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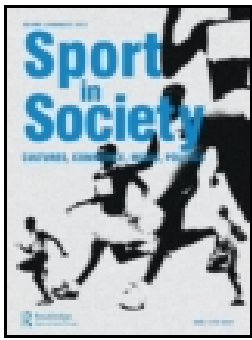http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/18995/

Article

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Football fans' contestations over security: between offline and online fan spaces and channels

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ABSTRACT

Much like in a myriad of other domains of the modern society, 'security' remains a highly contentious and debated area of 'online' and 'offline' football fan cultures. Against this starting point, this article critically examines how football fans respond to and contest key developments under the aegis of 'securitization' by employing relevant examples from elite English football. By subscribing to the contention that football fandom and its activism may be traced from fanzines to online digital media, this article draws from extant literature, fanzine archival material and digital sources to provide snapshots of two important examples that represent alternative forms of public communication and discourse – namely, (i) fanzines and (ii) digital media. The article's main arguments are that (1) fans' contestations of securitization have followed similar pathways as fans' opposition to other elements of the game; (2) fans' security contestations demonstrate both elements of continuity and responsiveness to emerging issues, and lastly, (3) English football's field of security contestations, to be fully captured by scholars, should be approached in relation to both its offline and online manifestations.

Introduction

Whilst others have examined how football fans respond to powerful '-ization' processes such as commercialization or globalization in contemporary football cultures (Numerato and Giulianotti 2018; Millward 2011), fans' reactions to securitization in football have received relatively scarce attention. This composes a starting point for this article which explores how football fans contest security and safety-related developments impacting football, its organization and cultures, while demonstrating that contestations of security present a significant layer of fan engagement on offline and online channels. As a notoriously slippery and fluid concept, 'security' – and its pursuit, accompanied measures and discourses – has for years been one of *the* most contested aspects of contemporary football cultures and a key source for debate between fans, clubs, security providers, stewards and authorities (Numerato 2018). Thus, although security remains a ubiquitous element of modern football, fans are not uncritically positioned on the receiving end of it and, indeed, the importance of understanding citizens' perceptions

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of security developments (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2016) also encompasses fans who, following Numerato and Giulianotti (2018), can be understood as critically reflective agents.

Against this backdrop, this article critically investigates (1) how football fans contest security-related changes, policies and discourses and, crucially, (2) how this has evolved in line with wider changes in the realms of fandom, technology and the commodified securitization (Giulianotti 2011) of English football. Fitzpatrick and Hoey (2022) noted in their robust analysis of fan activism over the last 30 years that the development of fan activism – in line with football fandom more broadly (Millward 2008) – can be traced from print *fanzines,* via *e-zines,* to *social media.* Whilst this implies an offline/online shift, one under-examined area relates to how this shift has impacted fans' responses to and contestations of repressive security and safety measures within and beyond the stadiums. Whilst much has been written about how fan protests and mobilization have emerged as a response to the globalization, commercialization or mediation of football (King 1998; Millward 2011, 2017; Dixon 2020), the current paper hence addresses another dynamic '-ization' process at force in English football: securitization.

By bridging this research gap, this article draws from existing inter-disciplinary literatures, material from the British Library's collection of print football fanzines and, lastly, digital web-sources to provide snapshots of print football fanzines and digital (fan) media, where fans have responded to security-oriented developments, voiced their cultural resistance, combatted 'hooligan' stereotyping and excessive policing (Jary and Horne 1991; Millward 2008). As such, the article produces three key arguments. First, that fans' contestations of securitization have followed a similar pathway as fans' opposition to other social '-ization' processes transforming the game. Second, fans' contestations demonstrate both continuity and responsiveness *vis-à-vis* perpetuating or emerging issues. Finally, English football's field of security contestations, to be fully captured theoretically and empirically by researchers, must hence be approached in relation to both its offline and online manifestations. Concerning the wider sociological debates, such arguments matter because they attach another layer to our reading of how reflexively engaged citizens provide alternative readings of, and challenge, securitization processes and political debates within one illuminating cultural field.

Conceptualizing security as a contested field

Collectively, the reactions of football fans to security measures, surveillance technologies and policing make up one key area of contestation among football fan activists across Europe (Numerato 2018). However, to fully understand this, the multiplex and contested nature of 'security' must be accounted for. In the social and political sciences, numerous scholars have since the 1990s (i.e. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Bigo 2002; Bigo and Tsoukala 2008) analysed the 'growing politicization of security issues' caused by the need to respond to emerging risks (Tsoukala 2009, 6). Consequently, the concepts of security, but also policing and surveillance, have increasingly appeared together as *social processes* oriented towards authorities' response to security concerns and social order (Lyon and Wood 2012; Bigo 2002).

Importantly though, security should not be considered neutral and its meanings uncontested. Indeed, by borrowing insights from critical security studies, security can be

theoretically approached as a field of contestation between those actors tasked with enforcing it, and those who remain at the receiving end (McDonald 2012). Whilst the study and practices of the state have dominated the study of security (Bigo 2002), a reading of security as a field of contestations, importantly, allows for capturing other relevant actors and social groups that put forward alternative narratives and visions of what and whom that must be secured, and what security ultimately means in the special political context (McDonald 2012). By understanding these social contestations – borrowing Bourdieusian terminology – as taking place in a '*security field*' in sport, the various actors (or players) situated here (fans, law enforcers, stewards, supporter networks) possess different levels of 'power' and 'capital' (Giulianotti and Klauser 2010) and, in relational and historical terms, they thus perceive and define security-related processes heterogeneously.

Yet it remains crucial to provide some transnational and socio-historical context into the realities underpinning the football-related field of contestations. Following the 1990s and 9/11, several critical transformations occurred within the realm of security. One of these relate to the securitization and subsequent criminalization of various social groups that became associated with 'public problems' and consequently defined as threats to security (Tsoukala 2009). Significantly, in a European-wide context, one of these social groups – albeit inherently heterogenous (see Garcia and Llopis Goig 2020) – includes football fans. Whilst in the UK, authorities' concerns associated with fans relate to long-standing fears of 'hooliganism' or football-related violence or disorder (Pearson 2021), the framing of football fans as 'potential troublemakers' can simultaneously be viewed through the lens of the neo-liberal processes at play in the football industry since the early 1990s, partly aiming to reorganize English football, making it free from 'undesirable' individuals or behaviours and therefore increasingly attractive for affluent audiences (King 1997). Hence, in English football, implemented socio-spatial control measures also worked to facilitate a 'stable, regulated environment' wherein wider political-economic policies could thrive (Giulianotti 2011, 3302).

Following Numerato and Giulianotti (2018), football and its cultures have been transformed by several transformative yet inter-related processes, including globalization, commodification and, the focus of this article, securitization. Here, football's securitization may be observed through, for example, the 'rapid spread of security technologies, measures and strategies to monitor and control diverse social spaces' (p. 339). Especially in a post-1990 context, professional football may be considered one key domain in which security-oriented policies – often backed by specific legislation – have been implemented to establish social control over fans.

Due to space restrictions, an extensive list of the different measures, policing techniques and legislations existing across football cultures cannot be provided here (see Spaaij 2013; Pearson 2021; Tsoukala 2009). Notwithstanding, what remains *most crucial* here is that across Europe, the restrictions on fan activities – including the regulation of banners, heavy-handed policing, surveillance technologies, body-checks, the control of pyrotechnic displays and policies preventing standing at football games (Numerato 2018; Turner 2021) – are heavily contested by some fans. Moreover, '[o]utside football stadia, the increasingly constrictive urban policing of supporters has led to formal opposition and resistance' (Giulianotti 2011, 3306). These contestations may be framed in 'football-specific' terms (e.g., that security measures sanitize stadium atmospheres), but, they also relate to more generalized societal questions such as the impact of draconian measures on freedom of speech and

movement, fans' civil liberties and the implications if such measures are exported into other areas of social and public life (Numerato 2018). Hence, whilst most supporters expect a presence of security in football (Cleland and Cashmore 2018), the departure point is that security – just like in other domains of society – composes a highly dynamic field in which some fans, social movements or fan groups express their contestations. However, it is important to acknowledge, first, as Turner's (2021) analysis of the Safe Standing movement shows, that in the UK such contestations are not unique to the twenty-first century but could be traced back to the post-Hillsborough (1989) time-scape.[1] Second, in the wider sports world too, intensified security complexes compose one issue that is widely contested, for example, among anti-Olympic activism (Boykoff 2020).

With respect to wider sociological debates, analyses of how football fans resist or contest security or surveillance remain an important continuum of relevance to social scientists. For instance, Jeffries (2011, 187) argues that, in the wake of the post-9/11 shift toward heightened security and surveillance, understanding social movements' perspectives and contestations remains integral since this 'can help uncover and analyze the often hidden expressions of resistance to surveillance culture in spaces of fear and insecurity'. Indeed, it can be argued then that, *if* security composes a field of contestation (McDonald 2012), then a reading of how fans or fan activists contest security – and associated concepts like policing, criminalization and surveillance – can inform wider debates on how reflective citizens operate, oppose or create alternative versions within climates of (in)security, and how they frame certain social issues (della Porta 2020). As others note, by contesting the political framing of security threats and responses, drawing attention to the exclusionary nature of such processes, 'activists also produce their own narratives, often framed around alternative discourses of security' (Rossdale 2016: 203). Notwithstanding, fans and fan activists, as stated, comprise a heterogenous social group, and not all fans participate in collective action or campaigns (Cleland et al. 2018). Still, the modes through which most fans react to the game's developments and its socio-political issues have been transformed in accordance with social changes and technological advances, meaning that they transcend both online and offline channels.

From 'offline' to 'online': the evolving nature of fandom and fan activism

In the UK, forces attributed to globalization and commercialization have transformed the spaces of football fans' consumption, practices and engagement with the game from the late-1980s and onwards (Gibbons and Dixon 2010). Concerning football fandom, fan movements and fan media, it is hence possible to observe a shift from 'offline' to 'online', although this does not imply that the existence of digital fan cultures have outright replaced earlier modes of fandom (Millward 2017).

While detailed reviews of football fandom literatures are provided elsewhere (e.g., Cleland et al. 2018, Ch. 1; Lawrence and Crawford 2022, 57–58), there is a consensus that twenty-first century football fans have moved beyond the stadia and that fans' practices and actions for getting their voices heard now also take place on *digital* spaces like e-zines, forums, social media, podcasts and Fan TV channels (Petersen-Wagner 2017; Millward 2008; Woods and Lee Ludvigsen 2022). Similar trends can be detected *vis-à-vis* fan activism and protests which are understood to have evolved from 'fan-geared communications via football fanzines' to social media platform (Fitzpatrick and Hoey 2022, 3). In this sense,

this offline/online shift – from fanzines towards digital platforms – also underscores the changing channels that have been utilized by fans and fan movements in their responses to transformative processes, but perhaps most notably football's commercialization (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Millward 2017).

Beginning with what this article understands as an 'offline' form of contestation, printed fanzines emerged from the 1960s alternative press that 'embraced football's oral folk tradition', and by being 'of the fans, by the fans and for the fans', the fanzines sought to challenge clubs' uncritical and uncontroversial official match-day programmes (Duke 2002, 17). Consequently, these fan-made magazines – largely produced in an amateur, home-made fashion with a non-profit mindset (Ramon and Tulloch 2021) – captured football actions but also other, socio-political issues impacting the game and clubs (Jary, Horne, and Bucke 1991). This subsequently renders fanzines attractive and rich data sources for sociologists aiming to understand changing fan identities and values (Millward 2008).

As Millward (2011) notes, fanzines became a space for fans to discursively show their discontent with various issues like ticket prices, disconnections between clubs and local communities, the restriction and regulation of fan practices and the sanitation of match-day atmospheres. From the mid-1980s, as Fitzpatrick and Hoey (2022) submit, networks of fanzines also supported the development of fan activism aiming to ensure a more democratic and participatory game and advance fans' position as a political force influencing the future avenues of English football. Hence, fanzines served to give 'football supporters their own voice for the first time' and constituted a platform through which fans could challenge the 'negative stereotype of the football hooligan which had previously gone unchallenged' (Jack 1997, 673). As discussed later, in the UK, the politicized fan activism emerging from the fanzine movement consequently grew into independent supporters' associations and specific campaigns that opposed commercial aspects of the game (i.e. mergers or ground developments) but also elements of football's securitization such as the proposed Supporter ID cards (Stride et al. 2015) although the fanzine *discourses* addressing the latter have rarely figured in extant analyses.

Significantly, with the advent of the Internet, new technologies and digital platforms, the modes of football fandom (and activism) have changed. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the greater availability of the Internet meant that fanzine movements 'slowly migrated onto the Internet' (Millward 2017, 191). As fanzines increasingly emerged in an 'online' form, as e-zines (online fanzines), these typically consisted of interactive message boards (forums) where fans (or users) could comment on specific topics and debate with fellow fans (ibid.). This, again, was followed by the emergence of *new* types of social media and devices which – as similar to the wider society – have had a transformative impact on social movements (della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

Indeed, the novel forms of digital media and new online spaces utilized by fans, including websites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp (Cleland et al. 2018; Petersen-Wagner 2017; Rivers and Ross 2021), have been the catalyst for a 'new era of football studies' concerned with increasingly digital football cultures (Lawrence and Crawford 2022, 59). However, these spaces – whilst online – are like their fanzine-forerunners, platforms where fans discuss, get their voices heard and react to cultural, social and political aspects of football. They may be used to generate a political consciousness among fans (ibid.) and '[provide] uncensored and subjective accounts of the travails of football fandom to both local and global audiences' (Ryan 2021, 141). Partly for these reasons, these interactions

and discourses must be taken seriously by academics (cf. Gibbons and Dixon 2010) as they offer – like fanzines – not only legitimate and insightful data sources for sociologists of sport or culture, but a window to understand cultural movements 'within the canon of fandom' (Millward 2008, 309) and alternative communication practices (Jeffries 2011).

Whilst co-existent, this 'line' of developments from the fanzine via e-zines to social media has presented key spaces where fans contest central developments in English football. As this section argues, this serves as one key expression of the mentioned offline-to-online shift within football. Notwithstanding, whilst the majority of ensuing literature has examined how fans – in fanzines, forums and on digital media – have reacted to trends under the banners of 'commercialization' or 'modern football' (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Cleland et al. 2018; Fitzpatrick and Hoey 2022), substantially less research pays attention to how fans' contestations of securitization have been impacted by the shift described above, and, how exactly fans have responded to security-focused changes in English football. Aiming to do this, this article's next two sections unpack two examples from the 'offline' and 'online' respectively, to discuss patterns of continuity and responsiveness in fans' print and digital responses to transformations situated under the aegis of securitization.

Offline: supporter ID, criminalization and going abroad

Football fanzines may be understood as 'new social movements' and 'cases of cultural contestation' formed against the game's intensifying commercialization from the 1980s and 1990s (Turner 2019, 17) which intertwined with a series of security and safety related changes aiming to enhance English football's consumption circuits and public appeal (Giulianotti 2011). Against this backdrop, this section maps the contours of three avenues of contestations in fanzines including the Supporter ID proposal, the generalized criminalization of fans, and the international experience of football policing and security.

Nevertheless, to fully grasp this, brief insights into the social and political context of the 1980s and early 1990s is needed. Following Jary and Horne (1991), one primary dimension of the fanzine movement was that it sought to challenge the misrepresentation of football fans and the 'fan-hooligan' conflation, thus becoming spaces for the expression of:

> angry opposition to the introduction of what they [fans] see as excessive police presence and often indiscriminant police action, and to crowd segregation and to fencing, and penning, which they regard as having been introduced with scant concern for crowd safety or even any concern that the crowds would receive an adequate view of the game (ibid., 29).

By the early 1990s, British society had experienced a series of tragic and fatal stadium disasters including the Ibrox Park Disaster (1971), the Heysel Disaster (1985), the Bradford Fire (1985) and the Hillsborough Disaster (1989). Hence, at the time, English football stadiums were generally considered to be unsafe and football was famously depicted by *The Sunday Times* (19 May 1985) as a 'slum game played in slum stadiums watched by slum people' (quoted in Goldblatt 2007, 542), reflecting a wider social decline (Cleland and Dixon 2015). In addition, it is crucial to locate the initiated changes as related to wider political-economic interventions that altered the ways in which English football was organized and consumed inside the stadia (King 1998). For example, the Football Association's (The FA 1991) *Blueprint for the Future of Football* recommended

that English football's social problems could be resolved by the subscription to a free-market logic. As such, clubs were encouraged to target spectators from more affluent social classes and shift from targeting 'C1, C2 and D' towards 'A, B and C1' [as the highest social grades] (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018, 695). In other words, *The Blueprint* informed the clubs' new strategies relating to attracting the new, "'more affluent middle-class consumer'" (Webber 2017, 884) whilst simultaneously deterring fans characterized as 'hooligans' or 'potential troublemakers'. English clubs' new marketing practices and government initiatives meant that commercial and security-related processes moulded new, 'desirable' consumer identities (Giulianotti 2011). Yet, the club directors' and many fans' sensibilities were not automatically in harmony. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, many fans grew increasingly discontent with, for example, raising ticket prices, sanitized match-day atmospheres and the augmented regulation of 'traditional' fan practices which sought to stabilise the increasingly exclusionary social and spatial milieux of English football (Millward 2011).

In terms of security, issues of football-related violence meant that 'hooliganism' came to feature centrally on both the media and political agenda in the UK (Poulton 2006) and for European institutions (Tsoukala 2009) in what was a critical juncture of safety and security matters in football. Whereas the post-Hillsborough Taylor Report recommended a number of structural and social changes to English football such as the all-seater stadia (Turner 2021) – which was followed by the formation of the neoliberal juggernaut of the English Premier League (EPL) (King 1998) – the Thatcher government had also, in the years leading up to this, intended to implement a supporter identity card – as a draconian, symbolic and administrative barrier – that would make attending football matches increasingly difficult for fans (Cleland et al. 2018) reflecting how football-related violence and its policing constituted a nation-wide concern (Porter 2019).

Proposed as a part of the *Football Spectators Act 1989,* but later dropped (Giulianotti 2011), the Supporter ID represented one central issue to which the collective voice of football fans was responsive, came together despite club rivalries and countered the political establishment, by raising questions about its civil liberties implications (Goad, Dixon, and Gibbons 2020; Numerato 2018). Importantly, this may be considered a catalyst within the fanzine movement demonstrating how fans could share 'their ideas and fears about the game' (Cleland and Dixon 2015). In a way, this is exemplified by the passage from the article 'I.D. Cards – Right or Wrong?' demonstrating how the ID Card was perceived by fan-contributors of Welsh club Merthyr Tydfil FC in the independent fanzine *Dial M for Merthyr*:

> The Government seems hell-bent on introducing the I.D. Card Scheme. This ridiculous scheme will harm football and if you think that it doesn't concern Merthyr Tydfil F.C then think again. This scheme will destroy the backbone of the game – the small club. […] but if this scheme is introduced another hurdle [for Merthyr] is added to the considerable number we face already. The hurdle is that Merthyr will have to install new computerised turnstiles to join the Football League if we are successful in our march. These schemes must not be introduced and the Football Supporters Association are the only group who are putting forward ideas so that the I.D. Card Scheme can be defeated or amended so that football is not damaged. We urge our readers to join the F.S.A as soon as possible as football and it's [sic] supporters are under attack from the government

(*Dial M for Merthyr*, Issue 1, 1989/90, p. 3).

Whilst this discourse clearly frames the scheme as constituting an 'attack' on supporters and football, it is also observable how the proposed ID Cards were framed as impacting all clubs and fans – regardless of the club's size – and likely to come at a high cost due to the need to install new computerized technologies for the reading of the identity cards. As apparent, fellow fans were also urged to join the UK-wide Football Supporters Association (FSA) movement that campaigned against the ID Cards (Lomax 2000) and had emerged in 1985 as a response to the government, police and media's treatment of football fans (Turner 2019).

In the same fanzine, the ID card was also linked to the wider momentum of criminalization and perceived draconian policing of fans at the time:

> A lot has been written on the fanzine scene regarding the dubious treatment of football supporters (although its [sic] mainly away fans) by the police. Certainly the behaviour of West Midlands Police leaves a lot to be desired. The ejection of Watford fans from The Hawthorns (29 Aug 1988) was unbelievable. *Celebrating a goal is not a crime! Or is it?* Perhaps there'll be a government white paper banning the enjoyment of football as well as the ridiculous I.D. Card Scheme. [...] The message must be that football forces [...] must take a good look at their football tactics and ask whether they are causing more problems than they are solving.

> (*Dial M for Merthyr*, Issue 1, 1989/90, p. 4, emphasis added).

> Not only is the ID card framed here as 'ridiculous' but the perceived increased regulation of what is considered to be part of the fabric of football culture ('celebrating a goal') is considered to sanitize the atmospheric elements of the game (see Millward 2011) and constituting a disproportionate way of policing.

Whilst these examples speak to the breadth of security-related issues captured in fanzines, another interesting aspect speaks to how fans' role within the security consultations is neglected. This comes to the fore in the below discourses from the Liverpool FC fanzine, *Eh Mate… What's the Score* which, whilst mentioning the ID card, also questions the lack of priority given to fans' safety in light of Taylor's Interim Report after the Hillsborough disaster:

> Taylor's interim report has concluded what we already knew; that the fans were entirely blameless. It told us something else that we already knew; that there are another ninety-one grounds in the League where a Hillsborough is waiting to happen [...] The overcrowding at the 1921 F.A. Cup, 33 deaths from a late crush at Burnden Park in 1946, the Ibrox disaster at 1971 causing 66 deaths, the Braford fire and then the Heysel disaster – all should have provided conclusive evidence to the F.A. and the League that the grounds should be safer and that the fans should come first. In addition to this the government seems intent on pursuing its ID Card Scheme, which would aggregate the appalling conditions at most clubs and could even cause another disaster [...] We want safe grounds at prices we can afford, but only when those people who are the REAL EXPERTS in football – the fans – have our say will we be able to enjoy our game in the comfort and safety we deserve

> (*Eh Mate… What's the Score*, Issue 1, p. 2).

In a way, this underlines a degree of acceptance of the need for security and safety in the stadia ('we want safe grounds'), but concurrently expresses a desire for fans to be involved in the consultation process ('have our say') as the 'real experts' of football in the time of

transformation. This, however, was limited by the view of fans as troublemakers or unde-sirables. In an article called 'You'll never seat the Kop!?' – of the same issue – the author(s) wrote that: 'What is really at question is: can terraces ever be safe? The answer has to be: as long as football supporters are looked upon as a dangerous animal to be caged and con-trolled, then no' ('*Eh Mate… What's the Score"*, Issue 1, p. 8).

Collectively, these fanzine discourse exemplars illustrate how the criminalization of fans – and the increasingly normalized conflation of football fans as 'troublemakers' (Tsoukala 2009) was challenged and pointed out by some fan writers as obstacles to real security and safety. As the ID Card proposal was eventually abandoned, it was noted in the *The Mag* (Newcastle FC fanzine) that the: 'The decision of the government to heed Justice Taylor's report and shelve the I.D. cards represents a major turning point for football supporters in England' (*The Mag*, Issue 14, cited in Goad, Dixon, and Gibbons 2020, 454) whereby the fanzine movement emerged as crucial in the fans' response to this.

Finally, there was an important transnational element of the fanzine discourses which does not simply contest the security cultures of English football. Some fanzines captured the international experiences of this too, reflecting on the experiences of travelling abroad in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, they particularly frame the Italian football policing experience as draconian and heavy-handed. In a travelogue-esque report in Blackburn FC's fanzine *Many Miles From Home*, one of the authors reflect on the 1990 World Cup in Italy:

> From the moment of arrival at customs in Rome's Ciampino Airport enroute to Sardinia, the attitude of the police was apparent. Passports checked against blacklists and comparisons with mugshots of 'wanted' men became the norm. Sardinians had been whipped into a state of paranoia over the 'English invasion'. If not 'Urban Guerillas' we were at least common-or-gar-den 'hooligans'. Later in my travels, when I managed to explain to a Neapolitan construction worker that I was actually a well-behaved, law-abiding Englishman […] I was consoled by his synopsis that I must be a 'good hooligan'

> (*Many Miles From Home*, Issue 1, April 1990).

Whereas reflections on football-related travelling across Europe has constituted an important element of English fan cultures (King 1998; Millward 2006), here it is apparent that the expe-rience of football policing and suspicion was another element of European travels that fans reflected upon in fanzines. Indeed, as one editor of *Dial M for Merthyr* (Issue 1, 1989/90) wrote: 'The British policeman is often criticized but after you've experienced the Italian police's atti-tudes to football supporters you find out how lucky you are'.

Overall, whilst a totalizing portrait of all fanzines' responses to securitization and criminal-ization is beyond this section's scope, it can be argued that the fanzine movement and the discourses within the specific fanzines of different clubs showcase how supporters – in an offline setting – reacted to the intensifying securitization impacting the fan experience from the 1980s and onwards. The fanzines, as evidenced by the examples above, composed channels where, first, the specific policies could be responded to, such as the ID card proposal, which in fact became a catalyst for the collective action whereby FSA worked together with the wider fanzine movement through a convergence of club-specific networks. Second, criticism was also directed at the more general criminalization of fans. Finally, an appreciation of the trans-national nature of these processes is apparent. As next section shows, these elements of *respon-siveness* (to new, emerging issues) as well as patterns of *continuation* (in resistance to criminalization) have been prolonged by the digital spaces' affordances.

Online: continuation and responsiveness

This section turns towards examples of how fans' security contestations have been marked by the mentioned shift toward online fan spaces. Within this, it is observable how there is a *continuation* in fans challenging the misrepresentation of football fans (Jary and Horne 1991) throughout the twenty-first century. Perhaps notably, this is visible through the online presence of the FSA's 'Watching football is not a crime' (WFINAC) movement.[2] Yet it is also observable how fans remain responsive to emerging issues – like technologies, discourses or practices – on their contemporary modes of communication encompassing websites, podcasts or social media.

First, it is apparent that the WFINAC campaign of the FSA – as the UK's largest football network – represents another campaign that has united disparate supporters from different clubs (Turner 2017) and established cross-club links (FSA 2009). The campaign addresses collective issues that may be viewed in the context of football's securitization and has represented an effort to ensure fans are treated fairly and within the law (Stott, Pearson, and West 2021). However, of centrality here is *how* this campaign has disseminated information through its web-based channels, rather than the actual outcomes or 'impacts' of the campaign.

As Hill, Canniford, and Millward (2018) point out, the Internet has been a catalyst for football fans' campaigns. In such contexts, Internet media not only assists the transcendence of 'entrenched rivalries' between fan bases, but the coordination of 'broader awareness and support vis-a-vis previous movements in this context' (p. 689). Thus, the utilization of the Internet in order to create a wider awareness remains of high relevance here. Indeed, FSA's web-archive contains several digital articles about its WFINAC campaign from 2008 and onwards. These include articles discussing fans' rights and WFINAC events in English cities. Yet they also contain information on activated partnerships beyond football fan groups, speaking to how fans' contestations may become professionalized (Numerato 2018), entangled in wider webs of social movements (Cleland et al. 2018) and hence tie specific issues (in football) together with 'broader ideals of social justice and democracy' (della Porta 2020, 76). An example of this is FSA's (2008) announcement that they had: 'teamed up with the civil rights organisation Liberty to fight for the rights of football fans […] unjustly detained under Section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act'. This legislation, which the campaign specifically challenged, allowed the police to remove individuals from a specific area for up to 48 hours and came to FSA's attention in November 2008 when 80 Stoke City fans were 'rounded up in Greater Manchester pub and escorted back home by police using Section 27′ (FSA 2009). In the wake of this, the FSA together with Liberty and Stoke City assisted several of these fans who would receive an apology and, overall, nearly £200.000 in compensation (BBC 2010; Giulianotti 2011).

In line with wider trends in fan activism (Numerato 2018), WFINAC as a campaign thus appears to challenge restrictions on fans' civil liberties and the police's 'instant power to walk all over the civil rights of supporters' finding themselves at 'the wrong place at the wrong time' (FSA's Chair Malcolm Clarke quoted in FSF 2008). Significantly, in terms of *continuation*, these examples underpin how Internet media, here in form of digital texts or website posts on FSA's own communication channels – much like fanzines – serve as sites for not merely contestation of actions taken in the name of making football 'secure'

(i.e. Supporter ID, the use of Section 27 against football fans), but they highlight a continuation in fans' collective resistance against the wider criminalization potentially impacting their civil liberties and free movement.

Beyond this campaign, fans' contestation against liberty-restricting policies or measures enacted in the name of security can be found in other online formats, and be considered as *responsive* to emerging issues or debates within the football-security nexus. As Lee Ludvigsen (2022) argues elsewhere, fans and fan movements speak about and resist these security-related tendencies on digital platforms like forums, podcasts and social media. Indeed, these may be interpreted as central in the 'modes of resistance or "counter-conduct" of fans (Spaaij 2013, 179). Examples of this include the discussion of facial recognition surveillance of fans on the football podcast *Football Today* in January 2020 (Lee Ludvigsen, 2022) – following the use of such technology at a match between Cardiff and Swansea – which also led Football Supporters Europe to post on their social media channels how they opposed the use of fans as test subjects for surveillance technology (10 January 2020).[3]

Only months after this, when English elite football was paused because of Covid-19 and debates on the resumption of football centred upon whether games should be played at neutral venues (to reduce the likelihood of fans gathering outside stadiums during 'lockdown') (BBC 2020), this was also challenged by a number of fans. To use a club-specific example, *The Anfield Wrap* (TAW), an independent Liverpool FC channel with audio, video and textual elements (Ryan 2021), challenged the concerns held by the football policing authorities and used its platform to question why supporters were framed as likely to breach social distancing measures and thus as threats to football's return following the pandemic standstill:

> There is a threat, explicitly stated and repeatedly implied, that football supporters cannot be trusted. That they threaten public health and safety and public order issues could unfold. Ultimately, the suggestion is that fans of football are different, and should be treated accordingly
>
> (Roberts 2022)

Whilst all these remain selected examples, they are important in themselves as the departure point here is that we have witnessed a 'seismic shift' (Ryan 2021) in how fans communicate, and get their voice heard, concerning football-related issues. The above examples reaffirm how online spaces, in a way, have prolonged the fanzine movement's affordances as spaces for 'cultural resistance' (Millward 2008), but also how the digital spaces are employed by some fans to express important continuities in their opposition and criticism of the criminalization of fans, and transcend fan rivalries through the WFINAC campaign (Turner 2017) but also *respond to* specific emerging security-related issues over the last two decades, like the specific use of legislation, controversial technologies or the 'neutral venue debate' during Covid-19. Notwithstanding, in exploring fans' online security contestations further, it should also be noted that researchers in their future analyses may also want to explore, for example, specific hashtags or trends on Twitter (allowing for Social Network Analysis that connect nodes, ties and interactions) or forum threads that directly appear as a response to security-related trends or issues in football.

Conclusions

Scholars have pointed out the importance of examining supporters and supporter forma-tions' responses and counter-narratives to the policies, technologies and discourses gov-erning their behaviour (Spaaij 2013; Giulianotti 2011). Thus, this article's purpose was to draw from extant literature, archival material and digital sources to critically investigate how football fans have contested security-related changes, policies and discourses in English football, and how this may have mirrored key transformations within the realms of *security* and *football fandom*. And, by building on the contention that fans' spaces, channels and activisms may be traced from fanzines via e-zines to social media (Fitzpatrick and Hoey 2022; Millward 2008), this article advanced three primary arguments. First, that football fans' contestation of securitization processes – from the late 1980s onwards – has followed a similar path to fans' opposition to globalized and commercialized facets of the game, as expressed by the examples of print fanzines and digital media. Second, this article maintains that fans' alternative discourses of security relate to both specific, emerging issues (i.e. use of particular technologies or legislations, or public discourses) as well as the more long-standing, overarching but perpetuating criminalization impacting the attitudes towards football fans and the realities of security in domestic and international football. Third, the article highlights that the field of security contestation encapsulating English football – but also other country-specific contexts – in order to be fully captured, must be appreciated both in its offline and online channels in future analyses.

These arguments added together remain important because they show that whilst football fan cultures have been reconfigured and become increasingly digital – even to the extent where we observe the rise of 'digital football studies' (Lawrence and Crawford 2022) – so has fans' contestations and forms of criticisms against securitization formed an important yet underexplored part of this shift. With respect to broader sociological debates, the impli-cations of such contention are important because they attach yet another layer to our under-standing of how reflexively engaged citizens challenge, oppose and resist '-*ization*' processes associated with modes of social change – here, securitization – and wider political debates within English football's cultural fields. Indeed, both football fandom and the evolving activism of football fans need to be positioned within wider patterns of political and cultural changes (Fitzpatrick and Hoey 2022). *Culturally*, this encompasses the platforms through which fans are active on and react to socio-political developments. Moreover *politically*, this article does this by situating football fans in the context of the contentious political processes that enable the securitization of football spaces and consequent criminalization of fans.

This article contributes specifically to two areas of study. First, it attaches new layers to the study of the securitization of football (Tsoukala 2009) which, whilst historically significant, has intensified further following a series of incidents recently *inter alia*, the Euro 2020 security breach and the chaos outside *Stade de France* in May 2022 for the Champions League final. By advancing the conceptualization of security as a contested field (McDonald 2012; Giulianotti and Klauser 2010) and cross-pollinating this with insights from the fandom literature, the article provides examples of how one social group's alternative versions of security emerge between 'offline' and 'online' channels. Second, in the context of the key transformations of the 1990s, this paper adds to the burgeoning work examining how English football constitutes a site for political and

social change (Turner 2021; Cleland et al. 2018), and how fans respond to and communicate this as assisted by the technological advances that reorganize football cultures.

As a last point, it remains crucial to openly highlight that fans' contestations of security, policing and criminalization are complex and differ between different fan bases in Europe. Moreover, contestations do not necessarily nor automatically lead to social change (Numerato 2018) while many supporters are passive and do not necessarily partake in collective actions or acts of opposition. Concurrently, this does not mean that the available versions of those fans who have – and continue to articulate criticism of security-related developments should be discounted. Regardless, further theoretically-informed and empirical research is undoubtedly needed to capture fans' voices and assemble understandings of how fanzines, forums, social media or websites are consciously used by diverse fans to mobilize and advocate for social change in contemporary football and what types of events, technologies or issues that trigger criticism or debate. For future investigations, this article's appreciation of security as a socially contested field transcending both offline and online fandom settings may act as an important starting block.

Notes

1. The Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989 tragically resulted in the deaths of 97 Liverpool FC fans. The 1990 Taylor Report, looking at the causes of the disaster, accelerated several changes in English football, including the implementation of all-seater stadiums.
2. The mentioned FSA which emerged in 1985 was merged with the National Federation of Football Supporters' Club in 2002 and became Football Supporters Federation (FSF) (Turner 2019). FSF then merged with Supporters Direct in 2019 and again became FSA.
3. See: https://twitter.com/FansEurope/status/1215605324905963521 (Accessed 08/2022).

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