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Defining and controlling violent fandom in Europe: more than meets the eye

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ABSTRACT
This commentary situates 'football hooliganism' in Europe within a historical and contemporary security knowledge continuum. It adds to recent academic debates on the issue by addressing how shortcomings regarding the academic and legal definition of 'hooliganism' and the phenomenon's complex web of overlapping identities have enabled law enforcers' dominant definitional power in counter-hooliganism policies. The latent consequences of this arguably speak to the politics of security knowledge and assigned 'good practices' which are hegemonically designated by the key definers of the phenomenon. These definitional shortcomings have paved the way for law enforcers' ever-expanding definitional power not only to frame what football violence 'is', but also the 'good practices' to address it, these practices' efficiency and the metrics to determine their efficiency.

Introduction

In early 2024, academic debates re-emerged concerning the nature of 'football hooliganism' in Europe. Central here was the suggestion by some scholars that violent fandom had made a 'comeback' in continental Europe but spared England.[1] Other scholars quickly disputed this claim, warning simultaneously against the temptation of 'jump[ing] to bold and simple conclusions' regarding football-related violence given the many national variances of the phenomenon.[2] It is perhaps not so much a question of a 'comeback' or 'return'; but rather a persistent and ever-changing phenomenon, though there is no doubt that issues of football crowd violence exist and continue to haunt domestic contexts, as powerfully illustrated by the Greek fan who died after violent clashes prior to AEK Athens' fixture against Dinamo Zagreb in August 2023[3] or the Greek police officer who died after being shot with a naval flare thrown by fans in Athens, in December 2023.[4] Meanwhile, high-profile events like the disorder at Wembley, London, during the Euro 2020 final and the crowd control failures around *Stade De France* during the 2022 Champions League final have underpinned the political urgency speaking to safety and security issues in European football, revealing concurrently how the 'hooliganism' lens or explanation still are hastily turned towards and employed by political authorities despite the complex chain of events leading to these scenes.[5]

Addressing the issue of violent fandom is a treacherous academic endeavour because there is practically no aspect of the phenomenon that can be taken for granted. In fact, despite the profusion of relevant studies across Europe, violent fandom remains poorly framed. On the one hand, there is

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no legal definition of the issue, be it at national or European level. As of today, lawmakers have proceeded to an ever-expanding analytical description of reprehensible behaviours without ever defining the phenomenon as such. On the other, there is no overarching academic definition arguably due to the constantly evolving multi-factorial origin of this form of violence. We do not attempt to settle the already cited debates. Instead, we seek to shed a light on the linkages between the academic shortcomings in seizing what, precisely, violent fandom is, which have enabled law enforcers across Europe to not only become the key definers of the phenomenon in question but also the key experts and the key definers of football crowd management. Specifically, we first highlight the web of often overlapping identities which violent fandom may be seen as the outcome of. Thus, accepting that '[f]ootball-related violence is a capacious concept which covers a number of different violent behaviours',[6] our basic proposition is that it also covers several overlapping identity construction processes. These processes, the actors possessing the definitional power to designate what is a 'risk' or 'security threat', have consistently failed to factor in – despite being in charge of controlling and managing the issue. In showing that scholars and (later) law enforcers failed to account for violent fandom's ever-changing nature,we seek to address how key definers' establishment of knowledge and 'good practices' on controlling the phenomenon has proceeded to reinforce and reflect such failures.

Arguably, taking these identities seriously remains important when analysing a phenomenon marked by a pronounced complexity that is yet to be academically/legally defined.[7]A further worrisome aspect is that, despite the absent definition of violent fandom, law enforcers and policymakers, for decades, have been situated in a self-reinforcing, pole position to define what exactly constituted violent fandom, and crucially, the so-called optimal ways of addressing it. Academic shortcomings in the theorization of violent fandom could be seen as indirectly enabling this. Hence, it is unsurprising that the introduction of counter-hooliganism policies in many cases have aggravated or relocated the issue, rather than defeating violence. We therefore open up an understanding of the politics of knowledge that emerge and prevail when so-called good practices in response to a phenomenon in flux – failing to factor in the role of identities – not only become politically constructed and legitimized as 'working' or being 'effective' by virtue of being 'good', but are exported and imported into other contexts that drive forward a hegemonically produced security knowledge legacy that is rarely called into question. This lack of critical scrutiny becomes ever more significant because European and EU counter-hooliganism policies for four decades have sought to standardize European-wide fight against 'hooliganism'without taking into consideration supporters' civil rights and liberties.[8]

This analysis relies upon and cross-pollinates our prior, separate but empirical work, and extant literature to provide an updated, original contribution insofar as it places the historical and current security continuum of 'football hooliganism' within the wider frames of the politics of security knowledge and fuses together insights from the sociologies of sport, social identity and security. As violent fandom is just one of several collectively 'threatening' behaviours on the EU level, labelling processes and expanding regulatory frameworks addressing vaguely defined 'high risk' groups like protestors, migrants, youth gangs are not isolated from the field of counter-hooliganism given the extant avenues between these security fields.[9]

Defining violent fandom

The constantly evolving multi-factorial origin of violent fandom breaks away from usual academic analysis because of its significant variations in time and space. The factors that determined its emergence in Europe are not necessarily the same as those that have influenced its subsequent development, which has been marked by numerous interactions produced by the interventions of lawmakers, law enforcers, sports authorities, journalists, private security agents, and social workers,[10] with each stage of that development moreover adhering to its own particular structuring patterns. In other words, apart from the opposition to an adversary in the context of a fixture, there is little in common between violent

fandom in the 1970s and that of today. Therefore, academic theories that sought and probably managed to explain violent fans' behaviour in the 1970s-1980s are nowadays partly, if not totally, out of date.

Besides, the motives of the actors, who come from different political, socio-economic or cultural backgrounds, may be so divergent and deeply rooted in national specificities that they practically deactivate any comparative approach. Once again it seems that, apart from some similarities in terms of group organization and behavioural patterns, violent fans have very few features in common across Europe. Consequently, academic attempts to shed light on this collective behaviour have grasped some facets of its manifestation in a given context but frequently their findings lack in global explanatory vigour. Theories focusing on, for example, class identity issues are of no international interest because research findings in many European countries show that violent fans have never been predominantly of working-class origin.[11]

Arguably, the sole converging point of these behaviours is the fact that they are usually connected with overlapping identity-related issues in terms of individual and/or collective identity construction processes.[12] From this standpoint, stadia may be seen as social spaces that, due to their high social visibility, allow these identities to be widely broadcast and guarantee the social visibility fans are in search of.[13] Following this line, violent fandom will be analysed below in terms of overlapping identity construction processes. These identity issues have already drawn scholarly attention either as secondary aspects of an explanatory theory or as unidimensional explanations of the phenomenon. It is, however, believed that, once interconnected, these fragmentary insights may bring to light a multidimensional converging point of violent fandom.

Bearing in mind that the initiation to football fandom is a process that reinforces the family identity, since it usually bolsters the father–son relationship, all forms of further involvement in football fandom arguably fall under the following identity construction processes that are related to both imaginary and real frames of reference.

Youth subcultural identity

From the late-1970s onwards, violent fandom was regularly being associated with the process of belonging to (post)adolescent peer groups, as stage of creating bonds with broader society. John Clarke[14] was the first to see this form of violence as a youth subculture likely to provide its participants with the possibility to assert their identity in the face both of parental authority and the rest of society. The idea that violent fans were in search of emancipation and self-affirmation was later taken up by several scholars, who associated fans' action with the search for individual and collective identities and the subsequent quest for social status that this conferred on young people who were deprived of excitement and thrilling experiences in their daily lives.[15]

Gender identity

Violent fans' behaviour has often been attributed to a need to assert virility. In the late 1970s, Peter Marsh et al. coined the term *aggro* to show that a significant part of violent and unruly fandom was essentially symbolic, made up of rituals that allowed young fans to affirm their virility by impressing rival fans and demonstrating their membership of micro-cultures.[16]

In the course of time, the association of violent fandom with a masculinity subculture, observed as well by Eric Dunning et al.,[17] though they never analysed the role played by virility in violent fans' behaviour,[18] has been weakened in the UK.[19] Homophobic speech and acts remain however prevalent in other European countries.[20]

Political identity

Due to their high social visibility, stadia may be used as platforms to broadcast the voices of fans committed to political causes.[21] Violent fandom is thus often fuelled by the traditional enmity that

rules everyday interactions between fan groups due to their far-right and far-left beliefs respectively.[22] Political affiliation may also lead to international alliances, with foreign fans being frequently invited to another country to support their allies against their common political adversary.

Emergence and rise in far-right and far-left violent fandom fluctuate according to the domestic political context in a given period.[23] However, it should be pointed out that this usually mutually-reinforcing radical political affiliation is a highly complex phenomenon bearing many alternative and/or cumulative dimensions that actually call into question the political nature of this identity. The latter may stem indeed from well-structured political beliefs or reflect hollow political identities without any impact outside stadia[24]; it may express an individual/collective imaginary with regard to the clubs' and/or the fan group's tradition even if this tradition has little to do with the way the club is actually run nowadays; it may be mere mimicry as part of an integration process to a desirable group of peers; it may stem from an identity-constructing game grounded on the visible opposition to the political identityadopted by rival fans' groups[25]; it may be limited to lifestyle-related needs.

In other contexts, football crowd violence may be associated with dissidence against authoritarian governments,[26] or calls for independence. The latter have been observed, for example, in Catalonia and former Yugoslavia.[27]

Racial identity

Violent fandom has been frequently associated with the demonstration of an imaginary white supremacy.[28] Racist behaviours that nowadays are observed inside stadia as well as on social media[29] target both football players and fans but, to the extent that they are intertwined with loyalty to one's club, their manifestation is often instrumentalized to serve the fixture's needs: more often than not, racist insults thus only target rival players and exclude non-white players of racist fans' club. This instrumentalization has in turn been used as an argument for fans to deny the racist nature of their behaviour, which is then downgraded to a politically incorrect joke or attributed to their intention to support their team by all means.[30]

Territorial identity

One argument frequently put forward to explain violent fans' behaviour is their attachment to a given territory. This quest for a territorial identity may be limited to the micro-level. Eric Dunning et al. used the term of ordered segmentation to explain how part of violent fandom was structured around the notion of the defence of the terraces, a highly symbolic territory inside stadia.[31] This territory was sanctified because it condensed the imaginary inscription in space of both the club and the locality fans were coming from. Hence, it came to be perceived as an area that had to be defended against intruders so that it could allow public expression of the club's values and affirmation of the local or regional collective identity.[32]

While the terraces are defended in terms of sanctity, local and regional identities are defended in terms of inner superiority and, hence, inferiority of those who come from another neighbourhood of the town or another region of the country. In the latter case, violent fandom reflects regional political, economic or cultural rivalries. Therefore, its manifestation brings to light implicit rivalries between metropolitan centres in many countries, autonomous regions in Spain, Flemish and Walloons in Belgium, etc.[33] This identity may also be grounded on ethnic rivalries, as was the case between Bosnians and Croatians in former Yugoslavia.[34]

When expanded at the national level, the territorial identity to be defended often leads to nationalist brawls. Whether used by the government of the day to reinforce a given national identity building process, or perceived by fans as form of collective action likely to represent the nation, it is

well-known that football has such a federative force that it may promote or strengthen nationalism-grounded violence, especially at the occasion of international fixtures or tournaments.[35]

Religious identity

Clashes between rival fans may also reflect religious conflicts. Herbert Moorhouse was the first to highlight this aspect of the issue in his research into Scottish fans.[36] His findings were later on confirmed by Richard Giulianotti, who showed that violent fandom in Scotland was resulting from an array of historical and cultural factors closely associated with religious beliefs.[37] Political-religious factors also underpin violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and between Christians and Muslims in North Macedonia.[38]

Criminal identity

In some countries violent fandom has a hybrid form as it involves both fans and other people to serve as means of pressure in grey power struggles between powerful club owners and political elites. In this configuration, violence may be instrumental, and even enjoy to some extent law enforcement tolerance, so that club owners can curb the government of the day to promote their (il)licit financial interests. Opaque relations between violent fans, politicians and club owners have been observed in Greece and Italy for instance[39] but, broadly speaking, these ties remain under-explored in academia. Also underexplored are the power struggles between club owners that have occasionally entailed the infiltration of fans to the rival fans' terraces in order to create incidents that will lead to the rival club's punishment.

In other cases, fans' brawls may stem from ordinary criminal rivalries, manifested in public under the cover of football rivalries given that participants are simultaneously fans and drug dealers or smugglers, for instance. These fights usually occur outside stadia, either by surprise or following prior arrangement, but their real nature is hushed up because, even if there are serious casualties, the victims or their families are plausibly unwilling to unveil what was really at stake. Needless to say, this blurred form of violent fandom remains academically unexplored.

The politics of knowledge and good practice: the ability to (re)define security

The failure to account for violent fandom's ever-changing nature *vis-à-vis* multi-fold identity has had important implications. Some of these relate to broader questions speaking to definitional power, the politics of knowledge and setting out the optimal ways of dealing with football crowd violence through the Council of Europe's two relevant conventions, definition of 'best' or 'good' practices that are regularly exported and imported via mechanisms such as EU handbooks (whose content is described as 'consistent with the established good practice'[40] relating to multi-agency approaches to football), institution-specific working groups, or UEFA security conferences.[41] So-called good practices are institutionally drawn up, shared transnationally and adopted in new contexts although this is neither a mechanical nor linear process. Arguably, the authority to designate good practices is not merely related to the hegemonic powers of law enforcers concerning the definition of 'hooliganism' but reveals a more historically significant security knowledge legacy that continues to inform those practices 'best-suited' to regulate football crowds in the present-day society.

Social scientific theories on the political construction of risk and security threats often guide us towards the important role of 'experts',[42] or 'security professionals'[43] in possession of specialist knowledge regarding the nature of the relevant 'risk' or 'threat'. Ulrich Beck's concept of 'relations of definition' usefully captures how powerful institutions, under conditions of uncertainty, specify what constitutes and causes a risk, how they can be identified, and which measures and know-how must be adopted to address or tame them.[44] In European

football, the power to frame who (or what) is 'threatening' or 'risky', hence, lies mainly with law enforcers and sport's governing bodies. Their positions interact with negative media representations of the issue. Indeed, as several criminological insights would endorse,[45] the law 'is by no means immune from media frenzy'.[46] Consequently, this creates a reciprocal cycle: claims regarding the *seriousness* of violent fandom as a security threat become defined by actors with well-established definitional power in modern societies. Meanwhile, when counter-hooliganism policies have failed, their key definers rarely call into question their inefficiencies. Rather, inefficiencies have often fuelled justifications for even harsher restrictions.

Under such circumstances, civil society voices contesting expert discourses can, more easily, be muted. Politically engaged supporter groups face tougher challenges when questioning securitization processes because, as Linda Monsees submits, the designation of something as a 'security issue' allows for justifications framed in terms of emergency and privileges 'technological, bureaucratic solutions as the best and indeed only way to improve security'.[47] This is illustrated by the following unpacking of (i) harmonization, (ii) self-reinforcing 'common knowledge' and (iii) fallacious narratives.

The ideal of harmonization

The ways in which violent fandom has been addressed since the 1960s reveal how the phenomenon has proceeded from being originally framed as a national public order issue into a mobile, cross-border problem requiring transnational efforts.[48] Importantly, this was accompanied by a turn towards international knowledge-transfer circuits. Even since the supranational regulation of 'football hooliganism's' infancy, the transfer of know-how, existing models and practices has constituted a key axis of this security field.

The early binding 1983 UEFA's safety instructions were devised in collaboration with the English and German Football Associations.[49] Moreover, the 1985 Council of Europe's Convention on misbehaviour in football – passed shortly after the Heysel tragedy – emphasized the importance of international cooperation and harmonization between public and private actors, namely (inter) national sport authorities.[50] This drive towards harmonization was also accelerated by decisions made in the 1990s and 2000s, when the Council of the EU's engagement with football crowd violence saw the introduction of new resolution and football policing handbooks. These, *inter alia*, led to the setup of specific national information points containing liaison officers tasked with information-exchange and concretized the framing of supporters as a 'risk-producing' social group that had to be controlled through surveillance mechanisms and other pre-emptive methods.[51] Thus, patterns of standardization in counter-hooliganism policies on the EU and European level were characterized by a pronounced, future-oriented risk logic reflecting wider trends in the pursuit of security and crime control.[52] They also reflected an expanding appetite for more and more EU-wide cooperation upon addressing 'football hooliganism'. What may be extracted from this is that specialist actors, claiming to possess specialist *knowledge*[53] on violent fandom, lie beneath the definition of the phenomenon, its seriousness, and the definition of 'good practices' to be adopted, reproduced and used to combat it. Moreover, these same *experts* also possess considerable definitional power when it comes to setting out the criteria for these practices' effectiveness, their outcomes and their assessment.

Concurrently, it must be acknowledged that 'good practices' cannot be politically neutral. For instance, questions can be raised about where 'good practices' originated from, as claims of having developed 'good practice' could be explained by national authorities' search for prestige or power.[54] The creation of an extensive genealogy is beyond this piece's remit. Yet, the case of the 'English model'[55] provides certain hints granted the post-Heysel management of 'hooliganism' became, and still is often, presented as the 'successful' model for emulation in other countries that could pave the way for a European-wide model. As Radoslaw Kossakowski et al. write:

> Most discussions about football-related violence in Poland typically made direct references to the British case and used the narrative of how the hooligan problem had been solved under Margaret Thatcher. Her name was associated with the unquestionable success of the tough rule of law and the zero tolerance approach to policing football fans as the best way to cope with hooliganism [...] This was no different to a self-orientalising discourse about the Western way of approaching a variety of socio-economic issues.[56]

Moreover, Mateusz Grodecki et al. have recently pointed to the fact that the 'knowledge regime' concerning violent fandom was characterized by a strong UK-based hegemony with the phenomenon labelled the 'English Disease' and where 'most, if not all, studies on football hooliganism were produced almost exclusively in the UK'.[57] One implication of this, regarding the relevant politics of knowledge and good practice, is that western European, particularly the 'English model', often is identified as *the* lesson to look towards, despite obvious issues with translating the 'English example' to other national contexts or political systems.

Creating and sustaining a 'common knowledge'

The above connects with a common, problematic assumption attached to the notion of 'good' or 'best practices' – namely, their universal applicability.[58] This problem amplifies when considering the web of overlapping identities unpacked earlier, and the varieties of fan cultures, legal frameworks and police procedures across Europe. If this, on the academic level, means that 'asserting the existence of a singular standard or a uniform "environment" for comparing football cultures in Europe is difficult to substantiate',[59] then, a similar obstacle undoubtedly emerges on the levels of the key definers and managers of football crowd violence, meaning that good practices and models *vis-à-vis* the policing of football crowds cannot necessarily achieve universality despite the definers' insistence or incitement that they can.

Yet, the key definers in question have managed to overcome this obstacle because law enforcers and experts' assessments often are taken for granted as part of what Geoff Pearson called the 'common knowledge' on hooliganism.[60] Law enforcers' epistemic power – the ability to control what is known or unknown about policing practices – assists the creation of 'truths'.[61] Often, this is reinforced, and becomes accepted as unchallenged 'truths', not just through the widespread silence on football supporters' rights from civil society actors[62] and authorities' framing of supporters as 'potential security threats',[63] but also by relevant media accounts. Here, expert statements are not uncommonly unquestioned, but lack important context or empirical support, and occasionally outright fail to differentiate between the majority of 'peaceful' supporters and the minority of individuals that engage in violent or anti-social behaviours.

Two recent examples of this include the UK Football Policing lead's statement in 2022 claiming that standing sections in stadia[64] would make it 'easier [for supporters] to throw missiles, engage in hate chanting, racism, sneak alcohol in, [and] take cocaine'.[65] Meanwhile, during Euro 2024, a German Chief Inspector explained the decision to only serve low-level alcohol beer to supporters prior to England versus Serbia as follows: 'Serbia has many hooligans. The English guys, with alcohol, they are sometimes very aggressive'.[66] Despite representing isolated exemplars, arguably such statements – coming from actors possessing specialist knowledge and epistemic power – not just influence wider understandings of what violent fandom is and its dangerousness, but as Geoff Pearson writes, they also have 'practical implications for the ways in which it is reacted to in the realm of the criminal law'.[67]

Importantly, a similar logic is apparent regarding how this politics of knowledge plays a part in the establishment of 'good practices' on how to address 'hooliganism'. Whilst the pan-European modes of collaboration between law enforcers, seemingly, constitute a good practice – suggested by their consistent encouragement in EU texts over two decades – we are still left with few answers concerning how 'successful' such collaborative measures are. Similarly, it remains unclear what exact criterion or metrics may render them 'good' or 'successful' – when juxtaposed to an overarching aim of public safety or order. Especially so, when researchers have pointed out that the

collection of personal information stored in databases, in some cases before a criminal offence has taken place, can erode supporters' civil rights and liberties[68]or that the strengthening of security measures inside stadia has relocated violence in the urban space, thus rendering it more uncontrollable.[69]

Another example concerns the restrictions placed on alcohol consumption inside stadia across many European countries. For decades, masculine subcultures which football fandom is embedded in have meant that alcohol consumption is central to the social relationships surrounding football.[70] While proceeding on a contested assumption regarding the causal relationship between alcohol consumption and violence, and that prohibiting alcohol will automatically entail a reduction of disorder and violence, scholars have documented how such policies largely have contributed towards new safety issues, as they have created situations where supporters load up on alcohol elsewhere and enter the stadium 'last minute', causing crushes and disturbances at the turnstiles and stairways.[71]

However, whilst reflecting risk management's side-effects,[72] in many European contexts, the policy remains intact as a 'common knowledge', temporally built-up over decades, still sustains the image of supporters as 'subjects devoid of self-control',[73] and a 'risky' group requiring pre-emptive regulative techniques and restrictions, despite questions about whether such restrictions work. Hence, it becomes particularly remarkable that other 'good practices' with more proven track-records of eradicating violent fandom, like the socio-educational German or Belgian Fan Coaching projects (combining social work with fan engagement), or 'friendly, but firm' policing styles, are yet to be consistently applied throughout Europe, where certain countries, instead, adhere to the use of 'riot' or 'hard' policing styles. This reveals the selective rationale underpinning the key definers' attempts to harmonize counter-hooliganism policies through the reproduction of 'good practice' and the knowledge regimes they are anchored in. Here, alternative, yet successful, measures addressing violence's root causes appear to come secondary to those repressive, often liberty-violating practices whose reproduction is repeatedly desired.

Fallacious and fake narratives

Even in historical and recent cases where football authorities and law enforcers' knowledge on, or management of, football crowds have proved inadequate, we observe how the same definers of security have either carefully framed their truths or showed a reluctance to admit failures. Immediately after the Heysel disaster, the event was quickly framed as a case of the 'nationalist masculinity of travelling English fans'.[74] Yet, even after it was established that the disaster was also caused by Belgian law enforcers, football authorities and the venue's structural shortcomings, this original framing was conserved[75]: violent fandom was still defined as a 'security issue' and had to be responded to accordingly.[76]

A similar pattern emerged in May 2022 during and after the Champions League final in Paris which saw Liverpool and Real Madrid supporters crushed and indiscriminately tear-gassed by riot police. In the final's immediate aftermath, the alleged dangerousness of supporters was again pointed towards by UEFA and French authorities who attributed these scenes to supporters' alleged 'late arrival' at the stadium and the high number of counterfeit tickets in circulation. These claims were later unequivocally disproved by the independent review of the incident (published in February 2023) – stating that law enforcers had 'adopted a model aimed at a *non-existent threat from football hooligans*',[77] which was described as 'outdated' and 'based upon flawed assumptions about risk'.[78] As one fan representative commented, pre-conceived ideas of supporters as 'criminals' or 'hooligans' contributed to the scenes of disorder.[79] Although UEFA was forced to take the primary responsibility for these events, what remains significant here – beyond how the images of the 'dangerous' hooligan built up in the 1980s[80] still are alive and might even guide policing approaches to football crowds – is the legitimization of patterns already in use, which means that fallacious or even fake narratives surrounding violent fandom become dominant.

The counter-hooliganism policies' failure to eradicate violent fandom is therefore not just predictable given that they, on ground level, never reflexively nor substantially accounted for the nature of the phenomenon subjected to regulation. The politics of knowledge surrounding the issue has meant that the repertoire of practices – allegedly 'best placed' to control it – have spread transnationally. These practices are not politically neutral and have been largely shaped by processes accelerating in the 1980s which continue to inform the present-day security configuration as a *security knowledge legacy*, where the ever-changing nature of violent fandom and its web of overlapping identities and national specificity are unaccounted for, and where the actors defining what 'football hooliganism' is, carry the power to determine good practices, determine if they work (and, indeed, operationalize the criteria that render them 'good'), what issues to prioritize and, crucially, encourage their exportation into new contexts but also other fields beyond football crowds. This includes the policing of transnational protest which, since the late 1990s built largely on EU counter-hooligan policies, and unsurprisingly produced many of the same consequences speaking to the erosion of civil rights and liberties including the right to protest.[81] Overall, this remains socially significant because violent fandom remains *firmly entangled* in a web of contemporary security threats of collectively 'threatening' phenomena, such as youth gangs, protestors or migrants, whereby the lines between 'good/bad' or 'legitimate/illegitimate' are blurry and viewed through the lens of key definers with a disproportionate power to state what and how serious the issue is and the optimal ways of combatting it.

Conclusion and evolving research agendas

The persistent gap between the roots of violent fandom and its management demands a reconsideration of the issue that asks: 'how did we get here?'. In doing so, this analysis contributes with an understanding of how the poor definition of, and inability to capture the ever-evolving violent fandom, and its many overlapping identities, created a situation where law enforcers and sports authorities have become the key definers and managers of this form of violence. The failure to grasp what exactly violent fandom *is*, has had implications on counter-hooliganism policies, their associated politics of knowledge, and the assigned and reproduced 'good practices' adopted to combat the issue. Through the labelling of 'hooliganism' as a 'security threat', calls for harmonized responses, the creation of a 'common knowledge' on 'hooliganism's' dangerousness and fallacious narratives – hegemonically crafted across several decades – we observe how academic definitional shortcomings have paved the way for ever-expanding law enforcers' and policy makers' definitional power.

The failure to grasp the multi-fold identity construction processes at stake meant that law enforcers have had a disproportionate defining power to state what violent fandom is, designate the 'good practices' driving the associated responses, and the metrics these practices' efficiency should be judged by. In a time where violent fandom appears high on EU and European agendas, and scholarly debates on 'football hooliganism' in Europe have returned,[82] this analysis draws together insights from scholarship on 'football hooliganism', security and social identity to position the phenomenon within historical and current security knowledge continuums.

Concerning future research, it must be acknowledged that, even two decades ago, there was an expressed sentiment that violent fandom had been 'overstudied'.[83] This commentary contends that there are instead theoretical aspects and specific contexts still underexplored. It would be wrong to suggest that the framing of 'hooliganism' as a serious security issue has reached a saturation point within security or social identity scholarship. As with other recurring social phenomena, violent fandom, and the responses to it, demand our attention. First, as the circulation of 'good' security practices is often aided by international tournaments and the staging of these outside Europe implies that such practices may be exported globally, the good practices' destinations should be explored. Second, with high relevance beyond football, 'hooliganism' should be analysed within the

wider political and security fields where threats to societies' political and legal foundations become defined and their size, nature and priority determined.

Notes

1. Cashmore and Dixon, 'Why football violence made a comeback'.
2. Grodecki et al., 'Hooligans are coming home'.
3. Reuters, 'Greek soccer fan dies'.
4. Associated Press, 'A Greek police officer'.
5. UCLF22, 'Independent Review'; Pearson and Stott, *A New Agenda for Football Crowd Management.*
6. Grodecki et al., 'Hooligans are coming home', 915.
7. Rookwood and Pearson, 'The Hoolifan'.
8. Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*.
9. della Porta and Reiter, 'The Policing of Global Protest'.
10. Cohen, 'Campaigning against vandalism'; Armstrong, 'False Leeds', and *Football Hooligans*; Armstrong and Hobbs, 'Tackled from behind'; Armstrong and Young, 'Legislators and Interpreters'; Stott and Reicher, 'How conflict escalates'; Comeron, *The prevention of violence*; Stott, 'Police expectations'; Stott et al., 'Variability in'; Stott and Pearson, *Football 'Hooliganism'*.
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