

## Spectator Violence in Stadiums: Why do the Hooligans Fight? An Essay in Honor of Eric Dunning

Violência torcedora nos estádios: por que os hooligans brigam?  
Um ensaio em homenagem a Eric Dunning

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**ABSTRACT:** The study revisits the work of the Leicester School, highlighting the prominent figure of Eric Dunning, disciple of Norbert Elias and systematizer of the ideas of the German sociologist in England, leader in the process of constituting a sociology of modern sports in that country. In the poorly drawn lines that the freedom of the essayistic genre entails, we suggest that Dunning's position as Elias' apprentice soon becomes even and turns into a fruitful partnership. More: as a partner, he rises to the status of master himself, able to train new scholars and organize a series of collections together with his disciples. The broad theme provided by the focus of sports studies is restricted here to a specific agenda for analysis, namely the so-called phenomenon of hooliganism, to which Eric Dunning and his team devoted much of the analytical efforts of interpretation, reviewing assumptions of the first authors dedicated to the theme and carrying out a range of institutional collective research. These, in turn, led to the creation of theoretical and empirical references throughout the 1970s to 2000, with international repercussions among researchers focused on understanding not only British hooligans, but European *ultras*, Latin American *barras*, and Brazilian *torcidas organizadas*. If Dunning's theory and empiricism are not immune to criticism – as in the limit no scientific paradigm is –, in this text, the sociological, anthropological and historiographic contributions made by this admirable English intellectual are reiterated.

**KEYWORDS:** Stadiums; Football Hooliganism; Violence; Great Britain.

**RESUMO:** O ensaio revisita a obra da Escola de Leicester, com destaque à figura proeminente de Eric Dunning, discípulo de Norbert Elias e sistematizador das ideias do sociólogo alemão na Inglaterra, líder no processo de constituição de uma sociologia dos esportes modernos naquele país. Nas mal traçadas linhas que a liberdade do gênero ensaístico enseja, sugerimos que a posição de Dunning na condição de aprendiz de Elias logo se nivela e converte-se em profícua parceria. Mais: de parceiro, aquele ascende à condição ele próprio de mestre, apto a formar novos estudiosos no meio e a organizar uma série de coletâneas em conjunto com seus discípulos. O amplo temário propiciado pelo enfoque dos estudos dos esportes restringe-se aqui a uma pauta específica para análise, qual seja, o assim chamado fenômeno do hooliganismo, para o qual Eric Dunning e sua equipe dedicaram boa parte dos esforços analíticos de interpretação, revendo pressupostos dos primeiros autores dedicados ao tema e realizando uma gama de pesquisas coletivas institucionais. Estas, por sua vez, ensejaram a criação de referenciais teóricos e empíricos ao longo dos anos 1970 a 2000, com repercussões internacionais entre pesquisadores voltados à compreensão não só dos *hooligans* britânicos, mas dos *ultras* europeus, das *barras* latino-americanas e das *torcidas organizadas* brasileiras. Se a teoria e a empiria de Dunning não são imunes a críticas – como no limite nenhum paradigma científico o é – reiteram-se neste texto as contribuições sociológicas, antropológicas e historiográficas aportadas por este admirável intelectual inglês.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Estádios; Hooliganismo; Violência; Grã-Bretanha.

The sociologist Eric Geoffrey Dunning (1935-2019) passed away two years ago.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by his brilliant work, this essay is an assessment of the bibliography related to football hooliganism studies, developed not only by him, but also by Norbert Elias and his sociology school at Leicester from 1950 onward. As a way of celebration of Dunning's memory, I will here highlight the currents and interpreters who have sought to examine the phenomenon of inter-club and intergroup violence in the United Kingdom over the last decades, particularly from the cycle beginning in the 1960s.

One might say that following the 1966 World Cup in England, the phenomenon of hooliganism came to be recognized as a serious social problem by British authorities, with significant consequences in the 1970s and 1980s. The visibility gained by hooligans in football at that time – remembering that this figure already featured in the British collective imagination outside sports since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by Geoffrey Pearson – would prove to be a factor of national concern, with growing fights and disturbances in the stands, in the environs of stadiums, in pitch invasions, in pubs or in public transport, especially in the trains that cross the country.

If initially confined to national competitions, in the 1970s and 1980s the incidents would also be seen at matches in continental Europe, worsening the situation and generating far-reaching consequences.

The first official report on the subject of hooligans and safety conditions in British stadiums was the Harrington report, published in the city of Bristol, titled *Soccer Hooliganism*, in 1968. This would be the first of a series of nine reports over the following decades. The ninth and final assessment – the Taylor report – was released in the wake of the Hillsborough stadium tragedy in April 1989, when ninety-five fans were crushed to death due to overcrowding in an FA Cup semi-final match. This report, drawn up by Lord Peter Taylor on the causes of the tragedy and provisions for English stadiums, would have an impact on sports facilities in Great Britain in the 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> The following article is the result of a postdoctoral internship held at the *University of Birmingham*, in 2018, under the auspices of the Ernest Rutherford Fellowship and under the supervision of the historian Courtney Campbell.

The stadiums would undergo profound structural renovations, corresponding in turn to the expectations of a new type of audience, resulting in the complete architectural overhaul of arenas. This was not only due to the work of architects and engineers or the proposals by members of parliament and judges responsible for inquiries. The recruitment of scholars from the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences to propose preventive policies would spread throughout the continent, often with the financial support of the European Union and UEFA.

Prominent in the United Kingdom was the so-called Leicester School, which, under the sociological guidance of the German theorist Norbert Elias, an intellectual based in England, received institutional and government support for a series of studies on the history, anthropology and sociology of British hooliganism. The research team responsible for delving into the subject was led by the sociologist Eric Dunning, the first student supervised by Elias at Leicester, reader of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, in a rare original copy in German, since the book would only be translated into English in 1978. This student had proposed to his supervisor, as early as the 1950s, a historical and social study of sport and leisure in light of the civilizing process theory.

Dunning, himself a cricket and football player in university, was by then the well-respected director of the Centre for Football Research of the University of Leicester, and had started on his own intellectual journey with the organization and publication of his books in the 1970s: *The sociology of sport: a selection of readings* (1971) and *Barbarians, gentlemen and players: a sociological study of the development of rugby football* (1979), the latter in partnership with Kenneth Sheard.

In response to the challenge of deciphering the apparent failure in controlling the emotions of British fans, Dunning co-wrote with John Williams and Patrick Murphy, also Elias' disciples, a paper summarizing the arguments presented more extensively throughout the 1980s in the form of a triptych: *Hooligans abroad - the behaviour and control of English fans in continental Europe* (1984); *The roots of football hooliganism – an historical and sociological study* (1988); and *Football on trial: spectator violence and development in the football world* (1989).

The trilogy written by Dunning, Williams, and Murphy, which would be successively reissued in the 1990s, was actually the result of extended research,

including fieldwork, developed between 1979 and 1982, and contained important specificities. Officially commissioned, it consisted of reports submitted to the MP Norman Cherster, charged by the British Parliament and the English League to find and identify solutions to the disturbances involving hooligans throughout Europe. Under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council, of the Department of the Environment, and the Football Trust, the information was intended to provide the basis for understanding the phenomenon and supporting the development of an action programme by the public and sports authorities.

In addition to the trilogy, Eric Dunning would also edit a fourth book on the subject in the early 21st century, entitled *Fighting fans: football hooliganism as a world phenomenon* (2002). Arguing that the issue of hooliganism is not exclusive to Britain, it features a contemporary chart of football fans in different parts of the world, from the *barra-bravas* of Argentina to the *hinchadas* of Peru, from the *kutten fans* of Germany to the *tifosi* of Italy, from the *ultras* of Spain to the *siders* of Belgium, not to mention supporters' groups from Eastern Europe, Greece and Turkey.

It should be noted, however, that the Leicester researchers did not pioneer the study of violence among fans in England and my postdoctoral research has allowed me to explore this more deeply.

Throughout the 1970s, as the issue gained prominence in public opinion, investigations were carried out by other British schools, such as those of Birmingham and Oxford. Therefore, before addressing what they considered to be the deeper roots of hooliganism – the pleasure derived from fighting, the encouraging model for such behaviour found in the social environment of origin, and football as a privileged environment for the manifestation of these expressions of aggression – Elias' students began their essay by describing what they viewed as the more superficial explanations of the phenomenon, among which were the consumption of alcohol and violence emanating from the game's intrinsic dynamics.

Then, to assert their arguments, the authors reviewed the pre-existing theories about hooligans in university circles. Next they highlighted the differences between them and exposed the deficiencies and theoretical inconsistencies underlying each one.

The first current, of a Marxist bent, was personified by three authors: Ian Taylor, John Clarke and Stuart Hall. Taylor, author of the paper *Soccer consciousness and soccer hooliganism* (1971), explained the violence of football fans as a kind of working-class revolt against the progressive bourgeois and international character assumed by the game in the late 1960s. It was a movement of resistance to changes taking place in football and, more specifically, a reaction to the de-characterization of the sense of community of English clubs.

Clarke, author of *Football and working-class fans: tradition and change* (1978), also viewed hooliganism as resulting from the transformations brought about by professionalism and its process of 'spectacularisation', which contributed to the breakdown of local community ties among English workers. Following the outbreak of World War II, different generations of workers ceased to frequent stadiums together as before, which promoted a cultural divide within working-class families, separating youngsters and adults, parents and children.

Hall, author of the essay *The treatment of 'football hooliganism' in the press* (1978), an exponent of the so-called Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, correlated the role of the media in creating a situation of 'moral panic' in stadiums with the increasing national unrest due to the economic deterioration experienced by Great Britain. While the press could not obviously be blamed for creating the phenomenon, the way it portrayed the issue had unexpected effects, often leading to its misrepresentation.

The second current, in turn, influenced by ethology and especially by Desmond Morris, author of *The soccer tribe* (1981) and for whom the sport meant nothing more than a 'ritual hunt', was represented by Peter Marsh, E. Rosser and R. Harré, editors of the book *The rules of disorder* (1978). Unlike the first current that addressed hooliganism in a very general way and as a clash between classes only, the Oxford group aimed to understand the meaning of the conflicts in their intergroup dimensions. The impression of anarchy and disorder conveyed by the media regarding the behaviour of fans was untrue and ended up being a kind of sounding board that amplified the disturbances in stadiums.

Apart from the relationship with the other social actors involved, it was a matter of knowing why the fans created their own set of rules of confrontation,

resorting to this end to rites in which violence was a symbol, a metonymy. The shortcomings pointed out by the Leicester scholars in the Oxford authors' model included this latter consideration, which tended to underestimate the concrete possibility of direct physical confrontations due to ritualization procedures. Rather than poles apart, violence and ritual were understood by Dunning, Murphy and Williams as manifestations separated by a fine line.

The main issue for Elias' followers was to understand the reasons why young men and adolescents belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata of society, especially those from working-class families who frequented stadiums on weekends, took pleasure in physical confrontation. Likewise, it was important to know to what extent the development of a lifestyle in this environment depended on the respective encouragement to aggressive behaviour in the original environment. Finally, it was necessary to elucidate the meaning of football as the space chosen for the exhibition of such behaviour.

To answer these key questions, Dunning and his colleagues turned to a sociologist from the Chicago school, Gerald Suttles, author of *The social order of the slum* (1968) and *The social construction of communities* (1972), whose works addressed the specificities of the lower strata of the working class, from which emerged the young members of violent subcultures whose values were based on virile patterns of masculinity.

The Leicester scholars drew on an expression by Gerald Suttles, 'ordered segmentation', which in many ways resembles the 'lineage system' described by British social anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard. In his study of Chicago communities, Suttles emphasized how territorial units expressed their particular identities, with considerable weight given to age, gender and ethnicity. These in turn overlapped with the larger structure of society and with the construction of intercommunal contrasting identities.

This scheme of sociability could follow variations at local, regional or national level, with the trend to establish bilateral associations between groups that were alternately opposed and allied. Such a dividing-complementary model of residents of an adjoining neighbourhood, which could extend to even larger orders of magnitude, with polarizations between cities, regions and countries, gave rise to

vicinal groups of young men socialized in public spaces such as the street. Thus, neighbourhood ties acquired meaning and cohesion when opposed to other groups and the threat posed by external rivals.

Alongside the rivalries created in the coexistence with peers in public spaces such as the street, the household was also a prominent place for the construction of a role model among young adolescents, based on the arbitrary and violent behaviour of their fathers. The stereotype of the lower working-class head of the family – rather akin to Adorno's authoritarian personality – is that of someone who exercises stern control over his kin using violence and the clear-cut separation of male and female roles.

This type is evoked here to explain, in Eliasian terms, the social origin of 'aggressive masculinity'. Unlike social circles, including those of workers who enjoy better economic conditions, where violence causes revulsion and is condemned, these young proletarians found pleasure in intimidation and confrontation with their enemies, with no ensuing sense of guilt.

The upshot was that those who stood out in fights became respected and gained prestige with their peers and status in their environment of origin. This reputation grew in importance as it became the main form of social visibility. By a mechanism of stigmatization at work and school, workers of lower classes feel severed from society in general and see no possibility of educational or professional improvement.

Thus, the frequency of riots and fights in football stadiums partly depended on the degree of incorporation of the working class into British social life. This did not imply that poverty, unemployment and lack of economic prospects were immediately reflected in the production and reproduction of violence, for in the sociological world of Norbert Elias, cause and effect always vary according to the settings, which are complex and never automatic interactions. In addition, the variable relationship between hooligans and the degree of social insertion of fractions of the working class in the civilizing process could be verified by the authors in research in the archives of the Football Association and English newspapers.

Besides the observation that the figure of the hooligan was hardly new historically, the information gathered in publications and official archives showed the oscillation of violent behaviour in stadiums throughout the development of

sport professionalism in England. Based on this statistical record gathered in press reports involving incidents between groups of fans, and in the light of the interdependence between society and football, a hypothetical explanation was proposed for the cycles of violence in stadiums.

The reflection on the researched material revealed the existence of a U-shaped movement during the three main periods investigated over the long time frame of English football. Roughly, violence – measured by the authors as disorder, confusion and fights in stadiums – showed high levels in early professional football. This was followed by decline and stabilization at low levels, considered tolerable. Eventually, the upward trend returned. Far from being random, the line on the graph corresponded to the level of social integration and the stage of the civilizing process which, as Elias stressed, was a technical rather than a hierarchical-judging measure.

The first period was the last quarter of the 19th century and the early 20th century up to World War I. At that time, the newspapers frequently reported fights, disturbances and charivaris. According to the authors, with the emergence of professional football in the 1880s and the ensuing presence of the working class in the stands, the emotional atmosphere in stadiums became more vibrant, open and unruly compared to the hitherto restrained behaviour of aristocratic audiences.

The Scottish scholar Herbert Moorhouse revealed the ancestry of disorderly fans, based on attendance in Scottish stadiums such as Celtic Park or Hampden Park, which in the late 19th century already received over fifty thousand spectators. Like Dunning, he drew on newspapers of the 1890s like the respected *The Times*. Investigating the origins of the term, he found the word 'houlihan', which referred to the unsocial traits of an Irish family who had lived in Victorian London in the 19th century, later used to describe youth group activities, which gave its origin a mythical air.

On 30 October 1890, the following passage could be found in the London newspaper, according to the scrupulous research of Professor Geoffrey Pearson, published in the book *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears* in the early 1980s:



‘What are we to do with the “Hooligan”? Who or what is responsible for his growth? Every week some incident shows that certain parts of London are more perilous for the peaceful wayfarer than the remote districts of Calabria, Sicily, or Greece, once the classic haunts of brigands. Every day in some police court are narrated details of acts of brutality of which the sufferers are unoffending men and women. So long as the “Hooligan” maltreated only the “Hooligan”, so long as we heard chiefly of attacks and counter-attacks of bands, even if armed sometimes with deadly weapons, the matter was far less important than it has become . . . There is no looking calmly, however, on the frequently occurring outbursts of ruffianism, the systematic lawlessness of groups of lads and young men who are the terror of the neighbourhood in which they dwell. Our “Hooligans” go from bad to worse. They are an ugly growth on the body politic, and the worst circumstance is that they multiply and that the education boards and prisons, police magistrates and philanthropists, do not seem to ameliorate them. Other great cities may throw off elements more perilous to the State. Nevertheless, the “Hooligan” is an odious excrescence on our civilization.’<sup>2</sup>

The second period corresponded to the interwar and post-World War II years. At that moment there is a significant drop in the record of physical clashes at matches, resulting from a series of transformations in social relations, with a large part of the English population benefiting from the post-1945 Welfare State policy. It was a time of ‘inclusion’ of the working class thanks to the organization of trade unions, which obtained various improvements in working conditions, and thanks to government actions which, in turn, ensured labour rights and extended various civil rights to women. This phase, also referred to by the press as the ‘golden age’, began in the 1920s and marked the creation of the myth of the English gentleman fan, when the aristocratic ethos became the national ethos.

The civilized supporter, prototype of English phlegm and sobriety, is forged in contrast to the Southern Europe supporter of Latin origin, known for his spontaneous and effusive manner. In this sense, thanks to football, a distinction is made both between this English ideal type and the passion typical of continental Europe Latins and between the civilized English and the supposedly British barbarians: Scots, Celts and Irish.

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<sup>2</sup> PEARSON. *Hooligan*, p. 7-8.

The transition from the second to the third setting, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, corresponds to the change in the configuration of sports audiences. At this moment there is a resurgence – at times sharp – of violent incidents in stadiums. The kops, ends or terraces, as the cheaper and more passionate areas of the stadiums were called, located behind the goals, became the target of ‘topophilia’, to use the term coined by the English geographer John Bale, among young London fans, who created there supporters’ groups, called firms or crews, such as the Inter City Firm of West Ham United, or the Headhunters of Chelsea, both of them London-based clubs.

Alongside this gestating youth culture, previously existing urban subgroups such as mods, rockers, teddy boys and skinheads transfer their rivalry logics to football throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Political sectors linked to the far right also attempt to approach some of the football groups to recruit young supporters to their cause and use stadiums as channels of ideological expression, as in the link between the National Front and radical groups like the stigmatized Millwall supporters.

Besides ‘ordered segmentation’, the authors’ explanation for the growing violence included unequal rates of social inclusion, as measured by education and the labour market. Thus, the number of supporters from the lower strata of society starts growing again, causing riots. In the mid-1960s, the hard core of the working classes starts using stadiums not only for socialization, but also to clash with rival peers and express their discontent to society as a whole.

The controversy surrounding the stereotypes ascribed to hooliganism, including fanaticism, irrationality and savagery, was not confined to the most predictable sociological explanations and the most immediate links with the country’s political and economic spheres, whether the falling employment rates or the deleterious effects on the working class of the Thatcher government’s liberal measures in the 1980s. The penalties imposed on English clubs, barred from international tournaments for five years because of their fans’ fighting in continental Europe, would also rekindle a broad spectrum of ethical issues regarding human collective behaviour. Thanks to football, great universal themes of 20th-century Western civilization would be revived, namely crowd psychology, Western decadence, the clash between civilization and barbarism, xenophobia and intolerance of the other.

Therefore, the interpretation proposed by the Leicester School in the 1980s contains a set of indications leading to a more comprehensive understanding of our object. The authors' approach towards the press is not limited to sourcing information. The assumption of transparency in reported facts is discarded and the media is questioned for its role in constructing the image of the hooligan and fabricating the problem, as pointed out by Stuart Hall in 1978.

First of all, the examples of conflicts described in the press from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly show that the issue was not new. Next, a retrospective survey of the approach of sports journalists to hooliganism reveals to what extent the treatment afforded by the press helped boost the phenomenon's national repercussion. Specific analysis of popular sports tabloids such as *The Sun*, known for its sensationalism, was the basis to support this argument.

In the 1960s, when English journalism in general underwent editorial and structural changes, tabloid competition for growing sales intensified and sensationalism was, in many cases, part of a commercial strategy to boost circulation. The perception that hooligan clashes appealed to the readers of these sports dailies led newspapers to broaden coverage of the subject. On the eve of the 1966 World Cup, journalists expressed their fears about the behaviour of English fans, further increasing their visibility.

The generalization of a 'moral panic' in football and society, to retrieve an expression coined in the late 1970s by Stuart Hall, stimulated a feeling of decadence of values which was attributed to a disease of football fans. As reported by Dunning, Murphy and Williams, on 8 November 1965 *The Sun* referred to the situation as follows: 'Soccer is sick at the moment. Or better, its crowds seem to have contracted some disease that causes them to break out in fury.'

The hitherto restrained issue was blown out of proportion on a national scale and beyond the sports scene. Mobilized to prevent confrontations, the police came up with the palliative measure of separating fans inside stadiums. Such territorial division had no effect and, in the authors' view, merely contributed to fuel the conflict. The crisis also spread outside the country and the image of the English fan was established abroad according to the hooligan stereotype: poor young male, social misfit, delinquent in daily life and excessive consumer of alcohol.

In defence of the argument, the Leicester authors conclude that although sports journalism was not the decisive factor for the emergence of the phenomenon, media coverage played an active role in building the hooligan image and spreading it in sensationalist terms. The researchers' work, with its diachronic approach to media coverage of fan violence, contributed to relativize a series of prejudices their contemporaries harboured on the issue.

The proposal of a temporal scale and variation of its configurations over the 20<sup>th</sup> century afforded a new perspective and a more appropriate knowledge of the theme. Reconstructing the issue led to the use of newspapers as a source of information on the behaviour of sports audiences. On the one hand this resource revealed the potential of researching in newspapers, and, on the other, evidenced its limitations, which derived from the selective, biased and moralizing nature of many of the news stories.

Exposed to the phenomenon's diachrony, the Leicester School would also focus on an important aspect of the extrapolation of fans' behaviour: away matches. In their narratives, the journalists in charge of reporting on the circumstances of matches abroad would be authorized to transpose to society's collective imagination the environment of the supporters' trips. The licentiousness and extravagance of hooligans in away matches would be one of the aspects most emphasized by sports journalists, who ventured on the trips to witness the savagery of their unsporting behaviour in modes of transport and travels outside Great Britain.

The Leicester School scholars would find in the writings of sports journalists a few keys to understanding the travel logic established among football fans in the 1970s. Dunning, Murphy, and Williams relied on excerpts from the interview given by a Cardiff City hooligan to the journalist Paul Harrison, published in 1974 in the article *Soccer's tribe war* for *New Society* magazine. The Eliasians appropriated an expression coined by the interviewer to capture how rival groups of fans related to one another in these encounters.

The *Bedouin syndrome* was the tribal principle behind the syllogistic scheme of alliances and associations, shifting the issue from the domains of sociology to the terrain of anthropology. The friendships and enmities between visiting and home fans in Europe were based on an equation that seems crude: the friend of a friend is

a friend; the enemy of an enemy is a friend; the friend of an enemy is an enemy; and the enemy of a friend is an enemy.

The first book published by these three authors, *Hooligans abroad* (1984), disregarded journalistic reports and aimed to deepen the direct experience of travelling with fans. John Williams would be responsible for the fieldwork throughout the whole year of 1982, when he accompanied hooligans on at least three occasions: the European Cup final between Aston Villa and Bayern Munich in the Dutch city of Rotterdam; the decisive European Championship match between Denmark and England in Copenhagen; and the English team's matches during the World Cup in Spain.

By then the hooligans' track record had already spread their fame across the continent, comprising a sort of compilation of disturbances and 'horrors' abroad from at least 1965, when Manchester United played in West Germany, through the mid-1970's, when Manchester United played at Feyenoord's stadium in the Netherlands, to the early 1980s, when successive incidents were recorded in Luxembourg, Copenhagen, Turin and Oslo.

Thus, the residents of the cities where the matches were held experienced an atmosphere of anticipation and apprehension, waiting for the arrival of the 'mindless English thugs', so that Williams had to deal with this prior, adamant condemnation of the fans with whom he was involved. *Moral panic* – expression coined by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in the late 1960's, meaning the tendency to hold a social group accountable for problems affecting the whole of society – seemed to summarize well the situation.

The researcher Paul Jones reconstitutes the sociological roots of the expression "moral panic" during the 1960' and 1970':

...the legacy of Stan Cohen's moral panic thesis in the context of its debt to the discipline of sociology and its appropriation and transformation by Stuart Hall, especially in the relatively neglected major work *Policing the crises* (1978). This is shown to be a significant, if flawed, legacy for contemporary media and cultural studies where Hall's influence in particular remains remarkably strong.

The research paradigm of the moral panic is undoubtedly attributable to Stan Cohen. The obvious initial point of entry is thus Cohen's classic 1972 text, *Folk devils and moral panics: the creation of the mods and rockers*. And yet as soon as that book is opened, the reader is

struck by the considerable care Cohen takes to acknowledge his debt to a vast research literature from the sociology of 'deviance' and 'social control'. The 'moral' is taken fairly directly from Becker's 'moral entrepreneurs' (1966) and the panic from Smelser's *Theory of collective behaviour* (1962).<sup>3</sup>

John Williams' participant observation involved disguising himself as common supporter of the Birmingham club Aston Villa and traveling to the Netherlands for a first-hand experience, aiming to better understand the real intentions of those hooligans beyond their prior stigmatisation. Informal conversations also allowed him to obtain information regarding the age, occupation and political orientation of those fans. The latter was the key issue at the time, for suspicions were raised in the early 1980s of the involvement of football fans with far-right parties in England. According to the sociologist's observation, many of the travellers were unemployed, belonged to the lower strata of society and some had criminal records.

John Williams's ethnography was part of a sociological study aimed at helping the police design a prevention program in the short and long term. The Leicester Eliasians were looking for an alternative to the impasse between the initiatives of the police authorities, whose sole answer to fighting the disturbances was repression, and representatives of university circles, who tended to minimize the violence among fans as a secondary issue. Therefore, on buses and especially on trains, the researcher would investigate the motivations of fans to attend away matches abroad, ponder the manifestations of hostility to foreigners and learn about the importance of the recollection of past trips.

The latter was a key point: reminiscing about past trips, a kind of rite of passage and trial on these excursions, allowed them to share a common memory, with accounts of stories that made up the collective imagination and tested the standards of 'aggressive masculinity'. Besides the trips, the researcher described incidents witnessed outside stadiums during the 1982 World Cup, with clashes between English fans, the police and hostile Spanish hosts. Such occasions stimulated nationalist fervour and xenophobia, a discourse that could easily result in fans being injured, hospitalized and arrested.

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<sup>3</sup> JONES. *Moral panic*, p. 6.

John Williams's method of infiltrating the hooligans would inspire several journalists, who used the same strategy to unravel that semi-secret world of confrontation, transgression and traveling across Europe. The most famous account of the genre, which would become a worldwide bestseller thanks to its translation in several languages, is the book *Among the thugs*, by Bill Buford.

Published in 1990, it describes the impressions of a journalist of American origin who socialized with Manchester United fans for six years, accompanying them in pubs, trains, stadiums and trips to European cities such as Cardiff, Cambridge, Sunderland, Turin, Düsseldorf and Sardinia. The journalist would report, with literary flourishes, the refinements of cruelty and acts of savagery those individuals were capable of in the name of their supposed passion for a football club.

The reception, curiosity and interest the book aroused in the general public can be evaluated by its international impact. As early as 1991 the book was translated into Italian, with the title *I furiosi della domenica: viaggio al centro della violenza ultra*. In 1992 the book is also released in Portuguese with the title *Entre os vândalos – a multidão e a sedução da violência*, published by Companhia das Letras. Two years later it would come out in French with the title of *Parmi les hooligans*, besides a Spanish edition to which I did not have access.

The exponent of this modality of ethnographic journalism was actually no expert in sports. Born in 1954 in Louisiana, USA, Bill Buford had lived in Los Angeles before settling in England in 1977 thanks to a research grant that allowed him to do literary research in Cambridge, write for English newspapers and become editor of the literary magazine *Granta*. According his account, as a typical American, football was alien to him and he had never set foot inside a stadium before 1983.

His first contact with the hooligan phenomenon happened casually in a train station of a small town outside Cardiff, when he was returning home from Wales. On that occasion, Buford was impressed by the arrival of a train packed with noisy fans. As soon as the train stopped, the fans perpetrated a series of depredations and atrocities that made a deep impression on him. The incident was a decisive and from then on he decided to follow and infiltrate the 'fanatical' supporters. In the spring of 1984 the author travelled to Turin to watch the Cup Winners' Cup semi-final between Juventus and Manchester United.

Already on that first opportunity the author would share a flight with the fans and describe the atmosphere of the tour by coining the term ‘scum tourist’ to describe those football aficionados:

“Two hundred and fifty-seven Manchester United fans arrived on Wednesday morning, thanks to the efforts of Bobby Boss, to fly to Turin for a game to which they were forbidden to attend. Most of the fans of the plane knew each other; it was a club tour. No one knew where we were staying; no one had tickets to the game. But everyone was in a holiday mood; all proud to be part of a group of scum tourists. There were a lot of pictures to take. There was a pre-departure photo to register the moment, the half empty bottle bought in the *free shop*. And although I admit it seemed a little strange to see so many people consuming bottles of a pint of vodka at 10 a.m., our flight to Turin was quite quiet – noisy, humorous, but, after all, without diverging the slightest from what I imagined other English excursions should be. The group, on the whole, seemed harmless and amused, and I found that all that – my effort to get up early, the discomfort of travelling from London to Manchester with a boy who couldn't afford to buy a scarf, the sudden exposure to so many extravagant people – were beginning to end. Honestly, I was having fun. The fact, however, was as follows: the tourist-scum was on its way to devastate the country they would visit. For now, they landed in Turin”.<sup>4</sup>

The collection of stories ranges from 1984 to 1988, when Buford watched the European Championship in Germany alongside the quarrelsome fans who travelled to Dusseldorf, despite being forbidden to attend international competitions following the Heysel tragedy. Doubling as an ethnographer and writing in a fictional style, Buford would have his last experience with hooligans in 1990, when he travelled to the Italian city of Cagliari to watch the World Cup.

The detailed account structured in three parts and narrated in first person, with shocking touches focused on those human types subject to relentless value judgment – extravagant, disgusting, and coarse – seemed nevertheless to reveal more about the intimate feelings and personal anxieties of that journalist than the actual subject of his investigation. If the initial motivation revealed by the author was to satisfy his curiosity about those ‘abominable fanatics’ – ‘I wanted to learn more about it’, ‘to be one of them’ – ultimately the thrill experienced by the author overshadowed the knowledge of the vandals’ persona. Buford’s pleasure in describing details of fights and numerous risky situations led one to believe that

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<sup>4</sup> BUFORD. *Among the thugs*, p. 143-144.



his ultimate goal was to hypostatise the scenes, shocking readers with the moments of danger and fear he had heroically experienced.

Nonetheless, the book enjoyed academic credibility in England since it was written by a journalist with a literary and intellectual background who had read extensively on the subject, whether the abovementioned book by Geoffrey Pearson – *Hooligans: a history of respectable fears* (1983) – the work by Eric Dunning, John Williams and Patrick Murphy – *The roots of football hooliganism: an historical and sociological study* (1988) – or the classic by Georges Rudé – *The crowd in history*. Moreover, as evidenced by the book's acknowledgments, the sociologist John Williams had read the manuscript prior to publication and made suggestions, which afforded the book academic legitimacy. In addition, Buford seemed to have carried out solid research, showing unquestionable comprehensive knowledge of the great theorists of *crowd psychology*, before including football fans in the paradigmatic roster of destructive drives.

Such data led the author to enhance the ethological and pathological explanations endorsed by *crowd psychologists* to understand the split identity of those individuals. Despite their integration into normal English society, in groups the football fans were capable of giving vent to hatred and frustration, with racist, nationalist and xenophobic manifestations based on a mythology of virility. In describing in the second part of the book the National Front parties frequented by hooligans, Buford personally attested the close ideological links of football fans with the political guidelines of far-right movements, known at the time for their undeniable neo-Nazi traits.

The success of Buford's sports voyeurism and sensationalism resulted in a publishing boom in the English market of various kinds of similar accounts, from memoirs and autobiographies to fiction and film. The contemporary novelist John King wrote the novel *Football factory*, a book of almost four hundred pages about the world of a young Chelsea supporter and his group of peers, a work of fiction which would also enjoy a film adaptation.

Nick Hornby, screenwriter of *High fidelity* and Arsenal fan, published *Fever pitch*, internationally acclaimed and also adapted to film. Written like a journal, the book narrated his memories as an adolescent and young man in English

stadiums, divided into three periods: 1968-1975; 1976-1986; 1986-1992. The genre gained popularity as soon as hooliganism came under greater control in England, giving rise on the other hand to controversy regarding the glamorisation of fights in those autobiographical, literary and cinematographic works. They therefore contributed to the consolidation of a collective imagination about hooligans in Europe and in much of the world.

In the following decades, stimulated by the successful sales of books on football by scholars and journalists, as well as accounts of the experiences of supporters, football fans with links to hooliganism, many of them banned from stadiums, started writing their memoirs and publishing their experiences in stadiums. Such books, many of them drawing on sensationalism to impact readers with their raw narrative, generated a literary subgenre called 'hooli-lit', occupying entire bookshelves of English bookstores.

Returning to the academy, the upsurge of hooliganism in football in the second half of the 20th century challenged and put to the test the theory of the German sociologist Norbert Elias, adopted by the Leicester School in the area of sports. The manifestation of destructive and aggressive acts in stadiums ran counter to the evolutionary sense of containment of physical power and enhancement of self-discipline required of individuals in civilized life.

If Norbert Elias had broached the framework of his sociology of sport in the 1950s and 1960s, when the problem was only beginning to emerge, his epigones Eric Dunning, John Williams, and Patrick Murphy would address the apparent contradiction between the civilizing principles of sport and the unsportsmanlike behaviour of the radical minorities among British football fans. The initial considerations pondered the non-linearity of the direction taken by the course of civilization, itself subject to moments of *uncivilization*, in which the mechanisms of control over different segments of society reveal their managerial inefficiency or unequal incidence.

A different line of thought considered hooliganism as a social phenomenon that expressed tensions outside sport, only superficially intrinsic to it, using football to gain social visibility. The authors' diagnosis, based on historical survey, literature review and personal observations, identified the hard core of

hooligans as juvenile segments from the most deprived layers of the English working class.

The recurrence of the division between insiders and outsiders was noted in such excluded segments, who nurtured an aggressive and coarse style in which the prototype of manliness and virility was imposed both in fights and in offensive and often xenophobic and racist chants, aimed at denigrating rivals. The pleasure of attending a match was shifted by channelling energies into exciting strategies to evade police surveillance around stadiums and confront opponents, generally young people from the same social class.

One might say that thanks to institutional support and systematic studies, the interpretation endorsed by the Leicester School became hegemonic in between 1980 and 1990. However, in the face of the new reality of British football following the Taylor Report and the dissemination of studies on hooliganism, criticism of this school has also lately emerged, especially of the interpretative bias based on Elias's civilizing process theory.

Lack of space prevents this essay from advancing further in this direction. However, it should be noted that a new generation of researchers, such as Richard Giulianotti, Garry Armstrong and Geoff Pearson, has questioned Dunning and the application of this theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon of hooliganism. Rather than figurational sociology, they favour anthropological approaches derived from field work to capture nuances that escape sociological generalizations and concepts considered as problematic, such as that of 'civilization'.

Let us this issue for another opportunity...

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