

# From Pitch to Pulpit, from Firm to Fundamentalism: Football Hooligans and the Rise of Europe's Far-Right

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## Abstract

Discussions about the reactionary rise of the far-right in Europe remain focused on the realm of party-politics, and deliver over-simplified analyses of the mass right-wing demonstrations that western societies find distasteful. Little has been asked about the preconditions for a resurgence of far-right politics in post-war Europe, and almost no attention has been paid to the substrates for far-right ideologies that have existed within many European populations since the end of the Cold War. One overlooked incubator of political extremism in general is that of Europe's violent football fan clubs, known as "firms." Members of these groups, by virtue of their participation in firms, have been conditioned to socialized violence, racism, xenophobia, polar politics, black-and-white worldviews, and are regularly recruited by established right-wing political movements within their home countries. In extreme cases, hyper-violent individuals affiliated with firms move on to commit shocking acts of terrorism, often against ethnic or religious minorities. This paper seeks to examine the nexus between individual hooligans, their firms, the political parties that interact with firms, and the lone wolf terrorists that pass between parties and firms. Throughout, I will attempt to argue that individuals predisposed to violence satisfy this impulse through membership and participation in firms; within their firms, all members participate in violent street actions unrelated to football, often stimulated and supported by political parties; among members of firms, there are those that will distill their violent experiences as hooligans and exposure to extremist politics into acts of lone-wolf terrorism.

## Introduction

The rise of Europe's far-right has seemed meteoric since the current refugee crisis began in late 2014. Though its reintroduction to mainstream politics has seemed reactionary and sudden, smaller gains since the late 1980s cannot be ignored. Close observers of the far-right have marked major events in the last two decades which have episodically stimulated such movements. Director of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), Liz Fekete, notes the effect that the Gulf War had on some Europeans, producing "cheerleaders for more and more wars in the Muslim world," but dismisses the presumed cumulative significance. She favors a gradual process in which fascism, "defined as a problem at the margins of society," converged with the interests of Europe's political center, the stigma of political extremes falling away with the threat of communism.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps nowhere are the interactions and conflicts between race, nation, and religion more apparent than in the stadia of the world's most hegemonic sport, football.<sup>2</sup> The first battle of the Yugoslav Wars was not fought in countryside trenches or on the streets of ruined cities, but in the terraces and on the pitch of Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb. The highly organized cadres of fans responsible for the violence, known as "football hooligans" or "firms," were airing out the same hatreds they would a year later as combat veterans in paramilitary units, and in some cases as the perpetrators of war crimes.<sup>3</sup> But this episode again takes us to the breakup of communist states and the nationalism that reemerged as a result. Furthermore, the "*ancient* hatred" between Serbs and Croats was just that, coaxed out of dormancy by manipulative leaders and forces of history. In the present context, this phase of globalization has created new communities *within* states, and with them new hatreds, at times subordinating the ancient.

The far-right has been making a pronounced comeback in Europe since the 1990s, as Fekete points out. With the onset of the current migration crisis, however, the far-right has occupied a central role in western societies in the form of established political parties and the level of public support they enjoy with the concomitant "threat" that mass migration poses to white, Christian Europe. This has been expressed by party leaders like the UK Independence Party's (UKIP) Nigel Farage, or National Front's (NF) Marine Le Pen.<sup>4</sup> Political fear mongering is worrisome where it echoes the voices of extremists, or where it is heard by extremists and then acted upon through violence. The most chilling example is Anders Breivik. Breivik's 2011 lone wolf attack on the Norwegian Labor Party's youth summer camp left 77 people dead. Topics 2-4 bulleted for discussion in his 1,518-page manifesto are: "Why the Islamic colonization and Islamisation of Western Europe began"; "The current state of the Western European Resistance Movements (anti-Marxist/anti-Jihad movements)"; and "Solutions for Western Europe and how we, the resistance, should move forward."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fekete, "Neoliberalism and Popular Racism," 8.

<sup>2</sup> The term "football" will be used instead of the American equivalent, "soccer," for reasons of consistency with primary sources taken almost exclusively from Germany and the United Kingdom.

<sup>3</sup> See Shentov, *Partners in Crime*, 42. Fans of Red Star Belgrade belonging to the hooligan gang, Delije, provided the base for the Serb Volunteer Guard, led then as they were in Maksimir Stadium by a notorious criminal, Željko "Arkan" Ražnatović. The paramilitary group that sprang from this firm was known as the Serb Volunteer Guard, or more commonly as "Arkan's Tigers."

<sup>4</sup> McTague, "Farage Denies Manifesto is Racist," April 21, 2015; Buchanan, "Le Pen Using Her Racism," October 21, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Berwick, *2083*, 1-2.

Taken together, all of these developments should worry European leaders and security experts. At its worst, the rise of the far-right materializes in acts of terrorism, and at its best in the vile rhetoric of far-right politicians. Both ends of the spectrum are growing as a reaction to the influx of Muslim refugees bound for Western Europe, and both political parties and terrorists alike rely upon the support of the general public. In this context, what should worry security experts is Europe's built-in incubator for extremist rhetoric and socialized violence. It is rarely within the halls of European parliaments that competing nationalist, racist, and political hatreds confront one another in naked violence; but they do so routinely in its football stadia, and in the streets after matches and once riots within can no longer be contained. The violent criminal fan clubs, or firms, are beginning to look more like a pan-European substrate for individual and organized terrorists alike. These hooligan groups also appear to be a sieve through which criminals, terrorists, and political operatives pass at different phases of their "careers." Furthermore, firms appear to be burying old grievances at the local and international levels, and coming together with rival groups under the hate-based ideology of the far-right.

This paper will discuss the rise of the far-right on two stages in Europe as they are directly related: (1) the political establishment, and (2) as a resurgent domestic terrorist threat. Both will be examined as simultaneous and dependent reactions to the present refugee crisis. Specifically, individual hooligans and their firms will be analyzed where they can be considered a substrate for violence and political ideology, and incidentally, as they relate to individual pathways of radicalization. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between these reactionary forces within the present context of the refugee crisis, in which the racist rhetoric of political parties supports and stimulates right-wing terrorism in Europe, drawing both manpower and sympathy from the ready-made pool of recruits found within the hooligan subculture.

### From the Firm to Fundamentalism: *Hooligans gegen Salafisten* (Hogesa)<sup>6</sup>

The 2006 World Cup was a watershed event for host-nation Germany, as well as for Europe. Shattering the taboos of a society that has been constitutionally discouraged from displays of nationalism since the end of the Second World War, the streets of major German cities were saturated with the black, red, and gold tri-color.<sup>7</sup> Fears were mounting that German neo-Nazis would co-opt the event to express solidarity with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had repeatedly denied the Holocaust at international forums.<sup>8</sup> Of greater concern to public officials was a possible repeat of the chaos that ensued between English and German hooligans in 1988, when West Germany hosted the European Championship. American writer Bill Buford spent eight years embedded with some of England's most infamous firms, and compiled his experiences in the journalistic novel, *Among the Thugs*.<sup>9</sup> In a chapter on the bedlam

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<sup>6</sup> "Hooligans Against Salafis."

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, "In World Cup Surprise," June 18, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Scott and Harding, "Fears Grow," April 11, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*. Speaking at the Center for New American Security, former Secretary of the Navy and advisor to President Barack Obama, Richard Danzig, said: "One of the best books I've read on terrorism in recent years was not about terrorism at all [...] It's Bill Buford's book..." Shipman 2008.

that visited Düsseldorf in 1988, Buford describes motivations for the violence from the perspective of a “top man”<sup>10</sup> among English firms:

Grimsby believed that he needed to prove his cultural superiority to every foreigner he met; I had forgotten just how violent the violent nationalism of the English football supporter could be, and being in Germany had made him vigorously nationalistic... He wanted to fight the war all over again.<sup>11</sup>

The two-week event was called the most violent European Championship in history, and by the time the English team had been eliminated, “the grand total of arrests across Germany stood at 823, of whom 381 were English.”<sup>12</sup> During the opening events of the World Cup in 2006, German authorities’ fears of a repeat were realized in the streets of Frankfurt am Main. Despite failed efforts to seize the passports of known hooligans and deny others entry into the country, along with a list of known terrorists, German and British authorities considered 2006 a success, relative to 1988 and considering additional post-9/11 security concerns. Nevertheless, on the opening day of the tournament, English hooligans amassed in a drunken crowd outside of the *Rathaus* in Frankfurt’s *Altstadt*. Hours before police found themselves in the middle of a brawl that consumed the Red Light District, English fans had abandoned the usual club songs in favor of ethno-nationalist chants: “Oh, I’d rather be a Paki, I’d rather be a Paki, I’d rather be a Paki than a Kraut...”<sup>13</sup>

Destruction and violence of the same order touched off this way in several German cities throughout the tournament. The worst was in Cologne. Less than ten years later, members of the same British and German firms came together in this city, not to fight one another, but to resist the common enemy of Islam. Strikingly, racism is trumping nationalism in Britain’s far-right scene today, and being a “Paki” is worse than being a “Kraut,” the latter being considered a white, Christian ally.

The summer of 2009 found England stirring with a movement that had started in the town of Luton. The movement was a response to a series of incidents involving the UK’s Muslim population, which culminated in a protest against the war in Afghanistan, organized by the now-banned Salafi jihadi group, Al-Muhajiroun. Timed to coincide with the passing of the Royal Anglian Regiment through Luton on a parade route, the demonstration caused furor across England. “When a counter-demonstration under the name of the United People of Luton led to arrests, local football supporters decided something should be done.”<sup>14</sup> Out of the United People of Luton, a nation-wide anti-Islamist movement was born, loosely organized into the local divisions of what is now called the English Defense League (EDL).<sup>15</sup> UK-based think tank, Demos, estimates that the EDL has “between 25,000 and 35,000 active backers.”<sup>16</sup> Following his arrest in 2011, Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik claimed to have “more than 600 EDL members as Facebook friends,” and that he had “spoken with tens of EDL members and

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<sup>10</sup> Many firms lack such unifying personalities as an “Arkan,” and more closely resemble leaderless resistance organizations. See Lowels 2001: *White Riot!: The Violent Story of Combat 18*.

<sup>11</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 228-229.

<sup>12</sup> Lay, Ashdown, and Bateman, “Most Violent European Championships Ever,” 2008.

<sup>13</sup> “Hooligans – World Cup 2006,” YouTube video, 3:04 - 3:16.

<sup>14</sup> Casciani, “The English Defense League?” September 11, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor and Walker, “EDL Supporters,” October 30, 2011.

leaders.”<sup>17</sup> Some EDL members praised Breivik's heinous attacks, and EDL leader Stephen Lennon concluded that the Norwegian court's determination of Breivik's sanity gave “a certain credibility to what [Breivik] had been saying. And that is that Islam is a threat to Europe and to the rest of the world.”<sup>18</sup> Lennon was arrested days after Breivik's attacks for “using threatening, abusive or insulting behavior” during a street brawl involving over 100 football fans.<sup>19</sup> Despite being heavily steeped in the politics of the pan-European far-right, at the end of the day Lennon remains a hooligan.

On October 26, 2014, a convergence of 5,000 German hooligans and members of far-right organizations, along with average conservative citizens, descended upon Cologne. Planned months in advance by members of 17 rival firms and known neo-Nazis, the anti-Islamist demonstration evolved out of a coalition originally meant to confront anti-fascist (*antifa*), left-wing football fans, known as “Ultras.” This coalition, first called the “Gnu Honnters,” became known as “*Hooligans gegen Salafisten*” (Hogesa),<sup>20</sup> drastically expanding its partnership with right-wing networks unassociated with football and refining its message to one of “resistance against the true enemies of the homeland.”<sup>21</sup> The demonstration in Cologne, replete with a live neo-Nazi rock band, injured 49 police officers, left civilian and police vehicles overturned, and puzzled German officials. Hogesa was not considered a serious or lasting movement. It was thought to have materialized spontaneously, a freak success of a couple hundred agitators.<sup>22</sup>

Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*BfV*), had been monitoring Hogesa, and warned of violence in Cologne, though even they underestimated the size of the disturbance.<sup>23</sup> Immediately after the riot, one intelligence agent offered a compelling explanation for Hogesa's ability to rapidly mobilize so many people without drawing more attention to itself, in which the group exploited a bureaucratic vacuum between two key government agencies: “The police are responsible for stadium security and for violence-prone fan groups, but are largely uninterested in their political leanings. Domestic intelligence agents (i.e. *BfV*), on the other hand, monitor extremist groups, to which hooligans have not traditionally belonged.”<sup>24</sup> The interaction between far-right parties and their pool of street recruits was therefore missed even by the traditionally thorough German intelligence community.

An article that appeared a week after the riot in the German weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit*, suggested that German intelligence agencies as well as law enforcement should have taken cues from similar developments elsewhere in Europe, namely the UK. “The German hooligans have oriented themselves towards the English Defense League (EDL), an anti-Islamic movement, which also built itself from out of the hooligan scene in 2009.”<sup>25</sup> The article also points to the EDL's tendency to exploit crimes committed by Muslims in England by using these events to validate their message: Europe is threatened by Islamists who do not share its essential values.

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<sup>17</sup> Hughes and Rayner, “Norway Killer Anders Behring Breivik,” July 10, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Townsend, “Extremists Voice Support for Breivik,” September 1, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes and Rayner, “Norway Killer Anders Behring Breivik,” 2011.

<sup>20</sup> “Hooligans against Salafis.”

<sup>21</sup> Berwick, 2083, 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Germany's New Right,” February 14, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Henkel, “Das Vorbild aus England,” October 31, 2014. Translation mine. Original text: “*Die deutschen Hooligans orientieren sich an der English Defense League (EDL), einer islamfeindlichen Bewegung, die sich schon 2009 bildete. Auch aus der Hooliganszene heraus.*”

One notorious case that EDL seized upon became a national outrage, after police had uncovered a ring of Pakistani men that had over decades prostituted hundreds of young girls from lower-class families of Asian immigrants.<sup>26</sup> “A good thousand” people marched in protest alongside the EDL through Birmingham, a city known for its ethno-religious tensions, and a critical stage for EDL.<sup>27</sup> It was “a God send [sic] for EDL,” who “immediately poured oil on the fire.”<sup>28</sup>

A higher-profile opportunity for EDL was the murder of British soldier Fusilier Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. Rigby was hacked to death after being run down with a car near his barracks in southeast London. The attackers were both British citizens of Nigerian descent. One of the perpetrators, Michael Adebolajo, had converted to Islam in 2003, and according to MI5, had links to the banned Salafī jihadi group, al-Muhajiroun.<sup>29</sup> Twelve hundred British soldiers were subsequently deployed across the country to deny right-wing extremists opportunities to carry out reprisals against the Muslim community.<sup>30</sup> Joint demonstrations organized by the EDL and the far-right British National Party (BNP) led to violent clashes with counter-demonstrators, in which 58 *antifa* protesters were arrested.<sup>31</sup>

A younger movement that has enjoyed the increasing support of the public, Hogesa was born in the early days of the current migration crisis. Since 2014, there has been plenty of ammunition for the hatred espoused by its various member cadres. Less than two months after the November 2015 Paris attacks, the same city where Hogesa proved themselves a formidable movement, Cologne, was rocked by a major scandal. Amidst annual New Year’s Eve festivities, the police responded to over 120 calls in which German women reported that they were surrounded by coordinated groups of men “of North African or Middle Eastern descent” and sexually assaulted, including at least five reports of rape.<sup>32</sup> There was tremendous capital for Hogesa in this event. Social media in Germany was consumed by the various reactions to the night of horror. There was, however, a dominant aura of Germany’s tolerance rapidly evaporating as the nation took on growing numbers of asylum seekers. One Facebook user in Cologne wrote: “Everyone knows the cultural and geographic backgrounds of the offenders. I feel like a foreigner in my own country.”<sup>33</sup>

Terrorist attacks like the ones that claimed 130 lives in Paris in November 2016 are not just victories for Islamic extremists. They surely come as a victory to the extremist members of emerging far right super-groups like EDL and Hogesa as well, whose recruiting pool grows as the collective feeling of grievance multiplies, and whose message resonates with more people in the wake of more deadly, spectacular attacks on the homeland. Competing vigilante groups have become a familiar sight in East London, following the murder of Lee Rigby. Both marginalized and under close observation of police and British intelligence, Anjem Choudary’s Muslim Patrol<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: “*Ein gefundenes Fressen für die EDL. Gut Tausend Anhänger marschierten im September in Birmingham auf*”; “... EDL sofort zur Stelle und gießt Öl ins Feuer.”

<sup>29</sup> Laville, Walker, and Dodd, “Woolwich Attack Suspect Identified,” May 23, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> “UK Names Soldier Murdered,” November 24, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> “Fifty-Eight Arrested During Protests,” June 1, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Dowideit, Frigelj, and Röhn, “Plötzlich spürte ich eine Hand,” January 4, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Henkel: “*Jeder kennt die kulturelle und geografische Herkunft der Täter. Ich fühle mich zunehmend fremd in meinem Land.*”

<sup>34</sup> After this paper was written, Anjem Choudary was convicted in London for supporting the Islamic State terrorist group, and faces a steep prison sentence. See Gierson et al. 2016.

and Britain First's Christian Patrol, nonetheless set another worrisome precedent similar to the now Europe-wide Defense Leagues.<sup>35</sup>

## From Firms to Politics, from Politics to Terrorism

In a study of individual white supremacists and their pathways to radicalization, Schafer et al. describe an array of catalytic factors that accumulate in what the authors call "awakenings" to white supremacist ideologies.<sup>36</sup> These catalytic factors are referred to as "seeds of discontent," and can involve negative experiences with minorities in the neighborhood or workplace, "triggers" for changes an individual was already undergoing, such as global political events, and social interactions within various networks. The last category of "seeds" is of particular interest to this paper as many hooligans join firms as a part of regular localized social interactions in which their football clubs represent their communities. Through the violent group confrontations that take place during and after matches with other firms, which also represent their communities, hooligans' first loyalties to their firms appear rather tribal. However, as hooligans become veterans of the scene, encounter more firms from more nations, and interact with political subcultures, broader ideologies often replace these tribal loyalties. Schafer et al. acknowledge that most social psychology suggests that early peer interactions are vital to radicalization, "especially as one enters adolescence, peer groups play a far more profound role in the shaping of ideas and attitudes."<sup>37</sup> Further, their findings from evidence within individual narratives suggest that "peer groups play a far more profound role in the shaping of ideas and attitudes" than one's family members.<sup>38</sup> The study then details a background trait common to white supremacists, prior to their "awakening," which is a tendency to "wander" between groups of the movement. "Wandering" is often a process of serial affiliation with smaller or lesser-known groups, becoming accustomed to greater degrees of radical ideology, before settling on a group that satisfies the individual's various ideological and egotistical desires, as well as sense moral-superiority and purpose ("awakening"). "Regardless of the group(s) with which an individual had been affiliated, discontent seemed to center on the belief that group members were not sufficiently dedicated and/or the ideology was seen as improperly focused."<sup>39</sup>

With regard to hooligans, who invariably trade in and out of a complex network of different criminal and political organizations (and those that are both), the available pathways towards their individual radicalization as far-wing or neo-Nazi terrorists seems more nuanced, and afford more lateral movement across organizations. However, individual accounts of movement from hooligan to member of far-right organizations support the claim of Schafer et al.'s study. Loyalty to right-wing ideology often supplants loyalty to the firm, though it is not always accompanied by a renunciation of the firm.

Europe's far-right is a fairly amorphous scene, often operating as "leaderless resistance" movements, in which groups fade as quickly as they appear, splinter into factions, are temporarily formed to achieve short-term objectives, or disband as a result of increased pressure from law

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<sup>35</sup> "London's Holy Turf War," YouTube video, 21:41, April 22, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Schafer et al., "Awakenings," 173.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 189.

enforcement. Liz Fekete's years of studying Europe's far-right have led her to conclude, on an organizational level, that "the different ideological factions are loosely linked in a web of relationships... sometimes coming together in the spaces provided by specific subcultures—around music and sport, for example."<sup>40</sup> A longtime observer of neo-Nazi groups in the United States, Mark S. Hamm, describes the same process, where working class youth in Southern California began attending white power heavy metal concerts, and then embraced the neo-Nazi ideology, following incremental exposure to far-right ideologies, and eventually created among themselves what Hamm terms a "*terrorist youth subculture*."<sup>41</sup>

In fantastic detail, Bill Buford describes how firms, violent neo-Nazis, and members of the far-right political establishment interact within these common spaces. Attending a 1988 disco in London hosted by local representatives of Britain's National Front, sister to France's notorious far-right political party, and hoping to observe the same loose network Fekete and Hamm mention, Buford found himself surrounded by violent leather-clad skinheads and drunken football hooligans, packed together into a small pub, tortured by deafening volumes of neo-Nazi heavy metal music. He watched as the suit-wearing members of National Front appraised their recruitment pool. Several of these "awakened" hooligans, who had been radicalized and all but dispensed with their firms in favor of a zealous loyalty to National Front, explained to Buford the purpose of these frequent discos:

People were telling me things. I was told that they were an organized army, that football had brought them together, that they were creating a police force, that they tried to take over the places they visited [e.g. away games]. I was told that they were warriors. I was told that the banks were run by Jews and that the banks ran the country, that the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust was vastly exaggerated. One member told me the cities should be "deracinated"—that was the word he used—and that we should all return to our natural element.<sup>42</sup>

Fekete identifies the same synergy in Germany today. She claims that, since the emergence of the anti-Islamic, far-right movement Pegida,<sup>43</sup> "fascist mobilizations and racist violence against refugees have skyrocketed across Germany."<sup>44</sup> Among those included in the "temporary fighting alliance" of Hogesa are violent supporters of football clubs from middle-class communities. In Germany, these professional, politically engaged and connected members of the far-right are referred to as "*Krawattennazis*," or "tie-Nazis".<sup>45</sup> The presence of this class within the hooligan subculture reveals the diversity of the individuals that partake in this asocial behavior, not unlike the heterogeneous profiles of terrorists. Of particular interest is how these actors bridge the ideologies of far-right establishment figures with those of violent, asocial subcultures. Fekete refers to an organizational dynamic here, which she labels "counter-jihadism."<sup>46</sup> At one end of the spectrum are the street-level cadres of far-right hooligans and terrorists; at the other end, the "cultural conservatives and neoconservative writers," all of whom

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<sup>40</sup> Fekete, "Neoliberalism and Popular Racism," 3.

<sup>41</sup> Hamm, *American Skinheads*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 142-143.

<sup>43</sup> "*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*," or "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (West)," abbreviated PEGIDA.

<sup>44</sup> Fekete, "Neoliberalism and Popular Racism," 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

come together over specific causes within the “nebulous and fanatical fronts that spring up from time to time... as vessels of discontent.”<sup>47</sup> Between the two poles are the far-right politicians, who disseminate the ideas of the latter, and tacitly encourage the actions of the former.

However, both Fekete's claim and Buford's anecdotal account leave key questions posed by Schafer's study unanswered. Where does such a broad base for far-right ideology in post-WWII Europe come from, and does this speak to real grievances? What kind of negative encounters with minorities take individuals from being one of “the lads,” one of “*die Jungs*,” rowdy supporters of their local football clubs, to venomous xenophobes, in extreme cases willing to graduate from street brawls to acts of terrorism? How and why might they move back and forth? The best potential source for answers is likely the current literature on radicalization, de-radicalization, and disengagement.

Football firms are best thought of as gangs. Their members engage in a wide variety of independent and organized criminal activity ranging from counterfeiting currency and trafficking counterfeit luxury consumer goods,<sup>48</sup> to weapons and narcotics trafficking, and prostitution.<sup>49</sup> Respected sociologist and authority on gangs Scott Decker and coauthor David Pyrooz make some crucial comparisons between gangs and terrorist groups, relating mainly to operational methods and the importance of group processes to both. It is where he *delineates* gangs from terrorist groups, however, that we come to understand the process through which hooligans, ready candidates for radicalization, develop political agendas, in some cases escalating their commitment to violence to include acts of terrorism. A key difference Decker points to here is the apolitical nature of gangs, giving them separate motives for violence.<sup>50</sup> Presumably, a majority of gang violence is motivated by territorial disputes, or motives embedded in territorial conflicts, such as revenge. Territoriality is a second-order variable contributing to violence between football firms, especially concerning skirmishes between local clubs during regular league play. Typical arena for hooligan melees are platforms of the metro or train stations bearing their clubs' names. But the gang members Decker studies are most often from economically depressed communities with few opportunities, low levels of education, and often saturated with the illegal drug trade. Certainly, the backgrounds of some hooligans can be described in similar terms, but Buford's book contains many examples of hooligans who work in well-paying trades or belong to the legitimate business class.<sup>51</sup> What motivates *these* individuals to engage in regular violence, often in the form of low-intensity territorial gang wars?

The above motivations for gang violence fall into rational-choice theory, where the opportunities presented by scant law enforcement, high reward, low opportunity cost, or a combination of all three is present. On the individual psychological level, this is alternatively known as the “tool” approach, which views terrorism and political violence as a means to an end.<sup>52</sup> As it explains the lower-order violence of football firms, the opposite psychological approach, emphasizing terrorism as a “syndrome,”<sup>53</sup> seems more applicable to those individual hooligans that find no other profit in their asocial behavior outside of the satisfaction it brings them for its own sake, especially where it involves violence. If these hooligans are really

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Buford and Pyrooz, *Among the Thugs*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Fekete, “Neoliberalism and Popular Racism,” 6.

<sup>50</sup> Decker and Pyrooz, “I'm Down for Jihad,” 104.

<sup>51</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Kruglanski and Fishman, “Syndrome' Versus 'Tool',” 194.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 195.

committing violence for violence's sake, as some of them claim to, this has significant implications for the argument over whether radical *thought* and radical *action* develop sequentially (and which comes first), are contiguous, or are altogether unrelated. In the case of hooligans, it would seem radical action *precedes* radical thought, which might take the form of a drunken crowd committing thousands of dollars in property damage in the middle of the day, for example—a group act lacking a coherent reason.

In Jessica Stern's case study of an infamous Swedish neo-Nazi, identified as "X," the incarcerated terrorist explains the motives for his crimes, and for terrorism in general, consistent with the motives expressed by several hooligans. "Many terrorists, he said, are people who like to kill. The ideology is 'just an excuse' or a rationale for terrorism. They become extremists—Nazis or join Al-Qaeda—for the sake of justification."<sup>54</sup> Psychologically, these motives suggest the less popular "syndrome" approach. Terrorism scholar Jerrold Post agrees with this, arguing that individuals are drawn to terrorism specifically to engage in acts of violence, that "their special logic, which is grounded in their psychology," crafts rhetorical or ideological justifications for these impulses.<sup>55</sup> As far as hooligans are concerned, it seems even the special logic is not a requirement, let alone radical thought.

Stern gives equal weight to these approaches, arguing that terrorists in particular "are motivated by a mix of personal and political objectives."<sup>56</sup> But in the case of hooligans who eventually adopt political ideologies, and then graduate to terrorism, are we to assume that at hand is a process whereby grievances, or as Schafer puts it, "negative interactions with minorities,"<sup>57</sup> find a vessel in the ideology of the far-right, at times compelling them to acts of terrorism? And do we rule out individuals such as X, who derive pleasure from participating in violence, and only when exposed to ideology, adapt it through their "special logic" to fit escalating acts of violent indulgence?

Buford's book certainly makes a case for the latter type of individual among football firms. He mentions hooligans that have good jobs, families, no overt grievance, apparently nothing to gain through violent collective action. In a prominent anecdote, Buford describes an evening of unbridled violence following a league match between two English football clubs. The night had been a bedlam of running street battles between rival firms and the police. Three middle-class hooligans—two employed journeymen of respected trades and the other a business owner—cornered a terrified fan of the opposing club in an alleyway and stabbed him to death.<sup>58</sup> The only motivation for the kind of violence Buford offers is "boredom," responsible for what he calls "violence of the most extreme kind, because there was nothing else to do."<sup>59</sup>

Buford's anecdote is a microcosm of the escalating threshold of violence, significant when analyzing the pathways from hooligan to terrorist. Buford underscores the fact that the moment the three hooligans broke away from the larger crowd these men became a *gang*, theoretically as well as in the eyes of the authority that prosecuted them.<sup>60</sup> Oddly, Buford says this distinction is not important, himself only interested in the "boredom" variable of this tragedy. This is strange coming from Buford, considering his recurring emphasis upon what might be

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<sup>54</sup> Stern, "The Case of X," 445.

<sup>55</sup> Post, "Terrorist Psychologic," 25.

<sup>56</sup> Stern, "The Case of X," 447.

<sup>57</sup> Schafer et al., "Awakenings," 176-177.

<sup>58</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 221.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-223.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

called a “conditioning factor,” rather than on a “root cause” of terrorism, returning to our dichotomous understanding of violence as a “tool” versus a “syndrome.”<sup>61</sup> This conditional factor falls somewhere between “group dynamics” and “crowd theory,” to the extent that hooligan violence is as much an orchestrated attack as it is a spontaneous riot. In his clearest example, Buford describes the unnerving vibe hanging between two rival English firms, anxious to meet one another in street-combat, but both temporarily held at bay by a thin line of police separating the two sides. Obviously, something is going to give, and it is only a matter of time before the crowd itself becomes acutely aware of its superior numbers, and acts with disregard for the police. He calls this the “*threshold act*—an act which, created by the crowd, would have been impossible without the crowd, even though the crowd itself is not prepared to follow: *yet*.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the lack of importance he later accords the distinction between crowd and gang violence is all the more striking. The case of the three middle-class hooligans that murdered the rival fan, an extreme act, perpetrated as a gang removed from the physical and psychological cover of the crowd, more closely resembles the deliberate, coordinated violence carried out by terrorist groups. In both instances, extreme asocial acts are deliberate and coordinated, and encouraged within isolated cadres of individuals possessing an above-average willingness to commit violence.

The threat posed by the type of hyper-violent individuals that pass in and out of marginal far-right groups, or “wanderers,” became clear to U.S. security experts in 2014, when a married couple, Jared and Amanda Miller, executed two Las Vegas police officers as they ate lunch in a local pizzeria. Their shooting spree ended when both were killed during a standoff with law enforcement at a nearby Walmart. Just days before, the couple had been ejected from the ranch of an infamous anti-government, “sovereign citizen” figure, Cliven Bundy, after they had showed up to support fellow anti-government protesters in a demonstration against the Bureau of Land Management. The Millers were forced to leave the Bundy Ranch for being “too extreme.”<sup>63</sup> Prior to joining demonstrators at the Bundy Ranch, the Millers had transited in and out of a universe of similar anti-government movements, becoming disillusioned as each proved unwilling to act beyond extreme rhetoric. In the end, they officially broke from the crowd.

Another prominent case occurred in May of 2015, when German authorities thwarted a major terrorist plot of just such a cadre that had broken from the crowd, and began stimulating the abnormally violent impulses of its members. A four-person group of right-wing extremists with ties to the far-right hooligan scene in Cologne had begun to purchase and assemble the materials necessary to manufacture nail-bombs, which they planned to detonate at a home for asylum seekers.<sup>64</sup> Two decades earlier, a similar cadre of hyper-violent English hooligans had broken away from their firms to found the far-right terrorist group, Combat 18. In April of 1993, a member of Combat 18 successfully executed the same style of attack, planting nail-bombs in a shopping plaza located in a minority-dense area of Brixton, England.<sup>65</sup>

Both the German terrorist group, “OldSchool Society,” and its English predecessor, Combat 18, had affiliations with established far-right political parties, prior to rifts within groups, usually caused by disagreements over the use of violence. This is in keeping with their members’ status as “wanderers” among far-right networks. Recalling Stern’s argument that individual terrorists are motivated by a combination of personal and political factors, it is fair to assume that

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<sup>61</sup> Kruglanski and Fishman, “The Psychology of Terrorism,” 104-105.

<sup>62</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 190; emphasis added.

<sup>63</sup> MacNab, “Las Vegas Police Killings,” June 13, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> “Charges in Germany for Neo-Nazi,” January 13, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> “Combat 18 Nail Bomb Attack,” April 19, 1993.

a confluence of personal factors draws an individual to the hooligan subculture in the first place. These factors might include “thrill-seeking,” influence of and identity within one’s peer-group, frustration as it appears in relative deprivation, etc. What then furnishes these hooligans with the political motivations and the ideology that leads to bombing housing facilities for asylum seekers?

Again, returning to Stern and her analysis of de-radicalization programs focusing on the concept of “exit,” “kids are not drawn into far-right militancy because of ideology; they join the group first, and only later come to understand and accept the ideology.”<sup>66</sup> To identify the source of the ideology within subcultures that are apolitical on the surface we must recall Buford’s hooligan disco and the *Krawattennazis* of the National Front: “so many of the National Front’s activities—its discos, its marches, its propaganda—were designed to recreate the crowd among its members and then make it political.”<sup>67</sup> Buford himself recognizes that the interactive relationship between subcultures like that of football hooliganism—or neo-Nazi heavy metal, for that matter—the political demagogues, and the terrorists they inspire is not nearly as straightforward. He concedes that the *Krawattennazis*:

Were not very good at their task—they were there to lead, but few were following. But, although incompetent, they were not ignorant. They understood something about the workings of the crowd; they respected it. They knew that its potential—its rare, raw, uncontrollable power—was in all of us, even if it was so persistently elusive.<sup>68</sup>

One cannot help but wonder whether, in the year 2016, Bill Buford is marveling at how receptive the crowd has been to manipulation by far-right politicians. In seeking to account for this dramatic change, the only explanation for the mass convergence of far-right extremism and the discourse of the political establishment lies in the large variable introduced at the end of 2014: that mass of desperate humans fleeing conflict zones to the prosperous countries of Western Europe. Liz Fekete’s argument, that the first such convergence of public and far-right interests was *also* the result of the Yugoslav refugee crisis, makes perfect sense when we puzzle over the rapid rise of Europe’s far-right, which currently enjoys an unusually stable and receptive crowd. If the foundations for institutionalized xenophobia having been laid during the last refugee crisis (or before), could we be witnessing a repeat of the 1990s on a much grander scale?

The convergence of the extreme-right anti-refugee racism with the EU’s need to abandon a humanitarian approach to asylum and militarize its borders, was first exposed after the neo-Nazi pogroms at Hoyerswerda and Rostock. When migrants and refugees were firebombed and driven out of their hostels, Chancellor Kohl rewarded the neo-Nazis by abandoning Article 16 of the German Constitution, which guaranteed the right to asylum. From here on, asylum policy harmonized at an EU level, land and sea borders were militarized and a special prison regime was introduced to asylum seekers.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Stern, “The Case of X,” 449.

<sup>67</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 158.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Fekete, “Neoliberalism and Popular Racism,” 8.

## Conclusion

Hooligans and their firms seem to be an inevitability of modern society, just as gangs are. What separates the two is that hooligans, owing to the nature of the firms to which they belong, appear to be far more susceptible to a crossover into politics, where their socialized violence can likely only contribute to political issues in a similarly violent fashion. The bolstered audience and legitimacy currently enjoyed by far-right political parties in Europe, owing to the mismanagement of the migration crisis, is especially worrisome, where these parties can expect to draw street-level recruits from a pool of prepared potential extremists.

This evaluation of the unique role played by hooligan firms, that of a substrate for both socialized violence *and* political ideology, should not only concern us until the present refugee crisis subsides, but should inform our future understanding of the domestic threats that exist within seemingly innocuous, asocial, violent subcultures. A fact of globalization is migration, and with it, the diffusion of populations, identities, and animosities. The nationalistic nature of football, and the adversarial, confrontational nature of its radical fan-subcultures, should be understood together as a lasting vulnerability to the harmony of demographically diverse societies. Likewise, after this recent peak of support for the far- and ultra-right has crested, hooligans will presumably remain. This paper could not address violent far-left firms, which absolutely exist, but the point stands that the hooligan subculture is uniquely susceptible to the forces that breed political violence of all forms.

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