webster rose to prominence with ‘Allez Allez Allez’ which became the soundtrack to Liverpool winning the 2019 Champions League, performing at *Boss Sessions* at finals in Kyiv, Madrid and Paris to a combined 150,000 Liverpool fans: “With his Scouse lyrics and anti-Tory t-shirts he’s become the people’s poet” (I-F-3, 30.07.22). *Boss Nights* became global events, performed in cities from New York to New Delhi. The organiser reflected:

The *Boss Sessions* abroad are probably what I’m most proud of. The fans abroad... want to embrace Scouse culture... Maybe we’ve been a bit unfair to

out of towners over the years, because genuinely they want to embrace the city and the rich culture we've got. They want to take the lead off the Scouse hard core, they want to be a part of it... The fan culture, the city, the politics. Now we're singing off the same hymn sheet... It helps differentiate our fans from [Manchester] City and Chelsea in North America, for example, who I think embrace the commercial aspect of their clubs (I-E-2, 23.02.23).

This further emphasises a consciousness of the culture of exclusion prevalent in aspects of Scouse fandom. Also, despite referring to this as an “organic grassroots movement” (ibid.), for some this global dimension presents familiar friction, whilst revealing a demand for further cultural authenticity, as one interviewee articulated: “Now Boss Nights are full of replica shirts and the same old songs, it's almost gimmicky. That doesn't appeal to me anymore. Now there's another void that needs filling with something authentic again” (I-A-1, 22.02.23).

2.6 Fan Media and *The Anfield Wrap*

When *TAW* launched in 2011 its partisan, irreverent approach and grassroots origins firmly ensconced it in the old fanzine tradition. Yet from its beginnings it produced content across a range of digital platforms: audio podcast, digital iPad magazine, website and YouTube channel. After analytics revealed significant audiences situated beyond Liverpool, particularly in Ireland, Australia and the USA, it also branched out into live international events, attracting thousands of fans (I-J-1, 15.02.23). It could be argued that it set the template for *Boss Nights* and their equivalents to take events to overseas fans and to mix fan conversation with ‘authentic’ contemporary Liverpool music, through artists like the Tea Street Band and Jamie Webster.

The core team behind *TAW* effectively came together in the campaign against Hicks and Gillett's ownership of Liverpool. None had been friends, nor had they gone to matches together, but they had each developed a prominent online and offline presence in Liverpool fan circles. Their respective engagements also enhanced their authenticity. Neil Atkinson and Andy Heaton were active in SOS, with the former serving as chairman. Gareth Roberts created and wrote for *Well Red* magazine. Others had produced their own blogs, been involved in local broadcasting or had their own lines of Liverpool clothing. Liverpool F.C. podcasts existed before *TAW*, including *Anfield Index* and *Liverpool Official*, but these were largely produced by fans beyond Merseyside. *TAW* presented an unvarnished and often pronouncedly Liverpoolian angle on football by fans who were season ticket holders. Ryan (2020, p. 149) notes that this authenticity brought the slang and Scouse idiom of Liverpool to an army of overseas subscribers, “*TAW* fosters a linguistic and cultural exchange. Non-UK listeners adopt ‘Scouse’ language and phrases”, and “learning the slang helps Irish supporters feel more like insiders” (p. 257). He also argues that “outlets like *TAW* play a role in developing a sense of uniqueness around the city and the club, and developing a defiance” (ibid.).

For those who engage in its content, *TAW* has had an important influence in educating those from outside of the city, many of whom may never attend a game at Anfield, about key issues surrounding the culture of the club, matchdays

and the city. Ryan (2021, p. 147) notes “*The Anfield Wrap* itself helps maintain the fan discourse around Hillsborough, with numerous podcasts and articles appearing, and providing an education for those from outside the city.” It was an important outlet for discussions around ticket pricing both at Anfield and away fixtures, despite this apparently not being a major concern for the less committed fan and being among the least read material on *TAW* website (I-J-1, 15.02.23). The development of SOS and its role in debates around ticket pricing and fan representation on the club’s board have also been central concerns of *TAW*, bringing local supporters’ views to those outside of the city. In recent years the development of the Fans Supporting Foodbanks movement has also been a priority for *TAW* and its various channels, as well as explaining the political, social and economic context of Merseyside that has exacerbated the need for it. The foodbanks issue, when combined with wider discussions about the political challenges that Merseyside has faced in an era of Tory-government austerity, has been one that has brought many Scouse and nonlocal supporters together in solidarity. Contextualising contested notions of fan activism and exclusionary attitudes, one *TAW* interviewee stated:

People talk about daytrippers taking a ticket away from locals but there were people who were coming in for the day, building in a visit to us and visiting places that we talked about, like the Florrie [Florence Institute], and making a donation to the Foodbank. They had become engrossed in the stuff that we had been talking about. I ran a collection from our office for the Knowsley Foodbank and got loads of stuff, I brought car fulls of it up at Christmas. Because I am from Huyton, I explained its situation on a video, I explained the challenges the area faced. I talked on a podcast about where I have grown up, what I have seen and how levelling up doesn’t work for Huyton and they [listeners/ viewers] got it, they really got it (I-J-1, 15.02.23).

Therefore, *TAW*’s overseas visits also sharpened the focus on elements of collective identity and the culture of Scouse habitus. This included places that featured on *TAW* podcasts that resonated with those attending their events. Fans would ask about the co-operatively owned bakery Homebaked on Breck Road at the back of the Kop, or the best pubs to visit on matchday (I-J-1, 15.02.23). However, beyond the more superficial issues and those surrounding clothes, trainers and lifestyle that are central to modern Merseyside casuals, there has also been a deeper political and cultural understanding of Liverpool (the city and the club) shown by some overseas fans at *TAW* events. For instance,

We had 1,500 or 1,600 people attend in Melbourne in Australia. When we went on those tours we’d have lads talking about the *Spirit of Shankly*, and wearing *Don’t Buy the Sun* pin badges. They had the same clobber, wearing Fred Perry or Jockey or Transalpino t-shirts. They were aware of all the Fuck the Tories, Don’t Buy the Sun and Hillsborough stuff. They were the same as us, but they’d just been brought up on the other side of the world (ibid.).

2.7 Protest, Politics and Paris

In January 2023, UEFA was forced to accept responsibility for the events surrounding the 2022 Champions League final debacle in Paris. Thousands of both Liverpool and Real Madrid fans had been crushed into confined spaces outside the Stade de France stadium prior to kick-off, in a situation all too reminiscent of the Hillsborough tragedy. After the game, gangs of thieves attacked supporters as they left the ground, with police offering little or no protection. Those that compiled UEFA's report into the events agreed that "this situation was a near-miss: a term used when an event almost turns into a mass fatality catastrophe" (UEFA, 2023, p. 10). In the minutes prior to kick-off and then during the immediate aftermath of the event, UEFA and the French national police falsely accused late-arriving Liverpool fans and a mass of counterfeit tickets in a victim-blaming strategy that borrowed much from the smears of Hillsborough. However, unlike the tragedy of 33 years before, globally-networked and politically savvy fans in Paris were able to utilise modern technologies to help disprove the 'great lie' before it had a chance to take root. Supporters shared videos of violent and negligent policing outside the ground, the potentially fatal containment of supporters, and older people and children being tear gassed indiscriminately without provocation. High profile media figures like ex-players Jamie Carragher and Jason McAteer and journalists including Kelly Cates, shared *prima facie* evidence of the negligence of the police captured by fans. Broadcasters and media organisations shared fan footage shot on mobile phones prior to, during, and immediately after the match. *TAW* content editor and presenter Neil Atkinson gave several television and radio interviews offering eyewitness testimony to the horrific events that unfolded before and after the game. Multi-lingual journalist and Liverpool fan Daniel Austin, a regular *TAW* contributor who had previously lived in Paris, spent five days giving interviews in French and English which did much to counter the narrative of the authorities.

Liverpool supporters at Hillsborough did not have access to this mobile technology, nor were they as dynamically networked or politically organised as the modern fan-base. As a result, many of the lies espoused by the authorities in 1989 were accepted and amplified by the media. In Paris, fans of both Liverpool and Real Madrid possessed the mass means of media production in the shape of smart phones. As a result, the authorities were forced to admit, "UEFA announced on big screens within the stadium and thereby via broadcasters to the world, that the delay in kick-off was due to 'late' arriving supporters. This claim was objectively untrue" (ibid.). The announcement of the delay conveyed on stadium screens angered many inside, particularly those had queued for hours whilst being subjected to dangerously inept crowd control. The fan video footage shared on social media which later helped exonerate supporters and demonstrate organisational culpability also influenced the mood of those inside the ground on the night. This was particularly when combined with the circulation of unverified and thankfully false rumours that a fan had died (PO-F-4, 28.05.22).

Writing in the days after the release of the UEFA report on the event, Austin (2023) said,

Growing up in Liverpool means having your worldview shaped by Hillsborough... social grief and searing sense of injustice forms an inherited trauma... we share a collective spirit defined by three constants: a distrust of authority, a desire to fight for truth and a relentless stubbornness in the face of adversity.

As Austin alludes, the experience of Hillsborough and the campaigning response for truth and justice has cast a long shadow over Merseyside for over 30 years and deepened the anti-authoritarian political sub-currents of the region. In the face of the now ingrained ‘always the victims’ taunts from across the football and cultural divide, the struggle of the Hillsborough families to achieve justice and the official exoneration of their relatives has instilled in Merseyside fans the necessity of solidarity. This has also been forged in a period of near constant turmoil between supporters of Liverpool and Everton and the contested ownership of their clubs. They have been united in their attachment to the utility of protest to voice their dissatisfaction with the governance of their clubs, from the ‘Keep Everton at Goodison’ campaigns of the late 1990s, to those against Hicks and Gillett in the late 2000s, and to the more recent ticket pricing campaign at Liverpool and the anti-Board protests at Everton in 2022 and 2023. These fan protests have gained exponentially enhanced traction thanks to the highly networked nature of contemporary football fandom on Merseyside, but they have also reflected a much deeper tradition of political activism that has its roots in the maritime tradition of union activism of the city.

When the Hicks and Gillett protests escalated in 2008–2009, they came from a hardcore of astute Liverpool fans with a wealth of political, social and fan activism experience. SOS emerged as a pioneering fan union anchored in the trade union and political activism of the city (Williams, 2012). For a generation of younger fans who had grown up under Tony Blair and the relative stability of New Labour, it would prove to be a political education in the Scouse habitus and a frame of reference against which to continue the expression and renegotiation of collective identity. The formation of TAW around a hardcore of fans illustrates how weak tie connections offline and online can ultimately lead to effective supporter mobilization.

For some of our interviewees, the mobilization of SOS and the groups opposing Hicks and Gillett was inspirational and emblematic of what we frame the ‘Scouse habitus’. One noted,

Of the inner core of protesting Liverpool fans, 85% were local hardcore fans. I looked upon them with awe, they were mythological beings for me because they were Liverpool’s proper fans, they were the ones that went home and away. They were highly impressive (I.A.1, 22.02.23).

Critics might warn against overstating the influence of this core of fans in helping oust these owners, but the data presented in this article concur with the findings of key investigative journalists (see Reade, 2012).

The above interviewee, invoking Bill Shankly’s famous comments, also credited these protests for shaping his political outlook,

It was a form of socialism; it was a form of people getting together in a community and taking direct action. It was like a union now... the first I’d

seen of a union. It governed my political outlook and directed me to be the left-leaning community-serving person that I think I am (I.A.1, 22.02.23).

Echoing Reade (2012), another respondent argued that a key reason Hicks and Gillett sold Liverpool was the fan protests which had deterred potential investors: “The fans were the reason. They referred to us as ‘the noise that wouldn’t go away’. We didn’t go away. We continued banging the drum, we were out on the streets. These Texan billionaires underestimated the highly organised nature of the fan base” (I.E.2, 23.02.23).

The highly networked nature of this campaign was further revealed in September 2010 when, after a Liverpool fan photographed and tweeted Hicks touring investment institutions in New York, supporters based there who subscribed to fan media such as *Well Red* magazine, printed leaflets and posters and gathered in protest outside Deutsche Bank in mid-town Manhattan (I-J-1, 15.02.23). Despite misguidedly citing dated tabloid tropes, the *Wall Street Journal* encapsulated the paradigm shift in fan activism in the digital age, “In the old days, English soccer hooligans settled scores with knives and broken bottles. As Tom Hicks is learning... the weapons of choice these days – camera phones, Twitter and spam emails – can be almost as scary” (Enrich & Zuckerman, 2010).

Our findings demonstrate that the socially networked nature of the Hicks and Gillett protests, which for some may have been influenced by the scars and resilience of the Hillsborough families, laid the foundations of the effective fan activism in Paris. Technology, and the development of highly functioning networks of politically and socially committed supporters and fan media, led to the narrative of UEFA and the French authorities being compellingly challenged in real time. Echoing one of the core themes of this paper, one interviewee said of the 2022 final,

We are all citizen journalists now; every single supporter is the equivalent of an investigative reporter because the devices we have in our pockets allowed the truth to get out there much quicker. UEFA, the police and the French government all tried to set their narrative and it was quickly debunked by our fans and that was through the use of media, the videos that were showing what was happening and couldn’t be disputed (I.E.2, 23.02.23).

This interviewee also encapsulated how the spaces that new technology creates can potentially prove potent for fan activism,

We all had a place and a means of challenging what was getting said and that’s the main difference between what happened in Paris and what happened in the aftermath of Hillsborough that’s taken best part of 30 years for the truth to come out. With Paris, I feel that within 30 hours the truth was out there for those that wanted to listen (ibid.).

3 Conclusion

Merseyside is often considered to be synonymous with football, partly due to the achievements, cultural movements and fan activism associated with Liverpool and Everton. The contemporary participatory fandom emanating from those clubs

has been shaped by influential fan media channels and events facilitated by the development of the Internet and the explosion of user-generated online content. Some practices of cultural exclusion remain apparent within Liverpool fandom, with cultural capital used as a means of social stratification, and yet this fan media content, often created locally but consumed by globally networked supporters seeking authentic material over the sterility of mass broadcasting, has reduced the space between the in and out groups in club support. Embracing football and broader social issues, *TAW* have played a pioneering role for Liverpool fan culture, activism, inclusion and solidarity, whilst the club's current media department also regularly produce inclusive, innovative and culturally representative content. It is against such standards that alternative and often peripheral channels compete for subscribers, viewers and perceptions of quality and authenticity.

Boss Mag evolved in parallel, with the Liverpool fanzine giving rise to music events showcasing artists such as Jamie Webster, celebrating the city's music and football culture. These events facilitate the spread of the Scouse 'habitus' beyond the once narrow confines of club and city in the pre-Internet age. Yet, arguments expressed here that the international expansion of *Boss Night* might inhibit local authenticity reveal the dynamic tensions of glocalisation. This is particular but not unique to Liverpool. *AFTV* have amassed considerable if contested popularity, whilst emerging songwriter Louis Dunford's record currently plays before Arsenal matches declaring 'North London forever... these streets are our own'. Against the backdrop of football's global consumption, the appetite for fan media and local artists at Premier League clubs is growing.

Such platforms, events and personnel and the cultures they connect to can shape social identities. Habitus provides a means of understanding how individuals see the world and their place within it. However, as a function of cognitive mechanisms and social beliefs, collective identity is difficult to measure empirically, but can be examined through institutions, relationships, norms and shared experiences. In a maritime city often anchored to football, socially situated identity categories are particularly pertinent in Liverpool, with memberships and meanings continually under negotiation. Connecting with theorisations of collective identity, Liverpool is often associated with unity but not always uniformity. Europe invested funding and bestowed the status of *Capital of Culture* in 2008 upon the inwardly conscious yet outward looking city. In the 2016 Brexit referendum the majority of Liverpool's wards voted to remain, yet pockets of people opted to leave the European Union. Local Liverpool supporters declaring their 'Scouse not English' identity may view themselves inhabitants of a city 'in England but not of it'. Fans from elsewhere can feel alienated by such expression, and the exclusionary manifestations of social identity can be apparent as a consequence (Lawrence, 2015).

Furthermore, not all supporters of the city's football teams engage in the wider idiosyncratic cultural and political civic context, or are receptive to its educators. Some problematise such separatist sentiment or "romantic isolationism" (Du Noyer, 2007a, p. 283). Others may contest stated connections to the club's 'socialist' ideals whilst it competes in a market fused with capitalist greed. Fans have displayed 'Refugees welcome' flags on the Kop, but such acts

of solidarity have their counterpoints. In February 2023 a Kirkby hotel accommodating asylum seekers saw violent protests triggered by an allegation that a man had made inappropriate advances to a local teenage girl. Despite Labour politician Jeremy Corbyn addressing a counter-demonstration in Liverpool, concerns about far-right views disrupting the city's traditionally left-leaning political climate have advanced. Since Keir Starmer succeeded Corbyn as Labour Leader, many Scousers who oppose Starmer's policies have come to feel politically homeless. Regularly sung at Scouse sporting contests and music events, perhaps 'Fuck the Tories' currently encapsulates the city's frustrated political identity. Being galvanised only by the politics you stand against can eventually prove a problematic position.

That said, community cohesion remains evident in other experiential aspects of Scouse identity, with football a primary mode of expression. Terrace chants directed at Liverpool fans continue to feature implicit and explicit references to disasters: 'murderers' at Heysel, and 'victims' of Hillsborough. The latter tragedy represents the true test of civic solidarity on Merseyside. Whilst supporters of rival clubs sometimes mock Hillsborough, Everton's core fanbase maintain their commitment to solidarity, partly through negotiated practices of self-policing.

The 2022 Champions League final was clouded by dangerously inept crowd control in Saint-Denis, with authorities pursuing reactive victim-blaming strategies reminiscent of the smears of Hillsborough. That the potentially fatal containment of supporters did not result in casualties was largely due to the restraint of fans and the collective memory of Hillsborough. This too is part of the Scouse habitus, the embodied history shaping the present. The type of tenacious Scouse solidarity and activist antics underpinned by intellectual capacity and technical capital that helped dissolve Hicks and Gillett's ownership of Liverpool was also evident in the aftermath of Paris. *TAW* contributors played a key role in shaping the narrative, whilst the receptiveness of mainstream broadcasters to the messengers and their message emphasised the growing symbiosis of media formats. This reveals one of several directions for future research in this space, which may evolve with cultural transition and technological advancement. Other potential avenues for investigation include networks of solidarity such as Fans Supporting Foodbanks, comparative analyses of supporter unions, activist opposition to club owners and protests against what fans perceive as threatening to the game and its cultures.

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