

What is the best way of explaining football hooliganism?

[Sport & Tourism](#), [Football](#)



What is the best way of explaining football hooliganism? " Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words: it is war minus the shooting. " (Oswell, 1945) The best way to explain football hooliganism is to perceive it in the same context as war. Like war, football hooliganism has different factors that all contribute to the overall goal.

Although the goal of each is initially considered as overtly different - war, to some, is demonstrated as a positive thing, especially within the social movement of futurism, while football hooliganism is, as a whole, a negative as portrayed mostly by the media - there are however, similarities among the two that have yet to be further explored. To demonstrate this I will gain further insight into, what I believe are, the similarities of war and football hooliganism. I will do this by studying and explaining the three main attributes of each, which are; Territory, masculinity, and the moral codes each social group follows.

With territory I will compare how the two groups defend and protect their 'homelands' and how they achieve a sense of pride by claiming someone else's land. Although they conduct this in different ways, I will hopefully be able to present how similar their process of achieving this are. Through the study of masculinity, I will explore the symbolic meaning that each present, in order to achieve a high status of being a 'real man'. How they vilify their rivals is also studied, in order to make them feel less worthy or 'manly', including how fashion and uniform play an important role.

Before concluding my findings, I will explore how moral codes set internal 'laws' within each social group, to which each must abide in their realms of fighting, focusing specifically on the rule that non-combatants or 'civilians' are not to be harmed during combat, and how each group distinguishes combatants and civilians from one another. I will support my claims by using my own methodological research - in which I interviewed an anonymous football hooligan, who we will name as 'Darren' - I will also use Anthony Kings' 'The post-modernity of football hooliganism' (1997) journal article, T. W.

Reesers 'Masculinities in theory: An introduction, and Michael Byers' 'Understanding international law and armed conflict - War Law' (2005). By using the various sources, as said above, I hope to be able to support my claim that football hooliganism can be explained in the same context as war, through three important components - Territory, masculinity and moral codes - in which I have identified similarities among the two social groups. "... Hooliganism's central confrontation involved the 'taking of the ends', where fans would seek to infiltrate the opponent's terrace and assert their claim to the space.

This ritualistic combat was hyperbolically described as war (between nations) by many fans, but rarely involved the conquest of a complete terrace. " (King, 1997) The above quote - taken from Anthony Kings' article on the post-modernity of football hooliganism - shows us that the idea of hooliganism has similarities with the concept of war. This is not only shown through my own evidence, but also by football hooligans themselves. During

colonisation, the British army would claim other territories in different countries and claim them as part of Britain.

They would do this by capturing towns and cities, and forcing the surrender of the national people. The ultimate aim was to protect Britain and also show the world that we were a strong, independent country, with a powerful army, that could take over other nations with ease. Today, war is conducted differently. Colonisation is a thing of the past, instead of taking over and claiming other nations, the British army demonstrate their presence in other countries, and set up base camps within foreign towns as their own to claim these as part of their territory.

Football hooligans use a technique similar to that of the colonisation period. On a match day, hooligans will show their strength and power by attempting to claim something of the oppositions. This varies from terraces to pubs, and sometimes to streets. During my interview with 'Darren', he supported this claim by stating, when asked for an explanation of football hooliganism, "... Just taking liberties, going to other people's manors, in their pubs, taking over, calling them out, defending our territory, and taking over theirs..." (Darren, personal interview, Jan 2012).

Most hooligans will confirm that the method of taking 'enemy' territory is trashing the place they have 'captured'. This is significant to the process of claiming territory as it places a mark on the oppositions name, letting them and other 'firms' know that they have the ability to control, sometimes with the use of specialised stickers with the perpetrators signature (which is usually the clubs emblem and a short message). In terms of similarities with war,

when the British army would claim a territory for their own, they would mark it with the union jack flag, showing that they were now 'in charge' so to speak.

As shown above, in terms of territory, we can see the similarities between war and football hooliganism through the way in which they both mark their territory and set about claiming oppositions territory. Within both social groups, soldiers and hooligans both have the belief that they are fighting for something, a higher being than themselves: for soldiers it is for Queen and country; for hooligans it is for their team and local area. They both organise, plan and prepare for the execution of their actions, both knowing the risks of their actions, and are willing to take the risks to fight for what they believe is the ultimate cause.

According to T. W. Reeser (2010), one way in which to view masculinity is to look at it as an ideology, instead of an individualised creation. Observing masculinity within this context allows us to see various concepts of masculinity within different institutions and groups. This theory can work on many levels and can be associated with many institutions such as the army, sports and the business world. If we view the ideology of masculinity within the army, it shows us that the state needs the army to present themselves as the best they can be, an example being the army's slogan - 'army, be the best'.

The way in which soldiers are disciplined and taught how to present themselves is all part of their training in masculinity. As a soldier, the uniform is what sets you apart from the public. It is the symbolic meaning of

the uniform and weapon that a soldier possesses that is important in showing others their ideology of masculinity. When we, as the public, see a male soldier, in camouflage uniform holding a gun, we instantly see what is meant to be a 'real man'. The uniform, particularly honorary medals, shows us that the person has served his country and fought against others in battle.

The uniform represents the country that the soldier is fighting for and the gun is his weapon that he uses against the opposition, to disarm and hurt them. They affirm their masculinity through organised and planned attacks, when they succeed in disarming the opposition, or a bullet that reaches its target, is a soldier's way of removing the opposition's masculinity and building on their own. Football hooligans follow the same ideology of masculinity that soldiers do. They learn from their peers how to behave and act, and have a 'uniform' to abide by, which, like soldiers, is a symbol of their masculinity.

The uniform football hooligans wear is not as much a statement of authority, but a statement of fashion. The uniform is known as the 'casual look', which involves wearing top brand names of polo t-shirts, jumpers, jeans and trainers, and in some cases what is known as the goggle coat, a coat which disguises your face but allows the hooligan to see through a pair of inbuilt goggles. They use this uniform to tell each other apart, a way of knowing who is there to fight and who is not. " The casual look, its a way of telling people apart, you know who is who. (Darren, personal interview, Jan 2012)

Darren supports this in the above quote. The casual look is a uniform which symbolises their masculinity to others around them. As soldiers will use their guns as another sign of masculinity and to vilify their opponents, hooligans

instead will use their chants and songs. The chants and songs are specifically created to vilify their rivals, and mostly speak of the opposition as being sexually perverse, diminutive phallic references and mocking their sexual performance.

This is supported by Anthony King in his article on the post-modernity of football hooliganism. " Through the support of a football team, the male fan affirms his status as a man (in the eyes of his peers and himself) and also articulates the nature of that manhood. A central practice in the re-constitution of manhood in football is the communal chanting in which fans participate. Through these songs, male fans re-affirm and re-negotiate the partially sub-conscious idea of their masculinity. " (King, 1997)

In terms of masculinity within the army and football hooliganism, we can see that the similarities are, the way each uses a uniform and weapon as a symbol of their masculinity. Although the uniform and weapons are different, the way each presents themselves within their uniform and the way they use their weapon to vilify and remove their rivals masculinity is similar. It is a way in which each know who their rivals are. Which also links in with the moral codes that each social group abides by. Any armed conflict involves two broad categories of individuals: Combatants and non-combatants (who are also referred to as civilians). International humanitarian law protects both categories of person, though non-combatants are shield more than those who take up arms" (Byers, 2005) In the above quote, Michael Byers explains the humanitarian law that armies around the world are expected to follow. The British army abide by these and use them as a moral code as well

as a law. The harming of civilians is prohibited, and only other combatants can be return fired at.

As said in terms of masculinity, the army uses uniforms and weapons as a means of telling combatants and non-combatants apart. The harming of an innocent civilian can prompt an official prosecution of the soldier who open fired, unless there is reasonable evidence to claim that they believed the individual was in fact a combatant. Football hooligans also follow a strict moral code similar to that of the army. Football hooligans distinguish each other through the clothes they wear and the chants they use.

It is an unspoken rule that if someone is not part of the hooliganculture then they cannot be harmed or made to participate in the battles that take place. This is shown in a quote from Darren's interview " The casual look, its a way of telling people apart, you know who is who - We don't just kick the f**k out of a random person, only people who want to have a row back. "(Darren, personal interview, Jan 2012) This sets football hooliganism apart from just random street fights. With the presence of moral codes, we can see that football hooliganism is more developed and strategically balanced then first thought.

It is not simply about fighting like primitive men in the streets, but about the preparation and planning that surround it, the certainty that where you are going will not be surrounded by civilians who do not want to be part of this culture. The consequences of a civilian being harmed is most likely the shame that will be burdened upon you by your peers, and in some cases,

'taught a lesson' in that you will be expected to receive punishment through violence by your peers who are ranked more superior than you.

Continuing on the theme of similarities, the humanitarian laws and moral codes that both social groups follow is similar in the way that each are expected to abide by rules that prevent them from harming civilians who are not involved in their particular conflict. The consequences of their actions, should they breach this, is the prosecution of themselves through court marshals and/or violent punishment from their superiors. As presented above, we can see that war and football hooliganism have various similarities.

This shows us that we can explain football hooliganism in terms of war using three attributes; Territory, masculinity and the humanitarian law/ moral codes that both must abide by. Although the ultimate goal can be seen as directly different, it is the way in which both of these social groups plan and participate in their battles. The taking of territory and confirming their presence is similar in that both mark the territory claimed with the use of a flag or sticker.

The uniform and weapon is symbolic for both, in the way it presents and confirms their masculinity, whilst causing a negative impact on their oppositions masculinity. When fighting, both will abide by the same rules that civilians are not to be harmed in any way, or face the consequences of going against these rules, which involves being persecuted by others superior than themselves. Although soldiers fighting in wars are labeled as passionate heroes, whilst football hooligans are vilified as thugs, we can

notice the similarities of the two social groups when placed in the context of war.

The addictive adrenaline buzz associated with each group during battle is what spurs them on, gives them the power to keep fighting, and is what keeps them going back for more. 'Darren' describes this buzz as " Better than sex. " (Darren, personal interview, Jan 2012) Throughout this essay, masculinity has made a continuous appearance, in some cases it is more disguised, but still apparent. This shows us that masculinity, and proving they have an adequately sized manhood, is the real connection behind war and football hooliganism.

Overall, the best way to explain football hooliganism is in the same context as war through territory, humanitarian law/ moral codes and of course, masculinity. BIBLIOGRAPHY Byers, M (2005). War Law: Understanding international law and armed conflict. London: Atlantic books. p. 9. King, A. (Dec 1997). The Postmodernity of Football Hooliganism. The British Journal of Sociology. 48 (4), p. 576-593. Orwell, G (1945). The Sporting Spirit. London: Tribune. Reeser, T. W (2010). Masculinities in theory: An introduction. London: Blackwell Publishing. Chapter 1.