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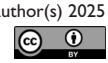

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Towards a Beckian Approach to Social Movements: Between Surveillance and Subpolitical Counter-Power

Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen
Liverpool John Moores University, UK

Abstract

By drawing upon concepts from Ulrich Beck's work on risk, reflexivity, contestation, and subpolitical power, this article produces an understanding of social movement–based critiques of surveillance and argues for the promise of Beckian (conceptual) approaches in analyses of social movements' power. While Beck argued, in his final book, that intensified surveillance constitutes a new epoch of the 'risk society', characterized by *global digital freedom risks*, little attention has been paid to how social movements contest such risks in 'risk societies'. Responding to calls for research on these risks' social consequences, thus filling this lacuna, this article advances our knowledge on Beck's social theory and surveillance-related critiques by using the empirical example of football supporter movements and their surveillance-related contestations. As argued, this case example reveals civil society, movement field coalitions, and digital freedom risks' emancipatory potential but historical significance.

Keywords

Beck, football supporters, risk society, social movements, subpolitics, surveillance

Introduction

This article advances sociological understandings of social movements–based critiques of surveillance through the employment of Ulrich Beck's social theory and concepts. In recent years, we have witnessed a significant and continual political, sociological, and public interest in social movements and the ways in which different movements, activists, and protestors challenge injustices and inequalities across diverse global contexts

Corresponding author:
Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen, School of Humanities and Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University, John Foster Building, 80- 98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5UZ, UK.
Email: j.a.ludvigsen@ljmu.ac.uk

(Della Porta, 2015; Useem and Goldstone, 2022). From a sociological perspective, this has unwrapped new, important questions about 'the ways in which social theory can be used to understand and analyse 21st-century extra-parliamentary political, cultural and social movements across the world' (Ibrahim et al., 2023: 3). In academia, this interest has been characterized partly by renewed questions being asked about movements' 'power' or 'counter-power', directly and indirectly associated with more specific questions of movements' 'effects', 'victories', 'outcomes', and 'successes' that have been allocated substantial sociological inquiry (Turner and Millward, 2024; Rye, 2024; Useem and Goldstone, 2022). Notwithstanding, because questions of 'power' and, relatedly, 'counter-power' are never far away in studies of social movements, collective action, or protest, it remains somewhat striking that the work of sociologist Ulrich Beck is yet to be made the most of here.

Particularly because Beck (2005, 2008) wrote extensively on the *rescaling of power* in a globalized world; 'subpolitics', capturing the 'significance of sources of power outside the political system in a differentiated modern society' (Holzer and Sørensen, 2003: 80); and, commonly mentioned, across his writings, the potential emancipatory and transformative capacity of social movements and civil society actors of the risk society. Central to the risk society is the existence of disagreements between, and heterogeneous claims made by experts, lay people, and social movements (Beck, 1992). Here, the latter have the potential to put powerful governments and corporations under pressure. Indeed, as Mythen (2020: 395) writes, by '[e]xploring the potential of alliances between nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and global social movements, [Beck] was bound up at this juncture with sketching out the dimensions of a progressive emancipatory politics'. Notwithstanding, although Beck (1997, 1999, 2000) observed how the risk society's new dangers brought about insecurities, and global and local social movements who could initiate social transformation and change from below, this article contends that, while social movements are commonly mentioned in Beck's work, there are still limited sociological analyses of specific movements or contexts that utilize, advance, and adapt his insights.

This article addresses this research lacuna, concentrating on what may be broadly understood as social movement–based critiques of public surveillance, specifically in the case of football-based social movements. This composes an important case as '[i]ncreasingly football-based social movements have channelled their activism towards wider social change beyond sport' (Fitzpatrick, 2024: 16) including certain surveillance technologies which may impede supporters' civil liberties. In risk societies, the surveillance technologies, practices, and policies are defining features. However, following Beck (2016), invasive surveillance technologies occupy an enormous sociological importance as they can come to constitute a *global digital freedom risk* to citizens' privacy and private data, thereby opening 'a new chapter of the world risk society' (p. 141). Responding to these trends, some social movements have, broadly, expressed their opposition to the fact 'surveillance is expanding enormously' in modern societies and its ramifications (Jeffries, 2011: 176). Importantly, though, social movements that campaign for privacy rights, civil liberties, and the need to balance freedom and security have to date been granted sporadic academic attention. This, despite Lupton's (2016: 475) call maintaining that 'global digital freedom risks' and their associated issues 'require continuing

attention from critical social researchers', and despite the generalized proliferation of surveillance policies and technologies, and their unintended side-effects within the risk society's contexts.

By adopting a conceptual approach, devised by sociological, risk and social movement studies literatures, and building on the Lee Ludvigsen's (2023, 2024) and Turner and Lee Ludvigsen (2023) earlier empirical work on the politics of contestation in European football supporter cultures, this article addresses primarily two research questions. First, seeking to 'travel with the academic spirit of Ulrich Beck' (Mythen and Walklate, 2016: 416), this article asks, 'what may a Beckian approach to social movements' power look like?' Second, what can *surveillance-focused critiques* and *contestations* tell us about the usefulness of these insights? It argues, via its case example, that Beck's insights allow us to capture how the dynamics of risk society and its emerging risks can produce emancipating movement outcomes, but that these must be positioned in historical context. Such argument carries a sociological significance given that intensified surveillance and ensuing contestations opened a 'new chapter' of the risk society (Beck, 2016).

Devising conceptual frames from Beck

Recently, Ibrahim et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of social scientists' committed efforts to deploy new sociological theoretical tools for the study of social movements, collective action, and protest. Specifically, they underscored how new, emerging cases require 'new empirical and theoretical analyses' (p. 4) that transcend social movement theory. While this, for example, is captured by an uptake of Foucault (Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2023; Death, 2010) and Bauman's work (Griffiths, 2023) in analyses of activism, protest, or social movements, this article argues that Beck's theories, while lending themselves directly and indirectly to the study of social movements, are yet to be made the most of by social scientists and consequently re-applied to and refined through new (empirical) contexts. While not claiming to represent an 'all-inclusive' summary of Beck's theory, this section unpacks this argument further focusing on (1) risk and reflexivity, (2) subpolitics, and (3) implications for social movements.

Risk and reflexivity

Beck's contribution to social theory has been described as 'extraordinarily diverse and thematically broad' (Mythen, 2020: 384). Notwithstanding this breadth, separating the diverse concepts located within this body of work remains difficult because of their often-inter-connected, even sequential, nature. It must, therefore, be acknowledged, as Jong (2022: 2) maintains, that Beck's notions of individualization, risk, globalization, reflexive modernity, and cosmopolitanism all need to be approached as 'components of the puzzle' collectively making up Beck's social theory. However, an exercise of unpacking Beck's work, arguably, necessitates a return to his sequential ideas of 'reflexive modernity' and most famously the 'risk society'.

Beck (1992) argued that we have entered a new epoch, the risk society (second modernity), which followed the industrial society that was based upon principles of insurance.

Importantly, the risk society represents a reflexive phase of modernity (Holzer and Sørensen, 2003). As Smith et al. (1999) put it, it is 'reflex-like', insofar as the modernization project's *side-effects* are now playing out more uncontrollably, creating an increasingly insecure and fragmented society (Mythen, 2004). Thus, the risk society is a society suffering from the 'very successes of the project of modernity' (Woodman et al., 2015: 1118) and reflects how '[w]hat goes around comes around, but in ways that are both unintended and unanticipated' (Smith et al., 1999: 169).

The shift from the industrial (class) society to a risk society is characterized by the shift from 'natural' (e.g. droughts or earthquakes) to 'manufactured risks' (e.g. nuclear power, climate change, financial crashes). Here, the latter are largely shaped by the modernity's advances in technology and science and no longer bound by space or time, while entirely unpredictable (Mythen, 2021) and impossible to secure against because they 'defy institutional regulation' (Mythen, 2007: 796). The risk society is infested with 'risks of which we can neither have knowledge nor measure' (Aradau and Van Munster, 2007: 91), whereas

> [T]he appearance of manufactured risks that imperil society indicates that previous boundaries of geography and time have been shattered. For Beck, instances like the Chernobyl disaster are characteristic of temporally unfolding global risks. (Mythen, 2021: 536)

Such circumstances demand institutional and individual exercise of reflexivity (Beck et al., 1994). Hence, risk becomes politically reflexive because individuals, technical experts, and social institutions must not just confront uncertainty, but additionally, 'political ideologies and governmental policies become increasingly subject to public scrutiny and critique' (Mythen, 2021: 537). Hence, the risk society and reflexive modernization compose a *macro-structural* context for this article, as it proceeds.

Subpolitics

Subpolitics constitute another central tenet of a Beckian approach to social movements. Within the risk society, we observe how contestations increasingly take place between, on the one hand, experts, and on the other hand, lay people and social movements. And so, it becomes crucial to position both processes of democratization and public participation as possible *outcomes* of the risk society. As Woodman et al. (2015: 1124, emphasis added) remind us,

> [T]he reflexive impact of unintended consequences opens up a *battleground over rationality claims*. In the wake of collective denial of responsibility, *a space is created in which a collision of expert claims to knowledge plays out, colliding not only with one another but also with claims of lay knowledge and of the knowledge of social movements*.

Similarly, Wynne (2002: 465) argued that

> Institutional bodies of government and policy have been forced to experiment with increased public participation in various arenas of expert decision over risks and technology regulation, in response to waning public trust in their processes and outcomes.

Within the risk society, therefore, the activities and discourses of technocratic expert systems, but also 'global corporations and national governments [have] come under pressure from world public opinion' (Beck, 2000: 70). Put simply, global risks 'cause, or will cause, people to act', thereby the risk society opens up doors for alternative, emancipatory action (Beck, 1999: 37).

Under these conditions of radical uncertainty, individuals and movements pursue their political agendas on the outside of regularized, political organizations, while social movements and activists increasingly have challenged expert systems' authority (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). This leads us to the rise of a new field of political action (Holzer and Sørensen, 2003), captured by subpolitics, which can be understood as 'the shaping of society from below' and the 'politics outside and beyond the representative institutions of the political system of nation-states' (Beck, 1999: 39). The subpolitical occurs, as Woodman et al. (2015: 1124) assert, through two directions, *the passive* and *the active*, whereby the former refers to where 'sectors of society inadvertently assume a political role by setting the parameters of social change' and the latter refers primarily to social movements.

Subpolitical engagement from social movements and civil society actors can thus contribute to the opening of decision-making processes and generate political change from outside formal political procedures and systems, as demonstrated by, for example, climate-focused civil society groups (Teo and Amir, 2021). Processes of globalization, meanwhile, assist the potential for coalitions or alliances between NGOs and global social movements as actors promoting emancipatory politics (Mythen, 2020). While acknowledging that social movements, as actors, are in possession of more legitimacy than power (Beck, 2005), it is essentially within this *field* of political action that social movements operate, and challenge the power and expertise of nation-states, social institutions, and private (transnational) corporations. Within Beck's power game, we may thus locate what Useem and Goldstone (2022: 34) called a 'social movement field', including not just the relevant movement and its target, but also active/potential countermovements, coalition partners, the broader public, and other organizations who, 'though not the target of the movement, would be affected by the movement's actions and goals'.

In this field, social movement possess a specific type of power, as Beck commented on:

> I asked myself the question 'What is the companies' key to power?', and I found a surprisingly simple answer which fits this context very well. The power of transnational companies is the flexibility to say 'no'! The can say 'no' to certain places and circumstances–they have to invest, but they do not have to invest in a certain country under certain conditions . . . So social movements that are directly or indirectly involved in organizing the act of saying 'no' have a huge political power over transnational industries. The companies react to this potential of power, and this leads to interesting processes of power in the global arena. (Quoted in Wimmer and Quandt, 2006: 340)

As seen above, Beck clearly ascribed an importance to social movements in the 'power game'. But still, it can be argued that his social theory and concepts are yet to be fully extended into other societal areas and new contexts. This, again, is remarkable given scholars' pluralistic theoretical approaches to make sense of the post-2011 'outburst of

political contention, including the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, Black Lives Matter and the Gillet Jaune protests' from anti-racism, anti-austerity, and pro-democracy movements (Ibrahim et al., 2023: 4).

Beck and social movements

Overall, this raises questions about synergies between Beckian theory and social movement studies. Like Beck's own work, literature on subpolitical movements inspired by Beck (e.g. Chan, 2008; Teo and Amir, 2021; Wynne, 2002) has predominantly focused on social movements and civil society actors in relation to environmental politics. Arguably, the ensuing literature on contestations between publics and experts has mainly examined these through scientific and environmental political fields (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). One (potential) explanation for this is, perhaps, that Beck did not necessarily offer one coherent theory for study of social movements, protest, or collective action. This, despite Bronner's (1995: 85) suggestion in the mid-1990s that Beck's 'views on the simultaneous fragmentation and globalization engendered by the "risk society" will also serve as a point of departure for any new theory of politics and social movements'. Instead, as argued here, Beck offers a selection of concepts with a direct portability to the study of social movements, beyond techno-scientific domains (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024), and dynamics within the 'movement field'.

There are primarily three departure points emerging from this discussion speaking to *why* Beck's work holds so much purchase in this context. First, acknowledging the contested meanings of 'social movements', Blumer (1951: 99) suggested they are 'collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life'. Accordingly, social movements emerge under conditions of unrest or disagreement with the 'current form of life and . . . from wishes and hopes for a new system of living' (Blumer, 1951: 99). Conditions of basic disagreement, ultimately, compose a pillar of the risk society. Thus, Beckian insights allow us to capture how relationships between publics (and movements) and expert and specialist systems originate from disagreement but may proceed with emancipatory potential. Second, it was mentioned that Beck's writings were thematically broad (Jong, 2022; Mythen, 2020). Yet, this concurrently means that Beck (2000, 2005, 2016) offers analyses of several of the processes to which contemporary social movements have responded to: globalization, neoliberalism, climate change, and, as this article analyses, surveillance. His theory can act as a (macro) backdrop for case-/context-specific research exploring the *dynamics of social movements in (globalized) risk societies*. Finally, critics have pointed towards the 'empirically light' (Mythen, 2004: 183) nature of Beck's theses, including the risk society, and his tendency to draw upon narrow repertoires of case examples (Mythen, 2005). While this might be excused by the suggestion that Beck 'provided a theory of the social world he saw emerging, not a social world that was already here' (Woodman et al., 2015: 1128), extending his work into new, empirical contexts is not solely desirable but theoretically important and constructive since it allows for attaching further, empirical frames or layers to his work. Bulkeley (2001: 434) has also argued convincingly that, because the risk society and its politics' applicability are not universal, 'the usefulness of Beck's insights into the dynamics of risk need to be demonstrated in each case'. Collectively, this demonstrates the promise

of Beck's concepts, including risk, reflexivity, power games, and subpolitics, for social movement–related analyses.

Next, this article employs Beckian insights to examine the case of social movement–based critiques of surveillance in risk societies. These critiques can be considered another reflexive response to a new type of risk generated by modernization *vis-à-vis* technology, what Beck (2016) called *global digital freedom risks*.

Surveillance and 'global digital freedom risks'

To fully understand the emergence of social movement–based critiques, contestations, and disputes over, it remains necessary to revisit a nearly two-decade-old suggestion about the so-called re-territorialisation security, on conceptual and practical levels, holding that 'with security more focused on the civic, urban, domestic and personal realms: in essence, security is coming home' (Coaffee and Wood, 2006: 503). Significantly, the rescaling of security has been influenced by the intensification of electronic surveillance technologies in semi-public urban spaces, which concretized in the 1990s and accelerated in the post-9/11 epoch (Coaffee and Wood, 2006: 507). Hence, Jeffries (2011: 117) observes how surveillance became a common feature, 'enmeshed with the very landscape of globalizing cities'. This, however, happened in line with the dominance of increasingly precautionary and future-oriented logics that Beck (1992) ascribed to the risk society. Here, experts and institutions' arguments for more surveillance are commonly framed in terms of the need for 'security' despite the impossibility of providing and guaranteeing this under circumstances of *nicthwissen* ('not-knowing') (Mythen and Walklate, 2016). In the new millennium, security concerns have often been used to justify the implementation of new and occasionally controversial surveillance technologies (Jeffries, 2011). However, unable to *guarantee* safety, these practices thus encapsulated how 'the restless search for lost security begins through measures and strategies that lend the *appearance of control* and security instead of guaranteeing them' (Beck, 2009: 156, emphasis added).

However, if surveillance and arguments supporting its application compose an expression of power, then it remains crucial to account for the counter-arguments and *counter-power* that emerge reflexively, in response to this (Jeffries, 2011). Against this backdrop, this article turns to explore the side-effects of surveillance in form of new risks as well as social movement critiques and contestations, before turning to the empirical case example of football supporters' surveillance contestations.

Beck's (1992) thesis becomes useful here: the risk society captures the *unintended consequences* of technological modernization. Yet, it was in his final contribution, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, where Beck (2016) discussed some of the side-effects of surveillance, particularly in the light of the public disclosures, throughout the 2010s, of US mass surveillance programmes and its public/private and transnational ramifications (see Bauman et al., 2014). These, Beck argued, remained politically significant and constituted a new chapter of the risk society, as citizens were now facing a new *global digital freedom risk* threatening their digital freedom rights to privacy and their personal data. The global digital freedom risk thus serves as an expression of the risk society because it is an unintended consequence of digital modernization, which is also temporally and

geographically unlimited (Anderson, 2019). Though, while this led to increased public scrutiny and discourses around global freedom risks, these were 'not triggered by catastrophe in the traditional sense' but, instead, 'the mismatch between the perceived and the actual reality of freedom and data in contemporary (Western) societies' (Beck 2016: 142). However, it was ultimately the visible nature of the 'violation of digital freedom rights' (p. 152) that came after the surveillance disclosures, which led to the reflexive awareness among publics about the 'new digital empire', leading again to resistance and social critique (Anderson, 2019).

In this article's context, and with reference to wider electronic and public surveillance, this remains imperative because, as Anderson (2019: 52) argues, Beck envisaged a scenario in which the 'negative side effects of digital modernization have also produced several unintended "emancipatory" side effects'. Examples of this include greater public demands for data protection in line with human rights or a more democratic political field on the decision-making *vis-à-vis* digital freedom risks. The public demands for enhanced compliance with human rights must be seen in context of individuals' and social movements' reflexive contestations and how risk opened up subpolitical arenas of rationality claims (Woodman et al., 2015). As Beck (2016) argued, '[i]f digital freedom is endangered, the brave can resort to counter-power, to non-compliance on the job' (p. 145), thereby opening new 'horizon[s] for alternative action' (p. 149). As argued here, after Beck's (2016) final book, few analyses have considered counter-power in the face of surveillance digital freedom risks, and moved beyond his own example of US mass surveillance, although other forms of surveillance practice (e.g. facial recognition or AI technologies) similarly open up for questions regarding civil liberties and privacy rights (Jeffries, 2011), and although scholars (Anderson, 2019; Lupton, 2016) have called for attention to be drawn towards *digital freedom risks* and, indeed, their *social consequences*.

Surveillance, social control, and movements

In social movement studies, the 'repression' or 'policing' of protest and activists have been key sites of inquiry. In risk societies, this includes the use and diffusion of advanced surveillance technologies and information processing (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2012) which seek to pre-emptively govern crowds and individual protestors both at and outside protest contexts (Bessant and Grasso, 2018; Jeffries, 2011). While this underlines the state's power in the face of social movements, scholars have increasingly explored how 'surveillance', both generally and when applied to protestors, is contested from below.

Huey (2009) emphasizes that 'pro-privacy' or 'anti-surveillance' resistance to, and public consciousness about, surveillance-related impacts on citizens' rights to privacy emerged throughout the 1980s. Meanwhile, Aradau and Mc Cluskeu (2022) draw attention to the increased mobilization of civil liberties and digital rights activists in the UK throughout the 2010s. Yet, while Jeffries (2011) saw the need for cross-pollination between surveillance and social movement studies, analyses of 'anti-surveillance' critiques are complicated because these types of critiques are seldom organized as and, crucially, they rarely 'take the form of a coherent movement against surveillance'

(p. 180). Others echo this, highlighting the absence of one mass or global 'anti-surveillance' movement (Huey, 2009).

In this context, this article follows the Jeffries' (2011) lead, who uses the case of political artists and artists collective in New York and their artistic, alternative media forms challenging hegemonic security discourses, to note that scholars should depart from the fixation upon surveillance-specific movements or activism as merely a movement for privacy rights. Instead, she argues, scholars should zoom out and capture how surveillance critiques are situated within wider social movement fields and intersect with opposition to other social and political processes. Hence, 'taking social movements as a starting point of analysis makes visible the way anti-surveillance activism is often more broadly enmeshed in wider movements of resistance' (Jeffries, 2011: 176). The advantages of such an approach are that

> In turn, we find in various expressions of collective anti-surveillance activism a resonance with critiques posed by the historical social movements, especially those articulated by feminism and global justice struggles. But if we re-locate resistance to surveillance within such movement assemblages, the connection between critiques of surveillance and organized opposition to neoliberalism, militarism, empire, hyper-patriotism, and patriarchy is starkly apparent even if its critics are not anti-surveillance activists *per se*. (Jeffries, 2011: 182)

This remains crucial because the location of surveillance-related critiques within a *wider movement field* (cf. Useem and Goldstone, 2022), rather than as one coherent movement or separate field, much aligns with Beck's task for social scientists concerning the abandonment of 'either-or' alternatives or logics (e.g. a movement *either* opposes neoliberalism *or* surveillance), in favour for 'both-and' categories (e.g. a movement can oppose *both* neoliberalism *and* surveillance), on the grounds that traditionally distinctive categories became blurred in the globalized risk society (Beck, 2005). In all, the preceding sections, therefore, argue that the 'rise' of surveillance as a distinct feature of modern social life has generated what Beck (2016) conceptualized as 'global digital freedom risks'. While existing literature reveals how few, if any, coherent social movements have emerged solely to oppose surveillance, Jeffries (2011) shows that, to fully understand critiques of surveillance, they must be approached as a part of a wider movement field and political struggles. Hence, extending Beckian insights on social movements and power in the face of surveillance contestations and 'digital freedom risks', this article employs the case example of football supporters' contestations over surveillance.

Football supporters 'against' surveillance?

Case contextualization

While critiques against, and disputes over, 'surveillance' have not taken up shape as one 'coherent' (Jeffries, 2011) or 'fully fledged' (Lyon, 2007) social movement, it can be argued that collective actions and politically engaged groups of football supporters across Europe have come to compose a social movement (Cleland et al., 2018) that, while not organized *specifically* to counter 'surveillance', has come to oppose certain

applications of surveillance and dataveillance, including the collection of biometric information about supporters and facial recognition CCTV (Numerato, 2018; Spaaij, 2013). Sociologically, football and its supporter cultures 'have provided fertile sites for mobilizations relating to issues inside and outside the sport' (Turner and Millward, 2024: 490), including securitization processes (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). This makes football supporters, as constituting a globally significant social group (Cleland et al., 2018), one important empirical setting for studies of the social movements/surveillance.

To contextualize, within Europe, Tsoukala (2008) observes how concerns about, and responses to, football-related violence and disorder, including 'hooliganism' and 'high-risk' fixtures, meant that football supporters became one of the first social groups within post-war liberal states that were subjected to systematic surveillance. Since the 1980s, the panoptic, or 'fan-optic', tendencies in football are hence consequences of football and political authorities' attempts to maintain a 'natural', disciplined order in football stadiums (Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2023). However, supporters have, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, regularly functioned 'as a guinea pig for surveillance techniques' that later have been employed against activists and protestors via EU-level policies (Spaaij, 2013: 178).

These processes have remained highly contested. Building on Beck et al. (1994), Numerato (2018) emphasizes that football supporters display enhanced reflexivity through their critical scrutiny of 'modern' football cultures, although only a minority of supporters engage in fan activism. Accordingly, fans' counter-arguments have become increasingly sophisticated and fan activists have stressed how restrictive measures, when applied against football supporters, not solely impede stadium atmospheres and fan experiences, but might be at 'odds with privacy rights and can undermine human rights and civil liberties such as freedom of speech or freedom of movement' (p. 14).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the new social movement of football fanzines emerged in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. This became one way of communicating fans' collective identity but must also be analysed as a response to authorities' conflation of 'ordinary supporters' with 'hooligans' and ensuing control strategies. In the UK, this included the supporter identity card proposal which the UK-wide social movement organization, Football Supporters Association (FSA), emerged in a response to, in the mid-1980s (Lee Ludvigsen, 2023; Turner, 2023). While the identity card proposal was eventually abandoned, it attracted criticism due to its nature as a mechanism that would monitor and control supporters. Capturing the sentiment existing at the time, one fanzine, for example, urged its readers to join FSA so that the ID card proposal, seen as synonymous with enhanced surveillance, could be challenged to ensure 'football is not damaged' (Dial M for Methyr, 1989/1990: 3).

Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, supporters' political engagement and activism took on a parallel European-wide significance, particularly through the formalized collaborative network of Football Supporters Europe (FSE) in 2008, which represents a democratic and representative body on supporter issues in Europe which, crucially, composes an organized network linking together supporter groups across Europe (Cleland et al., 2018). Thus, these are not examples of 'anti-surveillance' anti-surveillance in themselves, but instead, surveillance in form of CCTV, ID Cards, dataveillance, databases, collectively symbolizing *one* dimension of securitization, represents one of the

main socio-political issues that movements oppose 'through' and 'in' football, along with football governance, corruption, and neoliberal policies (Numerato, 2018). While specific campaigns maintaining that 'watching football is not a crime' have episodically mobilized across European countries, no monolithic nor coherent movement exists that counters 'only' securitization (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024; Numerato, 2018).

Notwithstanding, it can be contended that a number of important events throughout the 2010s and early 2020s, symbolizing authorities' turn towards facial recognition technologies, as piloted *through* and deployed *in* football, has marked a new turning point in the securitization of European football and mobilized, football-based social movements. This has mimicked wider trends, as Fussey et al. (2021: 325) highlight that automated facial recognition surveillance and its outcomes have become a 'particularly controversial technology among the growing armoury of digital policing tools', both due to questions about 'if it works' and 'purported high numbers of "false positives" generated by the system' (p. 332). In the UK, facial recognition surveillance was employed for the 2017 Champions League final in Cardiff, a decision that immediately attracted, and continued to receive, criticism from civil liberties groups after reports that 2000 people were 'wrongly identified' by the technology used at the final (BBC, 2018).

Following this, the deployment of similar technologies and the critical engagement of football supporter movements have continued. In early 2020, following the confirmation that facial recognition technology would be used during a fixture between Cardiff and Swansea, FSE (2020) announced their opposition, but in doing so also drew parallels to more generalized trends whereby supporters, across Europe, were being used as 'test subjects' for surveillance technologies (cf. Spaaij, 2013). Such concerns were also shared in the months prior, by Cardiff City's supporters, some of whom wore Halloween masks to the match, protesting the technology and the FSA (2019). While calling for an 'immediate end' to the use of the technology in European football, FSE (2020) stated concerning this specific fixture and similar trends in Europe that

> The question of whether this represents a new chapter in the history of mass surveillance, or whether such a development should be welcomed or not, is perhaps contingent on too many factors for a supporters' organisation such as FSE to answer. However, given the targeted nature of facial recognition, not to mention its potential wider consequences, we are compelled to restate our vehement opposition to the use of football fans as test subjects for unproven and unregulated technologies. Indeed, as numerous well-respected civil liberties groups such as Digitalcourage (Germany) and Liberty (UK) have pointed out, facial recognition technology is fraught with technical shortcomings and sociological risks. (FSE, 2020)

Beyond the reference to the expertise of specialist NGOs, it is also important here to point out how FSE's communication also referred to articles within the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human rights – specifically, the rights to privacy, association and expression (FSE, 2020) – and thereby navigated the discussion of enhanced surveillance from the context of football into the more generalized context.

Two years later, in May 2022, FSE (2022b) also reported that it had joined a 'global coalition of 53 civil society' organizations to call for the Member of the European

Parliament to protect citizens from biometric mass surveillance via the global campaign called 'Reclaim Your Face'. In September 2022, in a co-written article by FSE (2022a) and European Digital Rights (EDRi), FSE's position *vis-à-vis* mass surveillance was elaborated on:

> There are two good reasons why fans should pay close attention to the question of biometric mass surveillance. First, we have a right to privacy, association, and expression, just like everybody else. And second, we're often used as test subjects for invasive technologies and practices. With this in mind, we encourage fans to work at the local, national, and European levels to make sure that everybody's fundamental rights are protected from such abuses. (FSE, 2022a)

FSE and EDRi also pointed out the growing tendency in countries, *inter alia*, the UK, Denmark, Germany, and Spain, illustrating 'examples of fans being subjected to intrusive, or in some cases, unauthorised, surveillance' and the nexus between surveillance and systems linked to match-tickets (FSE, 2022a). However, despite supporters' contestations, the 'linkages between large sporting events and expansions in advanced surveillance architecture' (Fussey et al., 2021: 328) remain and attract opposition. For example, following the reported use of the contested technology during Arsenal versus Tottenham, in London, September 2023, Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust (THST) expressed the group's 'concerns about the use of facial recognition technology and, particularly, around its deployment at football matches', confirming that the supporter group would 'continue to liaise with the police, civil rights groups and fan organisations such as FSA and FSE on this matter over the coming months' (THST, 2023).

Risk visibility and emancipatory outcomes?

Against the above descriptive overview, this section demonstrates the purchase of Beckian tools in social movement analyses. The section consequently argues that (1) football-based social movements play a role in making risk visible, and that their (2) historically significant contestations over surveillance demonstrate the *potential* connections and collaborations between civil society actors and movements. Hence, we see an emancipatory potential of digital freedom risks in the form of, for example, cosmopolitan 'communities of global risk' (Beck, 2015).

In face of security technologies, supporter groups' power or influence may be limited in terms of changing, reversing, or overturning policy (Numerato, 2018). Returning to Beck (2016), however, what is apparent here is the ways in which surveillance of football supporters and spaces, as the examples all illustrate, is framed by supporter movements in terms of 'digital freedom risks', and calls for civil liberties and privacy rights protection. While *triggered*, in part, by recent uptakes in facial recognition surveillance used in football, what is significant in the case example of football supporters is that these critiques have become embedded into a wider, four-decade-long contestation over the 'hegemonic politics of surveillance and control [in football]' (Webber and Turner, 2023: 15). While Beck (2016) saw how the 'Snowden revelations' made surveillance-induced, global freedom risks violations *visible*, the case of football supporters in Europe reveals

how supporter-based movements and groups, not necessarily organized or set up merely to oppose surveillance, but what they see as 'modern', neoliberal and globalized football (Numerato, 2018), have not just between 2017 and 2024, but across four decades, attempted to *make visible* and contest what is seen as webs of invasive surveillance practices often piloted in football contexts.

There are also three other points to be drawn out from the preceding unpacking of Beckian concepts. First, echoing Numerato (2018), it is apparent how supporters' argumentation against surveillance is occasionally tied into wider and universal socio-legal questions of privacy and human rights. As Numerato notes, this underpins the enhanced sophistication of supporter criticisms, insofar as surveillance is 'lifted' beyond issues of sanitized stadium atmospheres and framed in more generalized terms, as potentially undermining not only 'supporters' rights' but *human rights.*

Second, the visible coalitions between supporters' movements and actors across the wider 'movement field' (Useem and Goldstone, 2022) are important. The public statements suggest that professionalized organizations like FSE and FSA are active within a wider field of movements and NGOs contesting surveillance. Thus, their potential 'successes' or 'outcomes' cannot be completely disassociated from this wider movement field, their alignment with other major actors (Useem and Goldstone, 2022), nor conceptualized within the frames of the nation-state (Beck, 2005) given this field's transnational make-up. This is captured by Beck's (2007: 288) suggestion that 'No single player or opponent can ever win on their own; they are dependent on alliances. This is the way . . . the hazy power game of global domestic politics opens up its own immanent alternatives and oppositions'.

Third, and relatedly, we observe the 'emancipatory potential' of digital freedom risks in this article's example. One Beckian contribution to social movement studies, hence, is that these emancipatory actions can be understood as movement outcomes. In his later work, Beck (2015: 79) pointed to the potential *advantageous* side-effects of global risk. Risks (e.g. climate change) provide 'new orientations, new compasses for the 21st-century world. We recognize that we have to attach central importance to the dangers that we have repressed as side effects until now'. In other words, by engaging with and proceeding in dialogue about 'bads' one might produce 'common goods' (Mythen and Walklate, 2016).

Hence, the 'digital freedom risk' contestations *through* and *in* football (cf. Numerato, 2018) illustrate how some supporter movements have coalesced around issues of democracy and human rights and called, increasingly, for their protection. Thus, while European football supporters possess 'country-specific' experiences of surveillance, there is an element of shared experiences *vis-à-vis* football's securitization and commercialization (Cleland et al., 2018). Possibly, these experiences open horizons for alternative action and *counter-power* in form of challenging football and political authorities' discourses nationally and beyond borders (Beck, 2016), as the 'pan-European' network of FSE and their access to decision-makers including the Council of Europe and UEFA can illustrate (see Author, 2024).

Hence, we can identify how the securitization of football since the 1980s, from supporter ID cards to facial recognition technologies, has not only meant that some supporters have coordinated beyond local or national fan rivalries (e.g. FSA) and even state

borders (e.g. FSA) through shared experiences, but become enmeshed in a wider movement field (that cannot be separated according to local/global or national/international (cf. Beck, 2005; Useem and Goldstone, 2022), and is directed towards progressive outcomes as the engagement and coalitions with other civil society actors suggest. The *both-and* rationality inherent to Beck's theory, hence, may enrich the notion of a social movement field where actors may transcend borders and movement success rests upon favourable alignment between major actors.

Finally, and *contrary* to this section's subheading, no monolithic movement composed of football supporters 'against surveillance' exists. Yet, it can be argued that, first, football supporters-movements reveal that critiques of surveillance must be located within a wider history of supporters' political engagement (Turner, 2023; Kennedy and Kennedy, 2007) and current movement configurations (Jeffries, 2011). Second, they reveal the potentially emancipatory and cosmopolitan 'communities of global risk' that can emerge through shared struggles and experiences (Beck, 2015) as supporters' disillusionment with commercialization and securitization represents a potent European exemplar of.

Conclusions

This article's contribution is twofold. First, it enhances our sociological understanding of the potential of Beck's work in the context of studies of social movements. Mapping the contours of a Beckian framework, the article continues the tradition of exploring new sociological theories and concepts for understanding the dynamics of social movements (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Second, it showcases the promise of Beck's work in an applied setting through its discussion of surveillance-related critiques and disputes from various movements. This matters because, over the last 30 years, separately and sometimes in relation to each other, sociological questions have been asked about social movements' power (Rye, 2024; Useem and Goldstone, 2022); the proliferation of surveillance practices, its consequences, and responses (Bauman et al., 2014; Beck, 2016; Lyon, 2007); and the politics of risk and insecurity (Beck, 2009; Mythen, 2004). By adding to these debates in the sociologies of risk and social movements and focusing on surveillance-related critiques and contestations *from below* using the case of European football supporters – this article addressed two sociological puzzles speaking to Beckian concept's relevance to the study of social movement's power and alternative, empirical contexts for Beck's (2016) concept of 'digital freedom risks'.

From Beck's viewpoint, '[p]olitics could not be left to only the experts' (Woodman et al., 2015: 1118). On a basic level, this view invites examinations of subpolitics – the politics from below – and social movements' power. Here, the example of surveillance critiques and contestations has attracted limited analysis, although Beck (2016) insisted risks to citizens' privacy opened a new chapter of the risk society and despite the fact that surveillance-related critiques can be found across a series of social movements that are not solely characterized by their 'anti-surveillance' activism *per se* (Jeffries, 2011).

As this conceptual article argues, football supporters compose a potent example in this respect, as some football-based social movements have opposed surveillance technologies and mechanisms that supporters for over four decades have been subjected to

across Europe (Lee Ludvigsen, 2023; Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2023; Tsoukala, 2008). However, crucially, the discussed case of football supporters' critiques and contestations in Europe remains socially illuminating because it *nuances* Beck (2016) of digital freedom risks: it showcases that contestation over surveillance technology risks to privacy, freedom of speech, and movement (Numerato, 2018) have both historical roots and significance. This article attaches hence an empirical dimension to Beck's (2016) concept of 'digital freedom risks' which he saw marking a new pathway within the risk society. Furthermore, the example of supporters reveals *outcomes* in form of the establishment of wider civil society coalitions and, finally, the emancipatory potential of risk, in line with Beck's (2015, 2016) theory, which underpins the potential power of social movements in risk societies as actors whose (counter-)power relates to their ability to produce alternative discourses and routes of action.

Importantly, the implications of this for future sociological work are that scholars can constructively employ Beck's broad, yet inter-connected concepts relating to risk, subpolitics, and emancipatory alternatives and, crucially, *refine*, *advance*, and *adapt* these in new contexts, including global justice and pro-democracy movements, who might occasionally engage in disputes around surveillance, policing, and securitization.

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ORCID iD

Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0085-2321

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Author biography

Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Politics with Sociology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. His research focuses on sociological and political issues in sport. He is the author of several books and his research has featured in journals like the *British Journal of Sociology*, *Current Sociology*, *Sociological Research Online*, and *Global Networks*.

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