



Mediated Thugs: Re-reading Stuart Hall's Work on Football Hooliganism

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Introduction

Amidst the countless and seminal contributions by Stuart Hall to discourses around race, representation, politics and identity, it is easy to overlook the equally countless essays about 'minor' fields in which he covered a broad range of related topics. One of these texts is an article about football hooliganism from 1978, entitled "The Treatment of 'Football Hooliganism' in the Press" from a volume edited by Hall and his colleagues Roger Ingham, John Clarke, Peter Marsh and Jim Donovan. The collection of essays is based on a conference held that previous year at the University of Southampton about football fans and violence, a topic that had become a major concern in the British public and that in consequence became a mainstay for research in the field of sociology. As this is Hall's only text dealing with violence around football, the essay fills only a minor niche in his oeuvre. Within the field of hooligan studies, however, his contribution to the discipline is still seen as an important addition: one of the major textbooks, *Football Hooliganism* (2005) by Steve Frosdick and Peter Marsh, mentions the ideas put forward in Hall's work as one of six major approaches to the phenomenon. That is remarkable, given that Hall is cited alongside researchers like Eric Dunning, John Williams or Patrick Murphy from the so-called Leicester School or Ian Taylor and others who spent a large part of their working life researching and publishing on the topic. Partly, this may be due to Stuart Hall's status as a renowned 'celebrity' within cultural studies and the social sciences, but nonetheless this is evidence that Hall's ideas have affected the study of supporter violence decisively.

In the last thirty years, the object of study, i.e. supporter violence at and around football matches, has undergone a significant transformation in the British Isles. Hall's essay was published during the 'heyday' of hooliganism in the late 1970s, and a couple of years later public opinion seemed so intimidated by this perceived threat that this was one of the major reasons why attendance figures in the English First Division reached an all-time low since World War II in the mid-1980s (cf. R. Taylor 1992: 3). Moreover, the opinion-shaping power bloc of the press and Margaret Thatcher's



government identified the hooligan-ridden sport as a public enemy and a social pariah: a *Sunday Times* editorial from 1985 tellingly called football a “slum sport played in slum stadiums and increasingly watched by slum people [...] deter[ring] decent folk from turning up” (16a). After three major stadium catastrophes in the 1980s, however, the government ordered Lord Justice Taylor to investigate the state of English football and suggest measures to improve the safety and the ethos of the game. As a result, supporter violence involving the English has been virtually eliminated from public view in the top divisions, and only seems to crop up infrequently at international matches (as in the infamous Marseilles riots around the group stage match against Russia during the European Championship 2016). I believe that re-reading Hall’s work on football hooliganism almost forty years after its publication is nonetheless worthwhile because, firstly, this expulsion of violence from football grounds has come at the price of processes of social exclusion which concerned Hall throughout his working life; and secondly, his postulations about the construction of fans as a social problem tie in with examples from other texts he wrote, and thus contribute to a bigger picture of the paths that British society has taken in the past decades.

The medial construction of hooliganism

The central argument that sets Hall’s text apart from the main corpus of hooligan theories is that he hardly focuses on the supporters who wreak havoc around football matches as such, but concentrates on the depiction of these violent acts in local and national newspapers. Hall is convinced that the press coverage has contributed to the perception of hooliganism as a serious problem and thereby increased said problem disproportionately. However, Hall does not neglect that there is a problem with football violence:

I *do* think there is a major problem about the way the press has selected, presented and defined football hooliganism over the years. But I *don’t* think the press has simply made it all up; though there are instances where I believe a little ‘creative journalism’ has indeed been at work. Nor do I want to suggest that we can be perfectly happy when passers-by are injured by football crowds. I don’t think the problem of football hooliganism would all go away if only the press would keep its collective mouth shut or look the other way. I do however [...] believe that the phenomenon known as ‘football hooliganism’ is not the simple ‘SAVAGES! ANIMALS’ story that has substantially been presented in the press. (Hall 1978: 19-20, italics in original)

When Hall takes issue with the “verbal reduction of football hooligans to the level of animals, or the insane” (28), he admonishes the implication that violent acts should be classified as a pathological form of anomie which can do without an analysis of the social circumstances that might nurture violence. In fact, the first official investigation into



hooliganism was the 1968 Harrington Report, conducted by a team of psychologists called on to explain the abnormal psyches of violent fans (cf. Frosdick and Marsh 2005: 87-88). Hall's warning is not an explicit retort to this publication, but criticises a general tendency towards psychosocial essentialism. There were other voices, though, who called for a consideration of hooligans' social background and the cultural practices that different milieus nurtured: Ian Taylor, for example, postulated the theory that a certain degree of violence was embedded in the socialisation of young working-class boys, who made up a considerable part of many fan cultures. Violent outbursts at football grounds, according to Taylor, should then be regarded as a form of resistance against a development in which these supporter strongholds saw 'their' football slowly being taken away from them. As evidence for this, Taylor considered the increasing influx of money and glamour into the game in the 1960s; from this perspective, supporter violence becomes a "'democratic' response to the loss of control exercised by a football subculture over its public representatives" (I. Taylor 1971: 372).

Hall may have supported Taylor's shift of focus from pathologising analysis to the social meanings of football violence, but his own approach is more radical in turning from the agents *of* violence to the agents of reporting *about* violence. One could intervene that, firstly, this makes the sociologist's job rather comfortable as "newspapers are more tractable than burglars", secondly, that the "material is abundant and [...] may be studied without risk in congenial surroundings" and, thirdly, that its "producers are usually more civil than are deviants themselves" (Downes and Rock 1982: 42). This would, however, not do justice to Hall's and many of his Birmingham colleagues' emphasis on studying "the interplay between class conflict, youthful rebellion, and media presentations" (Downes and Rock 1982: 117). According to Hall, there is a problem with scale and with the way that isolated incidents are treated in the press. It is one of the most central theses of his essay that the "sports pages don't simply reflect sport, they order the world of sport in terms of a league table of significance" (Hall 1978: 21). Press reports in general "cannot be simply a straight reflection of what happened because there always intervenes a whole process of selection [...] and a whole process of presentation" (19). In this line of argumentation, one can recognise early traces of what Hall would later articulate more fully as the concept of representation: by applying their own special lens to the phenomenon, journalists would construct a discourse around football violence in the first place, and secondly interpret this as a social problem. By identifying isolated, and maybe unrelated, incidents as recurring instances of an accepted problem, each new report about this phenomenon would ideally be decoded as an intensification of this social problem by a majority of readers.

It is important for Hall to stress that the press plays an active rather than a reflective role in this construction of football violence as a problem; although he does not mention the name Gramsci, his take on the press emphasises journalists' functions as organic



intellectuals who shape and direct a hegemonic consensus that a substantial part of the population can subscribe to. One of Hall's underlying theses is that "only a very small proportion of the population has any direct experience of 'football hooliganism'" (1978: 15) because they have never been involved in, or witnessed, such incidents. "The media provide the principal source of information about this problem for the vast majority of the public. It is therefore worth asking what the nature of that information is – how it is constructed, what it highlights, what it leaves out." (Ibid.) It is no coincidence that hooligans, some of whom have after their 'active careers' taken to writing about the topic, have repeatedly railed against what they perceive as an external form of (mis)representation: "Spurred on by the inaccuracies in accounts of the exploits of West Ham's InterCity Firm in various publications, I decided to use my unique position as a former member of the I.C.F. to set the record straight" (Pennant 2002: 16), writes Cass Pennant in one of these hooligan memoirs. It is admittedly central to journalism to strive for objectivity which needs to stay detached from its topic; hooligans' detestation of press practices still speaks volumes about the importance given to public perception.

Moreover, by selecting and focussing on football hooliganism the press single out hooliganism as a palpable threat that society faces. Murphy, Dunning and Williams have pointed out that right after the Second World War, many press reports played it the other way round, and by downplaying and de-amplifying violence on the terraces disseminated the impression that football crowds were becoming more and more orderly (1990: 115-117). Then, however, came the Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers, and the increasing presence of juvenile subcultures from the mid-1950s onwards was more and more perceived as a threat. It should not come as too much of a surprise that this coincided with the beginnings of the 'age of affluence': This triggered not only the evolution of youth subcultures as such, but also of adult middle-class responses ready to interpret the visible phenomena, yet not the underlying societal structures. Instead of hiding violent outbursts within a match report, press coverage from that time onwards picked out violent incidents and moved them to the front pages, thus constructing them as relevant for the general public (cf. Murphy, Dunning and Williams 1990: 118-123).

Deviant subcultures

Academic work on subcultures was flourishing in the 1970s: Stanley Cohen's writings about modern 'folk devils' and the moral panic around such deviant groups gained a lot of attention, and subcultural theories by John Clarke, Dick Hebdige and others were published on a frequent basis. The interest in subcultures, then as now, can be explained by their difference from the mainstream, middle-of-the-road culture. In deliberately and visually setting themselves apart and shutting themselves off from what was deemed normal, subcultures oftentimes reflected more on the normative middle of society than



on themselves. In other words, subcultures were as much about what they were *not* as about what they were, and consequently posed a potential threat to the dominant order of society. According to Jock Young, “sub-cultural responses are jointly elaborated solutions to collectively experienced problems” (1974: 160-161). This is important to understand deviant acts committed by subcultures: “Deviant behaviour is viewed as being a meaningful attempt to solve the problems faced by a group or an isolated individual – it is not a meaningless pathology” (161). Writing about youth cultures as modern folk devils, Cohen says that groups that are disruptive to this order first “become defined as a threat to societal values and interests”, and are then “presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media” until “the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people” (2002: 1). The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (CCCS) around Stuart Hall also jumped on the bandwagon and took a keen interest in this field; in fact, many scholars see this as a first major paradigm shift within the discipline of Cultural Studies. Colin Sparks, for instance, writes that the Birmingham Centre

produced a considerable body of material which attempted to relate the conditions of existence of young, mostly working-class, people to aspects of their taste in dress, music, behaviour and so on. [...] The originality of the new material lay in the semiotically-inspired ‘reading of the style’ as a magical resolution of the real dilemmas faced in the lives of working-class communities (1996: 84).

Resistance Through Rituals (1975) or *Policing the Crisis* (1978), both written or edited by Hall and his Birmingham colleagues, are key texts in this regard.

The latter of the two books discusses the construction of mugging in the United Kingdom as a social problem in the early 1970s and identifies a very similar case to the reporting about football hooligans. It thus goes beyond establishing how youth subcultures articulate internal coherence, and looks at how external representation – by the press – bestows coherence on these groups’ practices. When discussing subcultures, Hall et al. again foreground the construction and representation of youth cultures as potentially deviant threats to law and order. Not surprisingly (since both texts appeared in the same year), there is an enormous overlap in the arguments that inform Hall’s essay on hooliganism and *Policing the Crisis* (especially chapter 3, “The social production of news”). Importantly, in their analysis of mugging, Hall et al. stress that “though the label ‘mugging’, as applied in a British context, was new in August 1972, the crime it purported to describe was not. [...] Its social content may have changed, but there is nothing to support the view that it was a ‘new strain of crime’. No doubt the press had some interest in stressing its ‘novelty’” (Hall et al. 1978: 6). In a similar fashion, hooliganism in its organised form may have been a step up (or down) from raucous behaviour and spontaneous outbursts of violence that were common around football matches since the 19th century, but the label stamped on the phenomenon was the real



indicator that football violence had been elevated to the level of major threat via medial stigmatisation. Hall writes that even rather unrelated incidents can thus be categorised as a common danger: “if you get a whole cluster of similar stories, or if the press creates a cluster of stories by labelling rather different things by the same, catchy, label, they can create a trend. And a trend is newsworthy in its own right [...]” (Hall 1978: 24). As soon as this sensationalist spiral has been entered, it can hardly be stopped and the press, in its devotion to public opinion, no longer needs to be impartial: “The journalistic and editorial voice is raised, to the accompaniment of rumbles of moral indignation long before a scarf has been lifted aloft, a fist aimed or a boot swung. It would be hard to describe this press performance as one calculated to keep things in proportion” (26).

The question that comes up then is why football hooliganism was deemed so newsworthy and so shocking if, as Hall claims, the vast majority of the public was not affected by such incidents. One important factor that Hall mentions is the permeation of a supposedly apolitical cultural field, sports, that is detached from ‘real life’, by political acts that threaten the makeup of society. The reason why newspapers have their own sports pages lies in “the general place of sport in our culture – as a well-defined enclave – one of whose major attractions is that it has little or no relation to the rest of the news” (17). Reports about football violence however break out from “the segregated enclave of the sports pages” (18) because here a general social problem becomes manifest: “It often means – again, to put it metaphorically – that sport has gone political” (ibid.). One could mention numerous other examples, as, for instance, religion, which transgresses its socially assigned status of irrelevance as soon as terrorist acts are performed in the name of it. The “politics of confrontation” (qtd. in Davis 2004: 72) which Hall identified in the 1970s thus produced authoritarian reflexes when the privacy of leisure threatened to become political. Decisively, in Hall’s opinion these reflexes, nurtured by press reports and stigmatisation, would then amplify the problem:

If the official culture or society at large comes to believe that a phenomenon is threatening, and growing, it can be led to panic about it. This often precipitates the call for tough measures of control. This increased control creates a situation of confrontation, where more people than were originally involved in the deviant behaviour are drawn into it – forced to ‘put up a good show’ or increase the wager, up the odds. Next week’s ‘confrontation’ will then be bigger, more staged, so will the coverage, so will the public outcry, the pressure for yet more control... This is what is sometimes called an *amplification spiral* – and the press has a significant part to play in each twist of the cycle. (1978: 25, italics in original).

This line of argumentation stands in the tradition of sociologist Leslie T. Wilkins, who developed a first version of deviancy amplification theory in the 1960s (cf. Wilkins 1964: 45-104). According to Wilkins, the public exposure that the broad coverage of certain deviancies brings can work as a form of inspiration and lead people to imitate such acts of deviancy. Labelling people as deviant would structurally isolate them as a minority:



“information about such an isolated minority was [...] second-hand and mediated, and, being mediated, it was liable to distortion” (Downes and Rock 1982: 156). Stanley Cohen’s identification of modern folk devils is indebted to this strand of media theory, and Stuart Hall’s writings were influenced by these ideas as well. Whether it is mugging or hooliganism, the shift of focus from the deviant youth to the institutions that apply an amplification lens to this deviant behaviour suggests that media amplification works like a spiral, which is likely to intensify the problem rather than calm things down. In Hall’s words, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy that a shift of focus will bring about the desired proof that a certain problem exists: “the more resources are concentrated, the greater the number recorded” (Hall et al. 1978: 38). This does not imply that the police should look away from criminal acts because ignorance would keep numbers down, but it is a paradox “that the selectivity of police reaction to selected crimes almost certainly serves to *increase* their number” (ibid., italics in original). It may seem unsatisfactory to empiricists that the logical conundrum that follows from this assumption is that numbers can never speak for themselves. However, this is central to Hall’s line of argumentation: numbers cannot be more important than the persons who do the counting and their decision what to include and what to leave out in a certain number.

There have certainly been voices who have questioned the validity of media amplification theory (cf. Waddington 1986): are football fans really more prone to violence because they have read in the papers that their subculture has turned increasingly riotous? Can reputation completely precede and thus trigger certain forms of behaviour? Does the press really have the authority to work like a ‘Big Other’ by whom I want to be acknowledged, but not misrepresented? Moving away from the alleged homogeneity of football fans as a group and focussing on the club rivalries inherent in football fandom instead, the theory sounds more convincing. If I have read press reports that the supporters of Aston Villa (insert any other club name) that are about to visit my town and club next weekend are a bad lot who will in all likelihood run riot and try to take the home end in our stadium, I might either be intimidated and stay away from the football ground, or I will feel an increased sense of duty towards my home club and pre-emptively set all senses on alert for a confrontation with the rival intruders. Williams, Dunning and Murphy, for example, quote a football fan who was caught in 1967 carrying a razor to a football match and stated in his defence in court that he had “read in a local newspaper that the West Ham lot were going to cause trouble” (1988: 152). It does not stop with rival fan groups: when a combination of sensationalist press reports and actual incidents of hooliganism led to massively increased police presence at and around football matches, the group dynamics of young male crowds instigated the ritual confrontation with the forces of law and order rather than silently stepping down and accepting the regulation and intimidation (cf. Kerr 1994: 52-53). It is only in recent years that the possibility has been acknowledged that fewer police might actually result in fewer confrontations, rather than the other way



round. However, the reflex of calling for increased policing as soon as something goes wrong seems inevitable, and the first experiments with reduced police presence are unlikely to lead to long-term changes.

One of the main challenges of re-reading Hall's work about hooligans forty years later are of course the changed circumstances in which football violence or fan confrontations with the police occur nowadays. Most interesting in this regard is that Hall wrote about media amplification and football fans long before the arrival of the internet: with this new medium, the possibility of visually representing the riotous potential of certain fan groups has increased once again. However, although one has to tread carefully in calling corporate giants like YouTube democratic, internet video platforms and other social media have brought about new possibilities for fan groups to take charge of the way in which their cultures are being represented. If we take, for example, the controversial case of burning flares and other forms of pyrotechnics in the stadium, one can observe that official condemnations of these illegal acts are often challenged by counter-representations initiated by fan groups. This substitute battle about authority and resistance is ideologically charged on both sides, but one has to acknowledge that dominant channels of interpretation are encountering competition, which would have been nearly unthinkable before the arrival of the internet. Pictures and videos of smoke bombs, attacks on rival fans or policemen can thus be spread much more quickly and frequently than the odd press photograph could back in the 1970s. In any case, according to the logic of amplification theorists, this newly won balance in terms of representation will hardly do anything to further de-escalation.

Thatcher and beyond

What seems conspicuously absent from Hall's argument in the essay on hooliganism is the question as to whether anybody stands to profit from the sensationalist reports and the moral panic around football hooligans. He clearly identifies the agent or encoder of these messages as 'the press'; this is a reductionist and generalising strategy which allows for hardly any differentiation within this category. One needs to look at the wider context of Hall's writings to fill this with more life. In an oft-quoted definition from an essay which precedes the text about football violence by a year, he explains that the dissemination of "selective social knowledge" is first and foremost an ideological strategy by the mass media, which serves the ideological state apparatus:

establishing the 'rules' of each domain, actively ruling in and ruling out certain realities, offering the maps and codes which mark out territories and assign problematic events and relations to explanatory contexts, helping us not simply to *know more* about 'the world' but to *make sense of it*. (1977: 341, italics in original)



Although in an aside Hall mentions that it is easy to sell moral panics and that newspapers certainly feel competition and economic pressure (cf. 1978: 24), the enormous effects of media amplification can also be explained by their function as stabilising the authority of the state as a controlling and disciplinary instance. For example, it is of vital importance that the press must “reassure its readers that, appearances to the contrary, everything is not falling apart – yet” (1978: 23), which legitimates the calls for more and stronger police presence in and around football grounds. This legitimation is won because these reports manage to conceal the juxtaposition between individual or mob violence and the violence of the state, which as a form of legitimate violence is not even called by this name. Hall writes:

We also inhabit a culture which contains a strong taboo against violence of any sort, except that ultimate violence of coercion and restraint which is held to be the legitimate prerogative of the state. This makes us especially sensitive to the violence of individuals and groups, who are thought to be acting outside of the general consensus and institutional framework of society, while we are at the same time blind to routine, institutionalised violence. (28f)

It is essential in the case of constructing the football hooligan that the delegitimation of one form of violence is reached by ascribing it to a subordinate element within the class hierarchy, while the legitimisation of another form of violence supports the interests of the dominant elements in society. This is thus an example of what Johan Galtung has called “structural violence” (cf. 1969), and which is a driving force behind any hegemonic consensus in capitalist societies.

Reading Hall’s arguments about media amplification of the hooligan discourse in conjunction with his ideas about the press as ideological forces that legitimise “that ultimate violence of coercion and restraint” (1978: 29), the text takes on an almost prophetic note when considering what happened to English football in the 1980s and after. Under Margaret Thatcher’s government, the blown-up and distorted construction of football violence in the press was used for a large-scale attack and stricter measures against deviant youths, working-class strongholds and the game of football in general. Summing up a widely-held opinion among fans, Richard Edwards writes in *FourFourTwo* about the Iron Lady’s wrestle with football: “Distracted by her battle with the miners she may have been, but Thatcher still took the view that football hooliganism represented the very worst of the nation’s ills.” (2015) Battling hooliganism, for example by introducing an infamous ID card scheme, became an important topic on Thatcher’s agenda, which she pursued from an early stage of her leadership. When large-scale riots at Luton and Birmingham and tragic stadium disasters at Bradford and Heysel happened in the spring of 1985, her verdict seemed confirmed and was backed by social consensus led by the press. Interestingly enough, Thatcher even linked the violence on the terraces



to violence in Northern Ireland and violence on the picket lines, thus underlining the importance of a strong state to discipline this wide range of deviance (cf. King 2002: 78).

It is a sad irony that even within football, completely unrelated events were clustered under one and the same label. The riot between Luton and Millwall hooligans on March 13, 1985, and the fracas between Birmingham and Leeds hooligan firms on May 11 of that year, which cost one fan's life, were clear examples of escalating fan violence. The Bradford fire (coincidentally on the same day as the Birmingham vs. Leeds riot), however, borne out of a very different form of neglect on behalf of the authorities, was immediately thrown into the same category as violent incidents caused by fans. The main wooden stand at Bradford's Valley Parade ground, hardly altered since its erection in 1908, and the gaps between the floorboards and the ground had been identified as a fire risk before. Nonetheless, beneath the stand a mass of litter had assembled and not been cleared for years. After the fire, in which 56 people died, investigators found a copy of a newspaper from 1968 and a pack of peanuts with a price tag that dated back to before decimalisation was introduced in 1971 (cf. Conn 2005: 151-152). Still, this neglect was interpreted *not* in view of failed safety standards, but in line with the general state of the game which hooligans had brought into disrepute. The Heysel disaster in Brussels, only 18 days after the Bradford fire, was initiated by Liverpool fans charging at their Italian opponents (39 of which died), but questions about inadequate policing (why did English and Italian fans stand in adjacent blocks without police separation, after the fan groups had already clashed the year before?) or the derelict state of the ground (the Italian fans pushed against a wall which collapsed on them) were not asked until years later. The ready and over-deterministic explanation that hooliganism was bound to lead to such disasters overlaid any exploration of context and structural deficits. It is telling that Thatcher instituted just one single judicial inquiry into both Bradford and Heysel (cf. King 2002: 80).

Better and higher fences were the Thatcher government's answer, and the catastrophe at Hillsborough on April 15, 1989, when 96 fans were crushed against exactly these fences and trampled to death, the result. That this disaster would be immediately blamed on hooliganism is of course the most tragic of ironies. Even though the initial accusations, made by *The Sun* and the Sheffield police forces, have fortunately been revoked by now, the mere fact that these rumours could so easily catch on shows how the media amplification spiral around football hooliganism worked. A whole range of only marginally connected events like Luton, Bradford, Heysel or Hillsborough could all be labelled as football deviancies in the press, no matter where the deviancy came from and what it consisted of. Each new event, constructed in press reports, then confirmed the pattern around football which the dominant social consensus expected from the sport. In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. ask the rhetorical question whether it could be "possible – historically plausible – that a societal reaction to crime could



precede the appearance of a pattern of crimes” (1978: 182). The fact that it took almost thirty years for the families of Hillsborough victims to achieve some form of justice takes this a step further, because it explains how medial stigmatisation was able to conceal the mistakes of the police for decades (cf. Tempny 2016: 410-412).

After Hillsborough, though, it became clear that measures had to be taken, and the government ordered a panel under the auspices of Lord Justice Taylor to investigate the state of English football. The ensuing Taylor Report suggested a number of strategies, most importantly the conversion of stadiums in the two top divisions into all-seaters and the introduction of CCTV cameras into all areas of the grounds. These costly renovations and the loss in revenue (due to the loss in capacity) were then passed on to supporters, because clubs raised ticket prices enormously (cf. Dempsey and Reilly 1998: 233). Moreover, the old first division reinvented itself as the English Premier League and broke away from the rest of the Football League, selling its television rights in successive and increasingly lucrative deals. A combination of all these measures has virtually driven hooliganism out of stadiums in the top divisions – the shiny Premier League with its global middle-class audience is a world without any substantial violence in the stands, and even at train stations, in pubs or in lower-division grounds the numbers of violent incidents have, according to official police statistics, steadily declined. Instead, former hooligans have come of age and taken to writing hooligan memoirs in which they can battle old rivals with the pen instead of their fists, and even hooligan fiction has started to thrive once the actual phenomenon seemed to no longer pose a threat (cf. Piskurek 2018: 171-215). But not only hooligans have left the grounds; large groups of fans have been priced out and cannot afford to attend matches anymore. In a contribution to the *Kilburn Manifesto*, Michael Rustin has argued that the “excessively stratified reward system of the Football Premier League [...] now serves as a mirror for the entire society, as it symbolises and legitimises the displacement of spheres of intrinsic value by the esteem accorded to money alone” (2013: 9). Taking into account how the construction and amplification of hooliganism has contributed to these processes of social exclusion, it is maybe even more (or, cynically speaking, less) astonishing how neoliberal consensus has taken over the people’s game.

Conclusion

It is important to differentiate between different forms of violence in football and whether or not they are constructed as social problems or deemed normal and even normative. This distinction is rather obvious when looking at the physical violence by hooligan firms, which is conventionally considered to be a deviant attack on law and order, and the coercive violence by the police or the structural and ‘soft’ violence of social exclusion, which are seen as the adequate response to restore the common



consensus. The press, as Hall has argued, has played a pivotal role in juxtaposing these forms of violence, one as a social problem and one as its remedy. The latter, which as a concomitant side effect has driven physical violence from the terraces, qualifies as a form of violence as well: the neoliberal turn in contemporary football has knowingly brought about the pricing out of large sections of working-class fans who can no longer afford the Premier League. The elimination of terrace violence in 1990s England thus shows quite clearly how the visible presence of socially detested violence has been driven away while a hidden form of violence, which is manifest in the absence of a certain set of supporters is still existent. This, however, is constructed not as a problem but as a necessary step to clean up the game.

When Hall writes that we “inhibit a culture which contains a strong taboo against violence of any sort, except that ultimate violence of coercion and restraint which is held to be the legitimate prerogative of the state” (1978: 28-29), it is telling that he explicitly names the state as the benefactor and unconscious force behind the work of the organic intellectuals, i.e. the press. This line of thinking has, not unjustly, been criticised as regarding press reports as “a by-product of a conspiracy ‘engineered’ or ‘orchestrated’ by the powers that be” (Ben-Yehuda and Goode 2009: 39). Admittedly, the way Hall employs the terms media or state needs more differentiation to understand how these processes work in detail, but the general shift of focus from hooligans to the construction of hooligans is crucial in its own right. This shift of focus, as important as it is, almost conceals the question of where hooligan violence came from in the first place. Hall’s article certainly acknowledges that this form of violence poses a problem in itself, but the attention that he pays to the processes of amplification comes at a price, which is the text’s relative silence about acts that precede said processes.

Hall’s analysis from 1978 could not predict but only speculate as to how the neoliberal consensus that gave birth to the English Premier League would be helped by the sensationalised and amplifying reports in the press, but with hindsight one can understand how the singling out of hooliganism and the construction of a social problem have significantly contributed to this development. Moreover, Hall’s text, in conjunction with *Policing the Crisis* and other examples, teaches us that these processes are not limited to the world of football. Whether it is drug users, muggers, punks, striking miners, foreigners, refugees: the pattern can be endlessly repeated and thus not only reflect but severely influence public opinion and consensus. It is this potential, both positive and negative, that media messages carry in constructing but also in avoiding moral panics that is as crucial to understand and challenge in 2018 as it was in 1978.



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