

5-2021

Mehr als ein Spiel: Far-Left and Far-Right Football Subcultures in Germany

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Mehr als ein Spiel: Far-Left and Far-Right Football Subcultures in Germany

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Departments of German Studies and Psychological Sciences
from
William & Mary

by

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Accepted for Highest Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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May 6th, 2021

Abstract

This thesis analyzes Germany's far-left and far-right football subcultures and how their expressions are shaped by Germany's laws, policies, and social taboos. After World War II, Germany's efforts to overcome or to work through its history of political extremism and authoritarian governments (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung/Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*) has resulted in laws and policies intended to restore Germany's national image, protect democratic institutions, and prevent another mass atrocity like the Holocaust. These laws are against political extremism as a whole, including left-wing political extremism, but many of these laws are aimed at restricting far-right political extremism de jure because they address hate speech. However, despite these restrictions, Germany has one of the highest rates of violent far-right extremism in Europe. One of the reasons for this is that the far-right has been able to express hateful sentiments, recruit, and communicate with one another through utilizing what author and professor Cynthia Miller-Idriss refers to as "game-playing" with the restrictions set in place. For decades, football has been used as a tool for expressing political sentiments and political recruitment. Using journalistic articles, academic analyses, and written narratives in conjunction with legal texts and commentary, this thesis expands on Miller-Idriss's work and analyzes how far-left and far-right football fans respectively game-play with Germany's laws and policies addressing political extremism through utilizing cultural objects and collective actions like banners, stickers, clothing, and chants. This thesis reaches the conclusion that these cultural objects and collective actions are enabling unique, complex routes of politically-oriented expression in Germany.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Beau Hawkins, Charlotte Lucas, Morgan Brookhart, Leonie Qin, Michelle Ott, Noah Dowe, Chifang Yao, Tristan Dunn, Becca Merriman-Goldring, and Faisal Al-Alami for their financial support.

To my mother, for convincing me to go to William & Mary. Also to Dad, Dan, and Dawn for being great parents and looking over countless essays.

To Marco, Elizabeth, Alyssa, and Louise for being my best friends since high school. To Emily, Mary, Henry, and Holly for making my life feel complete.

To my other friends from William & Mary for their friendship and support. I am excited to see where our future takes us.

To Matthew Talboo, Prof. Burney, Prof. Leventhal, Prof. Taylor, Prof. Gully, Lena Böse, and Claus Heinze who sparked my love for German studies. To Prof. Smith who fostered my interest in international studies. To my professors at the University of Münster for their patience and kindness for an American “studying abroad” from her laptop in Virginia.

To Prof. Ellis for edits, encouragement, and patience—even when the world felt like it was falling apart.

To Frank Shatz for lessons and friendship.

To Ida and Louise for taking me to my first Babelsberg 03 games, to Uwe for kindness, and to my other friends in Germany for teaching me about your country and culture.

To Prof. Stratton, Prof. Moloney, and my other psychology professors for sparking my interest in human behavior.

To my friends from the German House for the laughs and adventures.

And to the William & Mary German Department for life-changing lessons on language, human rights, and cultural understanding. I am proud to be a German major.

It was in Washington Hall where I realized I was in the right place.

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Introduction: Teams of Focus

It's a strange one. Football is the vehicle upon which so much of the St. Pauli experience hangs, yet once you are here, the football part seems so insignificant. It's about people giving a toss about each other. About showing that we care, that governments and their policies are wrong. It's not about nations or borders, it's about 10,000 people marching together or 22 people from different backgrounds and cultures coming together through football to show that they appreciate each other. It's bloody powerful and I'm proud to play a tiny part in it.¹

In his book *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, author and football fanatic Nick Davidson provides a comprehensive analysis of the Hamburg-based, “Kult” football club FC St. Pauli. Davidson dives into the coach changes of St. Pauli throughout recent years, memorializes high-energy moments when players scored last-minute points, and goes over the promotions and relegations of the team through the various levels of German football. However, St. Pauli—a team that struggles to occasionally stay briefly in the top level of German football, or the Bundesliga—does not have books written about it for its football performance. Rather, football is the base on which St. Pauli's unique, internationally-lauded left-wing fan subculture builds. From large banners reading “REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE” to thousands of fans demonstrating in the streets for refugees' rights, this is a team whose fans' unorthodox actions and rhetoric go beyond the playing field by loudly and proudly standing against racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and fascism.

¹ Nick Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics: FC. St Pauli: Falling in Love with a Radical Football Club* (York: SportsBooks Ltd, 2014), 244-245.



FC St. Pauli fans hold a pro-refugee banner during a game.²

FC St. Pauli is not the only football fan team in Germany with a “loud and proud” politically-oriented fan scene. This thesis will analyze St. Pauli fans and other teams with far-left and far-right fans, looking at their cultural objects—such as banners and tee shirts—and collective actions. The central argument of this thesis is an extension of the work of author and professor Cynthia Miller-Idriss, who argues in her book *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany* that bans on far-right ideological symbols results in a “game-playing” from those who wear the banned symbols. That is, those who wear these symbols will change their “codes and their display to navigate bans of particular symbols,” showing how banning policies can actually backfire.³ However, Miller-Idriss' concept

² “St. Pauli: German football's cult club explained,” Bundesliga, last modified 2019, <https://www.bundesliga.com/en/bundesliga/news/st-pauli-hamburg-cult-club-explained-max-kruse-reeperbahn-song-2-millerntor-2896-1471>.

³ Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 20.

of “game-playing” also applies more broadly to politically-oriented football subcultures, going beyond clothing, going beyond symbols, and going beyond commercialized objects; this thesis also goes beyond Miller-Idriss’ book by applying psychological topics for explanation and intervention. It is important to look at political cultures in other domains because football fans’ cultural objects and collective actions, for example, can even intensify this game-playing; these various manifestations can be utilized to express political ideas in additional unique ways and have implications for both textual and visual cultures, including contributing to group cohesion and identity formation.

My foremost argument is that football fans on polarized sides of the political spectrum rely on these cultural objects and collective actions to “game-play” with Germany’s mainstream restrictions and express their fringe views. Overlooking this idea closes doors for a valuable exploration of ideologically-based subcultures that have international influence and reveal unorthodox political aspirations of a portion of the population. From blank canvas to finished and displayed product, this thesis seeks to analyze the cultural objects and collective actions of fans—which I will occasionally refer to as cultural expressions—especially from the aforementioned teams to understand several key ideas:

- What are the political, cultural, and legal impacts of football fans’ fringe rhetoric being displayed through cultural objects and collective actions, rather than through speaking? And what unique opportunities and modalities of expression does fan culture offer?
- What are the common and differing qualities between far-left fans’ and far-right fans’ cultural expressions? How do these qualities affect the functions of their objects?

- What are the overall political, cultural, and legal implications of football fans' fringe rhetoric in a country like Germany, in which two dictatorships occurred less than 100 years ago?
- What role do legal, sport, and social restrictions play in shaping fans' left-wing and right-wing expressions?

Similar to St. Pauli, right outside of Berlin and set in the “Film City” (*Filmstadt*), fans of the smaller football club in Brandenburg, Germany Babelsberg 03 also tend to be quite left-wing, and some say, even further left than St. Pauli. Other East German teams, including FC Energie Cottbus, Chemnitzer FC, and Lokomotiv Leipzig are known for having far-right fans, “but Babelsberg 03 took a different path.”⁴ For example, Babelsberg’s stadium—covered in antifascist graffiti—still has its communist-era stadium name.⁵ Founded as a “spin-off” of the former East German Betriebssportgemeinschaft SV Motor Babelsberg, the team plays at Karl Liebknecht Stadium, named after the co-founder of the Spartakus League and the German Communist Party. Fans often feature Marxist imagery on their flags, banners, and stickers, and at games, antifascist (antifa) flags are not difficult to spot.

Babelsberg 03 fans—strong rivals of fans of the team Chemnitzer FC—⁶continue to position themselves as an antithesis to the far-right football fans in former East Germany. For example, when anti-refugee banners sprouted around in the East, “Babelsberg instead gave free entry to refugees.”⁷ In his blog on the “undervalued stories” of football entitled *No Football Colours*, content creator T.O Metz encapsulates the alternative left-wing culture of 03 fans in a November 4th, 2015 post: “The Marxist nature of the club can be found anywhere; ranging from

⁴ James Montague, *1312: Among the Ultras* (United Kingdom: Ebury Press, 2020), 223.

⁵ Montague, *1312*, 223-224.

⁶ Montague, *1312*, 223.

⁷ Montague, *1312*, 224.

free entrance for refugees, political flyers, merchandise, anti-fascist graffiti pieces, pre-match music and how the fans dress.” Metz’s quote both highlights how left Babelsberg 03’s fan base is, and how these fans rely on a performative style—which encompasses specific aesthetics and specific sounds—to express their political stances.

Babelsberg’s fan base is so far-left that simply being a 03 fan—similar to being a St. Pauli fan—can result in issues with the far-right: “[Babelsberg 03 fans] tend to become enemy #1 of any right-wing ultras groups in Berlin or the surrounding area,” a Reddit user says in a forum about German football.⁸ Along with their performative style, some of Babelsberg’s notable progressive actions include creating a team for refugees—Welcome 03—and their initiative “Nazis Out of the Stadium” (*Nazis Raus aus den Stadien*) to oppose right-wing agitations in stadiums. Eight football teams in Germany have signed onto the initiative, including St. Pauli and Borussia Dortmund.⁹

Similarly, Borussia Dortmund—or BVB—is a team based in Dortmund, North Rhine Westphalia with a left-wing fan base that formed as a response to neo-Nazi fans within the club. This again highlights that some left-wing movements in German football are functioning as a response to the far-right actions among other fans of the sport. But Borussia stands out from St. Pauli and Babelsberg because it is in the Bundesliga, the top level of German football, with hundreds of thousands of viewers worldwide. Although the club is somewhat less explicit in its official support of left-wing actions than the other teams of interest, fans of Borussia run various progressive projects, including one that educates fans about anti-semitism through visiting

⁸ @trenzafed. “r/Zweiteliga - Political Leanings of Football Clubs in Berlin (Hertha, Dynamo, Union Etc.),” Reddit, accessed August 22, 2020,

https://www.reddit.com/r/zweiteliga/comments/cuda2e/political_leanings_of_football_clubs_in_berlin/.

⁹ Stephan Uersfeld, “Babelsberg’s battle against far-right in Germany’s fourth-tier gaining momentum,” ESPN, last modified April 6, 2018,

<https://www.espn.com/football/german-bundesliga/10/blog/post/3412795/babelsbergs-battle-against-far-right-in-germanys-fourth-tier-gaining-momentum>.

concentration camps.¹⁰ Dortmund fans' orientation also highlights the association of fans' actions to local politics; football clubs and cities tend to be strongly intertwined as it is, but politically-based football fans can also work to disrupt the political culture of the city they reside in. For example, Borussia Dortmund is located in a more far-right area of Germany, meaning that Borussia's fans' left-wing support is even more disruptive to far-right actions in the area, as journalist Felix Tamsut notes in a March 18th, 2019 CNN piece:

In terms of the city, in terms of the region, in terms of the history, in terms of the voting pattern, people are more prone to voting for far-right parties. I'm not talking in massive percentages, but still more prone than in the big cities, and that's the reality in which Borussia Dortmund exists. That's what makes their social work with young people even more important. Within that reality, Dortmund stands against racism, against discrimination, particularly against anti-Semitism, against homophobia, against sexism, and it makes its mark.

Tamsut's quote underscores how fans can represent political patterns of the location they are based in, or how they can unite as a response to these patterns.

Overall, FC St. Pauli, SV Babelsberg 03, and Borussia Dortmund fans make clear statements regarding their commitment to progressive socio-political action. While the teams and their officials tend to also support these actions, the primary interest of this thesis is in the fans and their actions, which can sometimes be at odds with their teams. These progressive fans will be defined as far-left fans.

Those on the left of the left-right political spectrum favor "freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform and internationalism,"¹¹ with socio-economic rights being at the core of

¹⁰ Uersfeld, "Babelsberg's battle."

¹¹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: an Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 119.

the far-left.¹² Examples of larger scale groups on the far-left include the Red Army Faction, the Democratic Socialists of America, and Germany's Die Linke party.¹³ On the other hand, the far-right involves "attitudes, scenes, groups, and political parties that espouse some combination of xenophobic, antidemocratic, authoritarian, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, anti-government, fascist, homophobic, ethnonationalist, or racist values, beliefs actions, and goals."¹⁴ The right typically emphasizes "authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction and nationalism."¹⁵ Examples of larger scale groups on the far-right include France's Identity Bloc and Germany's Alternative for Germany party (AfD). This thesis will define football fans who espouse these values as far-right fans.

However, labeling one or a group as simply far-left or simply far-right is not so simple: these fans do not act as a monolith, and it is vital to note that scholars disagree on what the far-left and far-right exactly are. For example, sometimes far-right groups can be referred to as "hate groups," but they might see those on the other side as haters.¹⁶ Furthermore, actions that one performs do not always reflect their inner beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes. But while inner processes are important, this thesis is more concerned with public performance: that is, even if one does not understand or support antisemitic views on the inside, if they are doing a Hitler salute, they will be viewed as a "far-right fan." As one will also see, it is not always justifiable to call a fan base or team just far-left or far-right: fans of the *same* football teams can be far-left and far-right. It is important to acknowledge this mix, but also to acknowledge that certain teams have a reputation for having an overall far-left or far-right fan base.

¹² Luke March & Cas Mudde, "What's Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation," *Comp Eur Polit* 3, 23–49 (Spring 2005): 23-49, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110052>.

¹³ There is some argument over whether Die Linke is left-wing or actually *far-left*.

¹⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 18.

¹⁵ Heywood, *Political Theory: an Introduction*, 119.

¹⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 18.

The first team with a notable far-right fan base that will be explored is Chemnitzer FC. Fans of this team based in Chemnitz, Saxony have made headlines numerous times for racist, xenophobic, and antisemitic actions. Fans of this team also demonstrate the different degrees of transparency that politically-based football fans use. The team, for example, does not officially support right-wing actions; however, there have been instances of the club *not condemning* fans' right-wing actions.

For instance, at a 2019 football game, Chemnitzer fans caused outrage when the team allowed supporters to memorialize fellow fan and far-right activist Thomas (Tommy) Haller—who had recently passed away—by holding up two large banners, with one banner displaying a cross and with one reading “Rest in peace, Tommy.”¹⁷ In the 1990s Haller co-founded the far-right hooligan (football fan) group “Hooligans, Nazis, Racists”¹⁸ (HooNaRa), which was one of the first hooligan groups to show that they could organize and “professionalise.”¹⁹ Haller's security company also originally provided security for Chemnitzer FC, but after Haller gave an interview in 2007 admitting to starting HooNaRa, the official story is that Chemnitzer FC cut off their relationship with his security company. In reality, Haller's employees continued to do security for Chemnitzer FC, but as subcontractors.²⁰ Overall, Haller had deep and extended connections to the club.

Chemnitzer club officials defended the fans who displayed the banner by stating, “it was a matter of human sympathy to allow the club's fans and the bereaved to mourn together.”²¹ In addition to this defense, Chemnitzer FC also originally approved the fans' banner to memorialize

¹⁷ Felix Tamsut, “Why Was a Neo-Nazi Hooligan Mourned at a Football Game in Germany?” Deutsche Welle, last modified March 13, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-was-a-neo-nazi-hooligan-mourned-at-a-football-game-in-germany/a-47856332>.

¹⁸ Tamsut, “Why Was a Neo-Nazi Hooligan Mourned at a Football Game in Germany?”

¹⁹ Montague, *1312*, 223.

²⁰ Montague, *1312*, 223.

²¹ “Neo-Nazi hooligan mourned at Chemnitz football match,” Deutsche Welle, last modified March 10, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/neo-nazi-hooligan-mourned-at-chemnitz-football-match/a-47845091>.

Haller. After the story broke about Chemnitzer fans honoring neo-Nazi Thomas Haller, the CEO of the club, and a local Chemnitz SPD politician and fan-liaison, “who had written a Facebook post praising Haller,” resigned, Chemnitzer FC's main sponsor severed its relationship, and the club was fined 12,000 euros by the regional football association.²²

Football clubs and cities tend to be strongly intertwined, with the club representing the city and the city often supporting the club. Namely, the majority of a team’s supporters come from that city, represent the city at away games,²³ and the city, in turn, supports their club. However, Chemnitz city officials openly wanted to distance themselves from the actions of the team and its fans regarding these banners. Officials released a statement reading “Chemnitz is an open-minded, tolerant and peaceful city. We distance ourselves emphatically from all racist and right-wing actions and statements.”²⁴ The officials’ statement shows how fans’ actions can affect formal support from the city.²⁵

Other notable far-right actions from Chemnitzer FC fans include fans chanting antisemitic tropes at games, fans calling the club's sporting director Thomas Sobotzik a “Jewish pig,” and fans chanting “at least Daniel Frahn is not a negro,” referring to the former club captain who openly supported a far-right hooligan group.²⁶ Even if the club condemns the actions of some players and fans, and even if not all fans are right-wing, Chemnitzer FC has overall garnered a reputation of being “neo-Nazis.”

²² Montague, *1312*, 226.

²³ In addition to politics. That is, football fans make up a portion of the voting population in an area, officially representing the area in facts and figures regarding its political makeup.

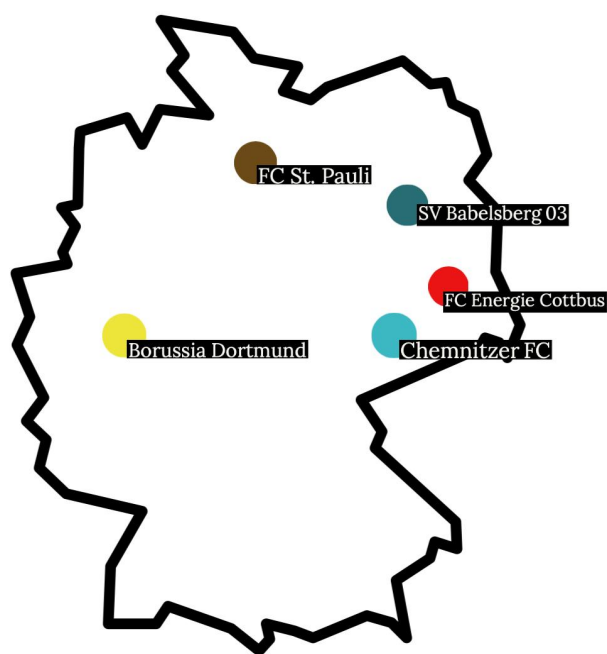
²⁴ “Neo-Nazi hooligan mourned.”

²⁵ Or support from the “mainstream.”

²⁶ Benjamin Salmon, “German Football Team Threatens Legal Action against Own Fans after Antisemitic Chants,” *The JC*, last modified August 27, 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/german-chemnitzer-football-team-threatens-legal-action-against-own-fans-after-antisemitic-chants-1.487898>.

In addition to officials occasionally stating their disdain for this far-right behavior, the club itself has also condemned some right-wing actions of both its fans and players at times. For example, club officials fined and condemned player Daniel Frahn when he held up a shirt commonly worn by the neo-Nazi hooligan scene during a post-goal celebration, despite Frahn claiming he did not know that the shirt was commonly worn by neo-Nazis.²⁷ This shows that a football club and its fans do not always explicitly match in political stances, but at the same time, clubs might turn a blind eye or support their fans' far-right politically-oriented actions.

Furthermore, this demonstrates the inconsistency of officials. Chemnitzer FC officials both



displayed sympathy for fans publicly mourning neo-Nazi Tommy Haller and fined Frahn for holding up a shirt commonly worn by those in the neo-Nazi hooligan scene.

Similar to Chemnitzer FC, FC Energie Cottbus based in Cottbus, Brandenburg also has a fan base with a reputation of being far-right. Chemnitzer and Energie fans even share a friendship, and when Haller died, Energie fans mourned with Chemnitzer fans, also with an approved banner. When referring

to how several clubs across Germany mourned Haller's death, researcher and author Robert Claus—who has a background in the intersection of far-right extremism and football—said “it's a pan-European network of far-right groups,” showing that a far-right, cooperating fan subculture is beyond a single team.²⁸ Many of the “forbidden” groups across this far-right fan network are

²⁷ “Neo-Nazi hooligan mourned at Chemnitz football match.”

²⁸ Tamsut, “Why Was a Neo-Nazi Hooligan Mourned at a Football Game in Germany?”; Although the politically-oriented subcultures of these teams can respectively have their own unique features.

still operating. Kaotic Chemnitz, for example, is a “thinly veiled rebrand of HooNaRa.”²⁹ Similarly, Inferno Cottbus 1999 was believed to be dissolved, but the group is still operating,³⁰ showing that well-known far-right fan groups are still operating despite regulations against far-right extremism. According to Claus, a “dissolution” might be portrayed, rather than actually done, to avoid prosecution.³¹ Other right-wing actions of Cottbus fans include the fans chanting anti-Roma chants and fans wearing Klu Klux Klan (KKK) hoods when celebrating their team being promoted.

Cottbus fans’ far-right stances mean that games against teams with far-left fans can result in turmoil. A 2017 game between Cottbus and Babelsberg resulted in an internationally-publicized and politically-fueled clash between the teams when Cottbus fans made Nazi salutes and chanted “work makes you free, Babelsberg 03” (*Arbeit macht frei, Babelsberg null drei*)—referring to the inscription written above several concentration camps in Nazi Germany, “WORK MAKES YOU FREE” (*ARBEIT MACHT FREI*)—and in response, Babelsberg chanted “Nazi pigs out!” (*Nazischweine raus!*).³² The original result of the confrontation was a fine of over 7,000 Euros for only Babelsberg because of their use of pyrotechnics and contributions to the crowd trouble.³³ Refusing to pay the fine, Babelsberg garnered the support of various football clubs—including Borussia Dortmund—for their “Nazis

²⁹ Montague, *1312*, 222.

³⁰ Davis VanOpdorp, “Energie Cottbus, Bayern Munich’s DFB-Pokal opponent, and their trials with right-wing extremism,” SB Nation, last modified August 11, 2019, <https://www.bavarianfootballworks.com/2019/8/11/20800693/energie-cottbus-bayern-munich-german-cup-dfb-pokal-right-wing-extremism-babelsberg-brandenburg>.

³¹ VanOpdorp, “Energie Cottbus, Bayern Munich’s DFB-Pokal opponent, and their trials with right-wing extremism.”

³² Matt Ford, “Lower League Club Resists Fan Misconduct Fine, Blaming Neo-Nazi Visiting Fans,” Deutsche Well, last modified February 2, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/lower-league-club-resists-fan-misconduct-fine-blaming-neo-nazi-visiting-fans/a-42430846>.

³³ Ford, “Lower League Club Resists Fan Misconduct Fine, Blaming Neo-Nazi Visiting Fans.”

Out of Stadiums” (*Nazis Raus aus den Stadien*) initiative.³⁴ This instance underscores the potential for collision between fans on polarized sides of the political spectrum.

But when looking at Energie Cottbus fans overall, one can see that the team’s fan base is not completely far-right: there is also a right-wing versus left-wing struggle within the fan base. This became salient when some Cottbus fans decided to address the reputation of their team around 2017 by pasting stickers reading “Energy fans against Nazis!” (*Energiefans gegen Nazis!*) and “Energy fans against racism!” (*Energiefans gegen Rassismus!*) around the community and by displaying banners with antifascist messages.³⁵ These actions have not always gone over smoothly within the Cottbus fan base. According to the Facebook group “FC Energie Cottbus - Fans Against Nazis” (*FC Energie Cottbus - Fans gegen Nazis*), their anti-Nazi banner was stolen at least twice by neo-Nazis.³⁶ This intra-club struggle within Energie Cottbus highlights the fact that fans of a team whose fan-base has a largely—or at least saliently—far-left or far-right fan base does not mean that all fans of that team have the same stance. Cottbus fans’ struggles also show that the politically-oriented actions of a fan group are a collective effort; that is, left-wing Cottbus fans creating and distributing the Energiefans against Racism! stickers and right-wing Cottbus fans chanting neo-Nazi chants required collaboration and coordination between a number of fans. This teamwork and common perception of politically-based fans as a unit—in addition to other traits—means that one should look at these dedicated politically-oriented fans as a subculture.

³⁴ Uersfeld, “Babelsberg's Battle against Far-Right in Germany's Fourth-Tier Gaining Momentum.”

³⁵ Vanja Budde and Sylvia Belka-Lorenz, “Rechtsextremismus in Cottbus - ‘Eine Der Bestorganisierten Neonazi-Szenen Im Osten,’” Deutschlandfunk Kultur, last modified March 7, 2019, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/rechtsextremismus-in-cottbus-eine-der-bestorganisierten.1001.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=442913.

³⁶ FC Energie Cottbus - Fans gegen Nazis, Facebook, May 28, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/EnergiefansggNzs/>.



An “Energiefans gegen Rassismus!” (*Energiefans Against Rassismus!*) sticker is pasted on a pole above a “FCK NZS” (fuck Nazis) sticker.³⁷

The fan bases of FC St. Pauli, SV Babelsberg 03, FC Energie Cottbus, Chemnitzer FC, and Borussia Dortmund stand out in international football. While these teams are arguably unique, it is also vital to note here that these are just a few teams with politically-oriented fan bases in Germany. Other German teams such as BFC Türkiyemspor 1978, 1.FSV Mainz 05 II, and Lokomotiv Leipzig are also known for having politically-oriented fan-bases. German

³⁷ FC Energie Cottbus - Fans gegen Nazis.

football is overall known for having these types of (vocally) politically-oriented fan bases. After all, “any given month saw hundreds of protests in German football stadiums,”³⁸ causing Germany to garner a reputation for having a notable mix of politics and sport at their football games.

It is clear that politically-oriented fans across Germany rely on an array of cultural objects and collective actions to get their politically-oriented messages across. From “Energiefans Against Nazis!” stickers to large “REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE” banners and “Support your local hools” t-shirts, football fans are disrupting both sport and society with their detachment from the politically moderate mainstream on multiple levels with a “DIY-subculture,”³⁹ channeled through banners, posters, stickers, clothing, chants, and songs. Fans expressing “extreme” ideas in creative ways means that these ideas can influence the political culture in Germany and beyond both metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically, far-left and far-right fans' expressions offer alternatives to the mainstream, uniquely “disrupting” the conventional options. One can also see a literal interruption: fans' chants, for example, are actually “interrupting” what could be apolitical football games. As one can see, fans' fringe rhetoric on both the left and right continues to take advantage of the unique qualities football provides—such as high publicity—and play with the limitations and freedoms imposed by Germany's laws, policies, and social taboos.

In the remainder of this introduction, an overview of German politics, resistant subcultures, psychological phenomena at play, football as a means of expression and mobilization, social taboos, and law and policies in Germany that are necessary for understanding the relationship between the contemporary politically-oriented football culture and

³⁸ Montague, *1312*, 220.

³⁹ *Pirates, Punks & Politics: FC. St Pauli: Falling in Love with a Radical Football Club*, 226.

the German establishment will be explored. First, it is important to understand how far-left and far-right football fan bases pose a unique relationship to Germany's tumultuous history with fascism that was responsible for the death of almost 20 million people in Europe and the communist dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic that continues to affect the society of the former East today.

Politics and Resistant Subcultures in Germany

What is considered far-right and far-left can vary between countries depending on their historical, legal,⁴⁰ and cultural backgrounds. Throughout Germany's history, political extremism has given rise to nonconformist, anti-establishment subcultures with ties to both ends of the political spectrum seeking to interrupt what they perceived as oppressive mainstream societies. These nonconformist subcultures perform(ed) their interrupting expressions via the utilization of cultural objects and collective actions. To understand the politically-oriented football fans of today's Germany as a resistant subculture, it is vital to first look at Germany's history of rebellious subcultures, specifically the ones that blossomed during two German dictatorships in the 20th century.

From 1933-1945, Germany was ruled under the fascist dictatorship of Adolf Hitler and the followers of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party (NSDAP). The Nazis' ideologies were strongly based in an idea of "purity," which was the basis for their desire to kill or oppress those they found through a pseudoscience called eugenics—or "race science"—to be "genetic blemishes" to their idealized, ethnically homogenous Aryan society.⁴¹ Those killed by the Nazis included Jews, Roma, Sinti, disabled people, and those who supported Communism, among others. Also tied to the idea of "purity," racism and antisemitism were

⁴⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 8.

⁴¹ "Nazi Racism: An Overview," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified July 13, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-racism-an-overview>.

strong themes in Nazi ideology, along with nationalism, disinformation, xenophobia, anti-capitalism, and anti-Marxism. The Nazis conducted extensive and violent means to accomplish their goals, including pogroms, law and policy changes restricting human rights, medical experimentation, annexing other countries through land expansion (*Lebensraum*), and a genocide aimed at the aforementioned groups of people.

Germany's right-wing extremist history has had a strong impact on today's German society, resulting in a wide range of questions regarding how to navigate the country post-Hitler, while coming to terms with Germany's Nazi past. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—the term referring to Germany's coping with its past—serves as an example of the ever-present effects of Nazi Germany on German society. The main questions that Germans confronting the past seek to answer are *how could an atrocity like the Holocaust occur?* and *what does the German past mean for the German future?* And to confront these questions, Germans have had anything but a homogenous solution.

The word *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* illustrates issues the country is having in dealing with its past. While *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a commonly used term to refer to how Germany is addressing its past, one can also see the promotion of the word *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* rather than *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. *Bewältigung*—which refers to “overcoming”—is criticized for referring to finally overcoming the past. On the other hand, *aufarbeitung*—which refers to “working through”—implies the idea of “working up from the past,” or that Germany's history of National Socialism is something that the country has to continuously work through, rather than be finished with.⁴² “*Bewältigung*” is additionally criticized for sounding closed and bureaucratic and for having a linguistic similarity to the German word for violence (*Gewalt*). This thesis will utilize both *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

⁴² Robert Leventhal, meeting with author, February 24, 2021.

(“overcoming”) and Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung (“working through”), while acknowledging that Vergangenheitsbewältigung is highly common in the literature and debates and is sometimes used interchangeably with Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung.⁴³

In Germany, Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung and Vergangenheitsbewältigung are a broad effort on various levels. Well-known examples of working through or overcoming the past include the Nuremberg Trials—during which some Nazis were prosecuted—erecting monuments to memorialize Holocaust victims, and implementing stronger restrictions on hate speech. On the other hand, coping with the past can also mean promoting the idea that Germans should not continue to hold guilt for the Holocaust because of the similarities of the Holocaust to other genocides, reflecting the view of the more conservative participants of the Historian’s Debate (*Historikerstreit*) of the late 1980s. One can especially see Vergangenheitsbewältigung here because through this view, after the Holocaust is addressed, Germans are done with dealing with it. This illustrates that addressing Germany’s history of human rights violations is not a monolithic nor agreed upon effort. These words can also be viewed in relation to strong social taboos in Germany; Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung has made it so that it is often highly frowned upon to commit acts that reflect nationalism or various forms of discrimination.

Nationalistic and discriminatory rhetoric continue to have more intimate effects in the country, illustrating how Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung, or dealing with/working through the past, means a present-tense dealing with/working for the present and future. Despite an effort to suppress right-wing extremism in the country as a result of Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung, it has continued to persist after Nazi rule through a spectrum of right-wing extremism, ranging from “subculture-oriented right-wing extremists”—

⁴³ I would like to see a more in-depth analysis of these words in reference to the politically-oriented football fans: are fans’ addressing the past or actually working through it with a critical lens?

including within the right-wing football fan subculture—to right-wing extremist parties that are not allowed to receive federal funding because they are deemed unconstitutional (*verfassungsfeindlich*), like the Nationalist Party of Germany (NPD).⁴⁴ This illustrates the necessity of addressing right-wing extremism in present-day Germany; it still persists decades after the Third Reich.

Today, right-wing extremism *can be* present in almost any facet of German life, from school to sport.⁴⁵ This right-wing extremism is often also accompanied by Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung-type response. For example, in the football stadium, one can see fans doing Hitler salutes, but one can also see examples of Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung through Dortmund fans holding up a large banner reading “WESTFALENSTADION—NO STAGE FOR NAZIS” (*WESTFALENSTADION—KEINE BÜHNE FÜR NAZIS*).⁴⁶ In Germany, one can see how from inside the stadium to beyond, Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung through different domains and actions such as memorializing, teaching, and adjusting illustrates the fact of political tumult in Germany and its dark shadow remaining over the German government and people.

Nazi Germany, however, does not paint the entire picture of Germany’s past of dictatorships that have had lasting effects on contemporary German society. Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung have also been used to refer to dealing with the communist dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during Germany’s post-World War II division—a dictatorship which resulted in opposition subcultures that provide

⁴⁴ “What Is Right-Wing Extremism?” Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, last modified October 25, 2016, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/fields-of-work/right-wing-extremism/what-is-right-wing-extremism>.

⁴⁵ This is not to say that every school or every sports team has politically extreme individuals, but it does seem that these facets of German life are not exceptions to right-wing extremism.

⁴⁶ BVB 09, “Beziehungsstatus: BVB 09,” Facebook, November 20, 2018, <https://ne-np.facebook.com/Beziehungsstatus.BVB09/posts/d41d8cd9/3584955111581222/>.

an insight to opposition groups as a whole and the persistence of far-left and far-right subcultures in Germany.

One of these subcultures was the formation of an anti-establishment punk scene in the former East in the 1980s, which started as a music scene and became more political after the punks faced oppression from both the Stasi—the GDR’s secret police agency—and those on the right—like skinheads—for their alternative style, music taste, and objection of the system.⁴⁷ Not all punks were necessarily left-wing, but many punks and the bands they followed—such as the band Chaos Z—did express left-wing extremist views ranging from pro-anarchy, anti-capitalism, and also like right-wing oriented subcultures, distrust of the mainstream. Although a punk scene did exist in the west, the GDR punks’ centralized and unified approach to radical and confrontational resistance made them a structurally different resistance group.⁴⁸ Thus, far-left culture in the GDR was especially cultivated and focused on anti-establishment ideas and anti-other oppositional elements. Namely, the Eastern punks united around a simple, but unified message of bringing down the system of their country by rebelling through both organization and style.⁴⁹

Clad in leather jackets, mohawks, and pins with anti-establishment slogans, punks opposed the system with both their lifestyle and appearance.⁵⁰ It was precisely this fringe, nonconformist style through cultural objects and collective actions that worried the East German government. But the punks’ style actually made it easier for the Stasi and the K1—or the Criminal Police’s (*Kriminalpolizei*) political division—to identify the punks and regularly call

⁴⁷ Tim Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus* (North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018), 24.; Style, music taste, and objection all went hand-in-hand in the punks’ resistance.

⁴⁸ Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 179.

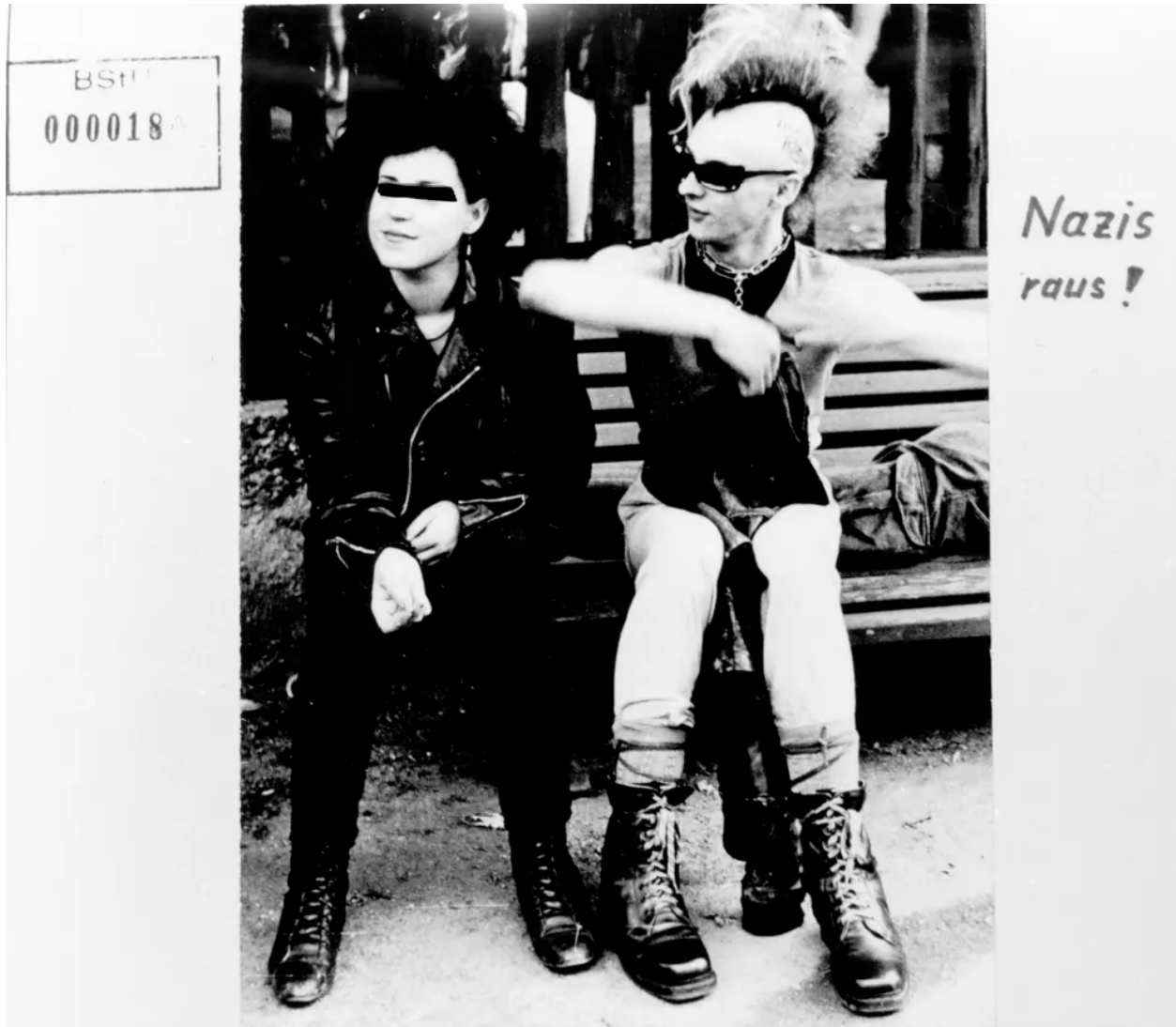
⁴⁹ Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 179.

⁵⁰ But as my friend’s left-wing punk dad from East Germany would say, “punk is in the heart” (*Punk ist im Herz*). I cannot say how many punks would agree with this sentiment, but it seems like punk is strongly about opposing the system, and a unique appearance is only a part of this holistic opposition.

them in for interrogation, make them sign documents identifying themselves as criminal elements, arrest them, limit the punks' travels, and beat them.⁵¹ Even if a punk was not necessarily caught doing anything, their style could put them at risk. The implications of this dissentient style meant that it was the goal of the K1 to eliminate the punks from public view, but the fact that these nonconformist styles continued even after oppression from the Stasi illustrates how the punks wanted to be *seen* as a threat to the system. Furthermore, this alternative subculture in East Germany was not an insignificant interruption to GDR society; in fact, an East German government report in 1989 found the punks to be a top problem for the country.⁵²

⁵¹ Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 24.

⁵² Andrew Flanagan, "Punks, Up Against The Wall," NPR, last modified September 29, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/29/652567677/punks-up-against-the-wall>.



A Stasi surveillance photo of an East German punk named “Speiche.” East German police dragged Speiche from a tram, beat him, shaved off his mohawk, and spread the idea that Speiche worked for them.⁵³

Like the East, the West also had a developing punk subculture, which was less secretive than its Eastern counterpart. For example, a “German punk” (*Deutschpunk*) music style developed in West Germany in the 1980s, featuring more public music with left-wing lyrics. To look at a specific example of punk in the West, a non-conformist “punk ideology” along with

⁵³ BStU, “Punk Persecution: How East Germany Cracked down on Alternative Lifestyles - in Pictures,” The Guardian, last modified November 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2019/nov/05/punk-persecution-east-germany-stasi-secret-police-in-pictures>.

alternative styles spread through the West German St. Pauli district in the 1980s. When political and economic insecurity hit Germany and right-wing hooligans began to attack houses around St. Pauli's stadium, a punk and left-wing response arose from FC St. Pauli fans.⁵⁴ Punks that also emigrated or were deported to the West from the East became involved in the anarcho-punk circles in the West, still maintaining their contacts with the punks in the East. Overall, rebellious punk cultures developed in both the East and West in different contexts and with different implications.

One can also see the specific persistence of a punk-oriented culture and punk appreciation within the politically-oriented German football fan cultures, showing the relationship between these non-conformist subcultures in German football to other historically non-conformist subcultures. For example, the shirt below is a shirt that Babelsberg 03 sells in their fan shop (*Fanladen*) that says "ALWAYS PUNK" (*FÜR IMMER PUNK*), with a rough, seemingly disorderly design, emulating the original style of the punks in the 1980s. What is interesting to note is that Babelsberg 03 is an East German football team, mirroring the continued influence of (Eastern) punk in the former East even to today.

⁵⁴ Sarthak Dev, "Punk Rock, Pirate-Flags and Leftist Politics: The Story of FC St Pauli," Football Paradise, last modified June 12, 2018, <https://www.footballparadise.com/punk-rockers-of-football-a-story-of-pirate-flags-and-the-anti-nazi-st-pauli>.



A shirt sold through Babelsberg's fanshop says "ALWAYS PUNK" (*FÜR IMMER PUNK*).

On the other hand, a far-right subculture was also developing in the GDR, despite the government of the former East being against the far-right in a de jure sense. Perhaps this is because—as political scientist Gideon Botsch argues—East Germany had innate and “substantial extremist-rightist elements,” which matched with the regime’s “authoritarianism, orderliness, and ‘range of secondary virtues,’” which can be observed as common features to right-wing dictatorships. Botsch also cites common outbreaks of xenophobia and racism against non-GDR citizens and foreigners within the GDR.⁵⁵ Perhaps because of this environment cultivated by the

⁵⁵ Gideon Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement: The Development of a 'National Opposition' in East Germany." *Contemporary European History* 21, no. 4 (2012): 553-73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23270685>.

GDR, another subculture that developed in the GDR was the skinhead subculture, members of which were often far-right.

Like the radical punks, the skinheads—originally not political, but with some becoming more right-wing and nationalist—were also a threat to the order and ideologies of the GDR’s socialist dictatorship. Part of the reason that a left-wing, radical punk scene gained traction in the GDR was actually because of the East German authorities overlooking or even secretly supporting the skinheads.⁵⁶ The irony of the lack of a clear plan for targeting right-wing extremism in the GDR also made some point out the contradictions in the “left-wing” system, as authorities refused to acknowledge the existence of extreme-right views.⁵⁷ It is still vital to acknowledge that the government of the GDR—although lacking a clear plan of attack—did help prevent the right-wing extremists in the former East developing into a larger-scale movement to an extent. For example, the East German government destroyed right-wing propaganda material and forbade the existence of right-wing parties through its Political Parties Act.⁵⁸ Therefore, both left-wing and right-wing subcultures in the GDR were in opposition to and monitored by the East German government; these subcultures’ opposition to the mainstream in the former East also meant that the subcultures continued to operate as fringe networks.

The GDR also saw the importance of sport when it came to both radicalization and (re-)integration of extremists, highlighting the intersection of sport and political culture. When it came to right-wing extremism, the GDR often stuck to their regular “three-pronged reaction” of “de-politicisation, repression, and integration” by targeting the sport and leisure activities of the groups like the skinheads.⁵⁹ Organizations such as the GDR’s Sports and Technology Association

⁵⁶ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 562.

⁵⁷ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 562.

⁵⁸ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 565.

⁵⁹ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 562; The GDR also used other tactics to address (political) opinions that threatened the government, such as spying, interrogation, and violence.

(Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik) were called on to support the social integration of skinheads through initiatives such as football-based measures.

This is partly because football specifically provided a ripe environment for right-wing radicalization in the former East and its connections were and remain with the neo-Nazi and/or skinhead scene. For example, some members of the Lichtenberg-Front—a well-documented far-right group founded in 1986—came from the fan group for Berliner Fussball Club Dynamo e. V., and the Vandals were a group referred to as a supra-regional far-right group whose members largely consisted of disorderly supporters of a Berlin football club.⁶⁰ Similarly, Botsch cites a turning point in the politicization of the skinhead scene in the former East in 1987 at a rock concert at East Berlin’s Zion Church commonly attended by “opposition elements” like left-wing punks, when about 30 skinheads and Berliner FC Fans attacked the church and left-wing punks, garnering more mainstream attention.⁶¹ Right-wing chants were also present among East German football fans in the 1980s. For example, in 1986, far-right Nationalistic Front members—from West Berlin—reported hearing nationalistic chanting and singing by local fans at a game in East Berlin.⁶² These instances underscore the fact that extremist politics and German football have been mixed for at least decades.

In 1990, East and West Germany reunified, and during this transition, right-wing extremism in the now (re)unified Germany grew. The transition through unification—or the Turning Point (*die Wende*)⁶³—gave power to the neo-Nazi scenes in both West and East Germany because under new leadership, a pro-Nazi youth subculture of skinheads, hooligans, and “faschos” especially from the (now) former East Germany began to develop into a

⁶⁰ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 560.

⁶¹ Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 558.

⁶² Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement,” 558.

⁶³ I will use the German word to refer to this transition.

politically-oriented “national opposition.”⁶⁴ Reunification was crucial to this formation of a national opposition because it allowed for more cooperation between far-right extremists of each Germany. For example, right-wing extremists from the former West and former East could borrow new chants and ideas from one another. Furthermore, part of the far-right in the former West brought mass propaganda into the former East, which was enthusiastically welcomed by some.⁶⁵ During the *Wende*, these right-wing extremist ideas already growing in the former East, became a united, nationalistic opposition that echoed tones of Nazi Germany.⁶⁶

One of the explanations for more prominent far-right extremism in the former East is the area’s identity crisis and issues during and after reunification, which made it a more fertile ground for right-wing extremism. During the 1990s, East Germany was going through massive changes after the metaphorical and literal “fall of the wall” separating the West and East, including losing a significant amount of the workforce due to internal migration to the West, quickly adjusting to international competition, experiencing decreased social welfare protection and capitalistic endeavors—like shopping malls—along with overall adjusting to a new political and economic system.⁶⁷ A right-wing movement continued to develop in former East Germany as immigrants were used as a scapegoat for former East's struggles during this transition.⁶⁸

Again, this growth of the far-right, neo-Nazi scene in the latter half of the twentieth century also had implications in the football arena. When about 100 violent right-wing extremists

⁶⁴ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 553.

⁶⁵ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 563-564.

⁶⁶ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 553.

⁶⁷ I know this after speaking extensively with people who grew up in East Germany.

⁶⁸ Right-wing movements around the world are often based on using (those who are perceived as) out-groups as a scapegoat. Hitler, for example, based a lot of his ideologies on the idea that the Jews—and other groups like the LGBT community and those who are disabled—were the reason for Germany’s post-WWI internal issues. Today’s German far-right similarly blames migrants—especially those from the Middle East and North Africa—for problems that the country experiences today. This thesis will further explore this idea, but it is vital to accentuate that although right-wing movements can gain traction on factors, like economic issues, right-wing movements are often *strongly* based in a white-supremacist, xenophobic-oriented “othering.”

were freed at the end of 1989, far-right attacks and vandalism followed, including on Jewish cemeteries and projects and housing perceived as leftist.⁶⁹ After almost every weekly football match, fans led by neo-Nazis would go to squatted houses, where they would train and spread ideologies with international visitors, showing football as a gathering ground for the far-right.⁷⁰

During the continued political extremism throughout the *Wende*, cultural objects acted as representations of a respective side of the political spectrum. For example, during this time period, extreme-right marching squads began to show up at weekly Monday night demonstrations in Leipzig, each squad with its own flag—including a nationalistic display of the German flag—banners, and member groups, similar to the fan squads of certain football teams.⁷¹ In opposition, antagonistic and young left-wing punks showed up to the far-right demonstrations to fight back.⁷² As it often was a response to the far-right, the growth of the neo-Nazi scene helped the left-wing punk culture gain traction. For example, the new wave of neo-Nazism in the 1980s actually contributed to punk bands from the 1980s reuniting and releasing new music about the dangers of neo-Nazism. These examples accentuate the use of cultural objects—like banners and songs—as representation articles for politically fringe individuals, functioning throughout history as ways for them to communicate with each other on the fringe sides of the spectrum.

Today, political extremism in the former East on both sides of the spectrum remains higher than in the former West. This is especially true for far-right extremism, including far-right extremist violence. East Germans can often easily call to mind the weeks of racist riots in Hoyersweda, Saxony in 1991, during which asylum seekers and temporary workers were

⁶⁹ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 564.

⁷⁰ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 564.

⁷¹ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 563.

⁷² Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement," 563.

targeted.⁷³ Following Hoyersweda, one can also see a pattern of neo-Nazi strongholds in the former East; East German cities like Jena, the location of the National Socialist Underground (NSU), and Chemnitz, where some principle NSU members fled to, became and continue to remain neo-Nazi strongholds with a “flourishing” far-right scene.⁷⁴ Other towns with strong neo-Nazi presences in the former East include Leipzig, Dresden, Bautzen, Brandenburg, Saxony, and Saxon-Anhalt in which neo-nazi marches, attacks on refugee housings, and hate crimes towards individuals and groups have occurred.⁷⁵

Although attacks occurring from fringe, politically extreme networks might seem completely divorced from federal-level politics, some voting results in Germany also reflect far-left and far-right political cultures. The establishment, therefore, is not necessarily the federal government as a whole—or any upper-level entity—but more the status quo, the centrists, or the accepted. Starting on the far-left, Die Linke is Germany's far-left populist socialist party that seeks to implement progressive legislation. For example, in their 2013 campaign, Die Linke focused on reforming the “discriminatory” Hartz IV laws, which cut benefits for the unemployed.⁷⁶ The 2013 campaign also focused on expanding educational opportunities for youth and specifically took advantage of its higher popularity in the former East with signs stating “East votes red. Understand?”⁷⁷ Overall, Die Linke seeks to promote progressive, and anti-capitalist legislation under the umbrella of left-wing ideological beliefs.

⁷³ I understand that referring to places and people as “East German” years after the East and West united can be considered problematic because technically they are “German” not “East German.” However, I am attempting to strategically use East German to highlight the fact that strong economic, social, and political differences remain between the former East and West. So one might be German, but also have a “East German” identity, especially if they grew up in the former East.

⁷⁴ Denijal Jegic, “How East Germany Became a Stronghold of the Far Right,” Racism News, Al Jazeera, last modified September 29, 2018.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/9/29/how-east-germany-became-a-stronghold-of-the-far-right>.

⁷⁵ Jegic, “How East Germany Became a Stronghold of the Far Right.”

⁷⁶ Chelsea Burris, “Left out?: The Political Left in Contemporary German Politics ” (MA Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2016), 11.

⁷⁷ Burris, “Left out?” 11.

The success of the Die Linke is particularly interesting because far-left powers often remain absent in many formerly communist Eastern European countries.⁷⁸ However, perhaps Die Linke's success in the former East is because the former East had a communist dictatorship, while Die Linke and its predecessors have promoted democratic socialism. This means that those in the former East can vote for a far-left party lacking the element of authoritarianism that contributed to German Democratic Republic's downfall. But to some, Die Linke's political position is still taboo. For instance, some more centrist politicians and parties within the German government will try to exclude Die Linke by painting it as anti-democratic, totalitarian, communist, and Trotskyist/Stalinist, among other anti-democratic labels.⁷⁹ Interestingly, these strategies may decrease the far-left influence, but not necessarily the far-left vote: German left parties have hit historic highs while being politically excluded from federal activities.⁸⁰ However, while far-left politics and ideologies persist in Germany on various levels, right-wing extremism seems to be what's making headlines during more recent years. Despite Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung-related efforts especially focused on Holocaust education and preventing right-wing extremism, right-wing extremism has persisted in different forms in Germany.

One of the more pronounced results of persisting right-wing extremism in Germany is right-wing extremist violence; while the bulk of the far-right extremist scene is opposed to violence, right-wing extremism has an "explicit predilection for violence."⁸¹ The Amadeu Antonio Foundation monitors right-wing extremism in Germany and has attributed 208 deaths to right-wing extremism since 1990, estimating that there are over 32,000 right-wing extremists in

⁷⁸ Luke March and Cas Mudde, "What's Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation," *Comparative European Politics* 3, no. 1 (2005): 23–49, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110052>.

⁷⁹ Burris, "Left out?" 13.

⁸⁰ Burris, "Left out?" 12.

⁸¹ "What Is Right-Wing Extremism?"

the country, and that over 1,000 of these right-wing extremists are primed for violence.⁸² With underground far-right networks still in existence, ministers in Germany claim that far-right extremism is Germany's greatest security threat, and the data certainly makes it seem so. From 2016 to 2018, the number of far-right severely violent incidents in Germany per capita—usually targeting people of color or immigrants—far passed the numbers of other European countries.⁸³

Although seemingly obvious, it is important to consider that these far-right extremists were not born far-right extremists. Radicalization can occur through where (future) extremists can find community through groups like online communities, marches, schools, concerts, and sports clubs, including amateur football and football fan scenes. Certain factors in conjunction with the social aspect that football fan culture involves provides a basis for understanding how a fan becomes a far-right fan.

One of the paramount factors that can contribute to political radicalization within a country is instability, either perceived or actual. Miller-Idriss notes this by stating that the “appeal of Nazism and fascism was rooted in the loss of stability in the global, postmodern era.”⁸⁴ The contemporary influx of migrants into Germany, for example, has created a feeling of uncertainty for some Germans over whether the migrants would fit into German society or attempt to change it, whether there would be less jobs for “native” Germans,⁸⁵ and whether migrants would perform antisocial acts within the country. Similarly, National Socialism grew under post-World War I economic uncertainty, neo-Nazi violence and activities grew during the *Wende*, and today, right-wing terrorism grew in UN member states during the pandemic.⁸⁶ This

⁸² “Germany is belatedly waking up to the threat of far-right terrorism,” *The Economist*, last modified February 27, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/02/27/germany-is-belatedly-waking-up-to-the-threat-of-far-right-terrorism>.

⁸³ “Germany is belatedly waking up.”

⁸⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

⁸⁵ Who is a “native” German? “Native” German is often a euphemism for *white* German.

⁸⁶ “MEMBER STATES CONCERNED BY THE GROWING AND INCREASINGLY TRANSNATIONAL THREAT OF EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM,” United Nations Security Council, released July 2020,

instability goes hand-in-hand with **fear**, as political extremists can recruit by taking advantage of peoples' anxieties during large-scale, societal change.⁸⁷



The Economist

Data from the Centre for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo shows that right-wing extremism in Germany surpasses that of other European countries.⁸⁸

Some recent examples of more recent violence from right-wing extremism in Germany that have garnered international attention include the following:

https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism_JUL_Y.pdf.

⁸⁷ "MEMBER STATES CONCERNED."

⁸⁸ "Germany is belatedly waking up."

- Karamba Diaby, the only Black MP (Member of Parliament) in Germany, had his office shot at and received death threats in emails, including with email sign offs reading “hail to victory” (*Sieg heil*).⁸⁹ Nazis said this chant or “Hail Hitler” (*Heil Hitler*) frequently, often accompanying it by raising their right arm.⁹⁰
- The Hanau shooting in 2020 involved a right-wing extremist killing 9 immigrants and those from ethnic minorities in Hanau, Germany.⁹¹
- The Old School Society was a German right-wing society with evidence of terrorist orientation in 2014. The group was originally a purely internet group that developed into a radicalized cell, planning attacks on accommodations for asylum seekers and mosques.⁹²
- Walter Lübcke—a Christian Democratic Union (CDU) pro-refugee politician—was murdered in his home by a right-wing extremist in June of 2019.⁹³ Because of the prevalence and violence far-right extremism, some politicians have continued to feel intimidated, with many wanting to quit.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ “Germany is belatedly waking up.”

⁹⁰ Also known as the “Hitler salute.”

⁹¹ “Germany is belatedly waking up.”

⁹² “Bavarian Court Jails 'Oldschool' Extremists,” Deutsche Welle, last modified March 15, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/bavarian-court-jails-oldschool-extremists/a-37943239>.

⁹³ Nadine Schmidt and Sheena McKenzie, “A Pro-Migrant German Politician Was Shot Dead. Officials Now Suspect a Far-Right Motive,” Cable News Network, last modified June 17, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/17/europe/walter-lubcke-german-politician-killing-grm-intl/index.html>.

⁹⁴ “Germany is belatedly waking up.”



An honor guard stands next to a portrait of the late CDU politician Walter Lübcke at his funeral. Lübcke was killed by a right-wing extremist because of his pro-refugee views.⁹⁵

Like the far-left, the far-right is not only confined to fringe, underground networks in Germany; the prevalence of politically extreme subcultures is also reflected in the federal government through the election of far-right politicians and parties post-NSDAP. Again, the federal government reflects the existence of these political subcultures because it is partly the people in the subcultures voting these far-right politicians in.

For example, the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) is the farthest-right party in Germany since the NSDAP. The several decades old far-right NPD has never passed the 5% threshold in federal elections, but did find regional success in Germany's states of Saxony and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and was elected to these state parliaments between 2004 and 2009.⁹⁶ Although there have been several attempts to ban the party and its "neo-Nazi agenda," courts

⁹⁵ Schmidt and McKenzie, "A Pro-Migrant German Politician Was Shot Dead."

⁹⁶ Angela K Bourne, "Party Bans as an Instrument of Militant Democracy: Under What Conditions Do Democracies Ban Parties in Practice," Roskilde University.

have determined that the party's low success does not threaten democracy and does not, therefore, constitute a ban.⁹⁷

But another far-right party has actually seen considerable success in Germany. In recent years, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD)—founded in 2013 foremost as an anti-immigration party—has also gained traction, especially in the former East. The AfD's rhetoric has been stated to normalize extremist ideas, and the party has embraced the anti-Islam Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) movement, which has held many, sometimes weekly, protests in the former East.⁹⁸ Despite taboos of the AfD's sometimes neo-Nazi-like actions because of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung*, the AfD has gained massive success in recent years. As of 2020, it is the third largest party in the Bundestag, Germany's Federal Parliament.⁹⁹

While this thesis is primarily concerned with Germany, it is vital to note how interconnected Europe is, especially among the Member States of the European Union (EU). Throughout Europe—including in Denmark, France, Greece, Austria, and other countries—far-right extremism is growing,¹⁰⁰ perhaps as a result of increased immigration or perceived increased immigration in various EU Member States. Ironically, much of EU Member States “spent decades rebuilding democratic societies post-WWII,”¹⁰¹ reflecting their respective own *Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung*-related efforts. Although the Nazi's far-right national populism was defeated in or by these countries in the twentieth century, and is often

⁹⁷ Ben Knight, “Germany's Constitutional Court rules against banning far-right NPD party,” *Deutsche Welle*, last modified January 1, 2017,

<https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-constitutional-court-rules-against-banning-far-right-mpd-party/a-37155332>.

⁹⁸ “Germany's AfD: How Right-Wing Is Nationalist Alternative for Germany?” BBC, last modified February 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201>.

⁹⁹ “Distribution of seats in the 19th German Bundestag,” Deutscher Bundestag, last modified March 2021, <https://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats>.

¹⁰⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 7.

seen through Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung efforts as a movement associated with perpetuating or avoiding atrocity, it is currently on the rise. This underscores that there is not a clear division between politics and the activities of politically-involved or -oriented citizens. Namely, the growth of far-right parties is correlated with a growth in far-right violence and other far-right activities.

In Germany and in other European countries,¹⁰² the far-right often utilizes several main tactics to gain traction. These tactics are based on what Benedikt Peters—politics editor at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*—postulates as reasons for the AfD’s contemporary rise in popularity.¹⁰³ One of these tactics is fear. As aforementioned, instability is a paramount fact that contributes to the growth of political extremism because it results in anxieties that the far-right takes advantage of. One of the main fears that the German far-right expresses is a fear of refugees and what an increase in refugees will mean for their society. The AfD’s more recent support is highly derived from Germany’s 2015 refugee crisis, during which hundreds of thousands of refugees came to Germany and several crimes committed by immigrants or refugees captured wide-scale publicity.¹⁰⁴ To cite an instance, during New Years’ 2015 in Cologne it is alleged that about 2,000 young, primarily Muslim men with non-European origins assaulted and mugged about 1,200 women, resulting in both widespread debates on immigration and PEGIDA marches.¹⁰⁵ Although many Germans have been notably welcoming to the refugees, a portion of the German population has been questioning the refugee and immigrant vetting process and whether

¹⁰² Arguably, the far-right on a global-scale utilizes these tactics to grow.

¹⁰³ Peters is an insightful source to use to identify these tactics because it is often journalists who see and monitor politics in real-time, from a citizens’ point of view.

¹⁰⁴ Benedikt Peters, “5 Reasons For The Far Right Rising In Germany,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 17, 2018, <https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/politik/afd-5-reasons-for-the-far-right-rising-in-germany-e403522/>.

¹⁰⁵ Rich Noack, “Leaked Document Says 2,000 Men Allegedly Assaulted 1,200 German Women on New Year's Eve,” *The Washington Post*, last modified April 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/10/leaked-document-says-2000-men-allegedly-assaulted-1200-german-women-on-new-years-eve/>.

immigrants and refugees can actually integrate into German society, sometimes due to these often cited and highly-publicized crimes. This has pushed a portion of the population to the right or has provided a scapegoat to the already far-right, and in more extreme cases, has resulted in attacks on refugees and immigrants, online hate speech, and more Germans joining movements like PEGIDA and voting for the AfD.

The far-right also uses calculated incitement and promotes offensive speech. This includes mocking the use of gender inclusive language, expressing a desire for Germans to openly state their national pride—which is often seen as a euphemistic expression for promoting nationalism—and criticizing same-sex marriage.¹⁰⁶ AfD politician Björn Höcke, for example, criticized the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, stating that Germans are “the only people in the world to plant a monument of shame in the heart of their capital.”¹⁰⁷ In a country where *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*/-aufarbeitung means honoring the victims of the Holocaust, statements like these are socially taboo. The AfD’s breaking of rhetorical taboos is even calculated at times to garner attention: a leaked internal strategy report showed that shocking remarks allow the AfD to gain a high amount of media attention. Therefore, breaking accepted norms is strategic and helps keep the AfD in (inter)national conversation.¹⁰⁸

The far-right also tends to have a digital advantage over competitors. The AfD, for instance, is the most active party on the internet, and it strongly relies on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter that allow the party to quickly, easily, and affordably disseminate messages across the world.¹⁰⁹ This means that the AfD’s far-right rhetoric is quickly and easily

¹⁰⁶ Peters, “5 Reasons.”

¹⁰⁷ Lizzie Dearden, “German AfD politician 'attacks Holocaust memorial' and says Germans should be more positive about Nazi past,” *The Independent*, last modified January 19th, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-afd-bjoern-hoecke-berlin-holocaust-memorial-shame-history-positive-nazi-180-turnaround-a7535306.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Peters, “5 Reasons.”

¹⁰⁹ Peters, “5 Reasons.”

available to many Germans. Furthermore, those on the far-right often play the victim. For instance, some see the AfD as a threat to German democracy, but the AfD spins this around by stating that they are actually experiencing the establishment trying to limit their democratic rights.¹¹⁰ An example of this is the AfD's Alice Wiedel walking out of a televised event because she believed that the moderators mistreated her.¹¹¹ Therefore, this fringe party wants to remain a fringe party, seen as separate from the mainstream federal parties; like politically-oriented football subcultures, their desire is not to fit in.

But this does not mean the establishment—or more centrist and mainstream parties—responds with pure aversion. Despite some Germans seeing the rise of a far-right party as a threat to both German society and the country's Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung efforts, some even more moderate politicians are having apathetic or approving attitudes towards the AfD. For example, Stanislaw Tillich—a leading CDU politician and Saxony's former Minister President—responded to the AfD's election success with “The people want Germany to remain Germany. They do not want refugees to engage in religious and political disputes here.”¹¹² Tillich's quote illustrates the idea that some mainstream German politicians are sympathizing with the AfD's nationalistic and/or xenophobic rhetoric.

From far-right underground networks to far-right parties, the German government has also received criticism about its handling of violent far-right extremism. Writer and researcher Denijal Jegic states that the CDU has done little to confront hate mongering; Jegic says that far-right violence is often condemned by the government, “but, rarely taken seriously enough.”¹¹³ Jegic's quote highlights, again, how the political extremists and the more centrist government are

¹¹⁰ Peters, “5 Reasons.”

¹¹¹ Peters, “5 Reasons.”

¹¹² Jegic, “How East Germany Became a Stronghold of the Far Right.”

¹¹³ Jegic, “How East Germany Became a Stronghold of the Far Right.”

not necessarily completely positioned against one another. This is not to say that the majority or even a high percentage of Germans are supportive of political extremism. However, the mainstream, such as far-left and far-right political subcultures, is not a monolith and is not fixed.¹¹⁴ This explains how some politicians—like Tillich, who represented the more moderate CDU—will not display consistent political views. Overall, politics, political views, and political cultures are complex and ever-changing. This thesis is interested in peoples' *primary* political leanings.

And the German government *primarily* expresses disdain against far-right extremism. Like is sometimes the case for Die Linke, Burriss notes that there is also a taboo of not working with far-right parties in the country, which has led to the formation of new coalitions within the federal government.¹¹⁵ Of course, there is also the extralegal barrier of promoting National Socialism, which will be further explored. Combining this fact with earlier explorations, there are taboos within the federal government of working with both far-right and far-left parties because both the far-left and the far-right have “spawned dictatorships in Germany in the past.”¹¹⁶

It is vital to understand these aforementioned concepts regarding the German federal government for two main reasons. For one, democratic governments can reflect a country's population because the population votes in politicians or parties to represent it. The German government's parliamentary system is arguably even more representative than the American system because of more proportional representation. Secondly, it is the government fighting to maintain the establishment because it is the government who creates or contributes to creating

¹¹⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Like the CDU/SPD/Greens compromise.

¹¹⁶ Burriss, “Left out?” 2.; However, Burriss also states that there may be less of a taboo of working with the Die Linke because of internal reforms within the party.

laws and policies, in addition to condemning actions, contributing to what is considered a social taboo. This second part is of primary importance for this thesis because laws, policies, and social taboos affect how fans game-play. Overall, understanding what is going on on the federal-level in Germany is necessary for understanding conflicts between the fringe and the establishment.

Analysts argue that when key political players have convergent tendencies—like the German government—it can increase the tendency for mobilization around anti-establishment themes within a country.¹¹⁷ It is the populist *anti-establishment left* and the *anti-establishment right* that one sees in Germany historically and today, whether at a federal-level or at a subculture-level. This thesis will consider the establishment in Germany to be dominant political and social opinions of residents, the composition of the federal government in Germany—which is largely centrist—and the laws and policies of the country. Through their objects and collective actions, politically-oriented football fans are pushing back on the dominant ideologies in Germany because the goal of their political extremism is to interrupt the functionings of the establishment.¹¹⁸ Overall, much of far-left and far-right rhetoric from (politically extreme) politicians and subcultures remains and strives to remain fringe. Germany’s politically extreme football fans reflect trends in federal politics and build on Germany—especially East Germany’s—opposition subcultures, which opposed the mainstream with unique means such as their style and collective actions.

German Football Fans as a (Politically-Based) Subculture: Hooligans and Ultras

¹¹⁷ Luke March, *Contemporary Far Left Parties in Europe from Marxism to the Mainstream?* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2008), 9.

¹¹⁸ This metaphorical and literal interruption will be further explored.

Whilst right-wing and apolitical ultras groups were common in Germany, there were just as many left-wing and anti-fascist ultras groups too. In Italy and almost everywhere else in southern and eastern Europe I had visited, ultras had moved rightward, towards ultra-nationalism and sometimes outright neo-fascism. But a large number of ultras groups in Germany bucked the trend. And even if the politics of the groups differed, they found that there was common ground on the key issues. They were against tough policing. They were in favour of the 50+1 rule. Against high ticket prices and Monday night football. One of Janni's most famous actions was the "12:12" campaign, which saw the *Südtribüne*, and other tribunes across Germany, go silent for the first 12 minutes and 12 seconds of a match because of the new safety measures brought in that reduced the number of away tickets.

In his book *1312: Among the ultras*, Montague highlights a unique fact about Germany's hardcore football fans, the hooligans and ultras: they are some of the most "politically active" and "politically influential" fans in the world.¹¹⁹ To non-Germans attending German football games, this can become quickly apparent. For example, Davidson—a British person accustomed to British football—recounts how he had "never seen any real evidence of a collective left-wing interest in football" before discovering St. Pauli.¹²⁰ In this section, football fan culture will be explored, along with different types of football fans, and why it is vital to look at Germany's unique politically-oriented football fans as a subculture, rather than merely a group.

¹¹⁹ Montague, *1312*, 208.

¹²⁰ Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 4.

To understand the actions of football fans and how and why some of them converge around political views, it is vital to first understand who exactly the hooligans and ultras are and how their qualities overlap and differ. To start, ultras are fanatic and organized fans who tend to use flares, tifo choreography—or a choreographed display of flags, banners, or signs—vocal support, and other elaborate displays. Ultras are most often apolitical, but can display political ideologies ranging from far-right expressions—such as promoting fascist tendencies like nationalism—or far-left expressions—such as promoting antifascist and socialist ideologies. Ultras who do display a political leaning almost always also display apolitical, purely team- or area-supporting¹²¹ expressions. For example, some ultras groups for Borussia Dortmund wave banners boasting how Dortmund is the beer capital (*Bierhauptstadt*) of Germany, while some Borussia ultras display anti-Nazi messages at the same game.

¹²¹ Supporting an area can be synonymous to supporting a team since a team represents a particular area.



Borussia Dortmund ultras hold up a large banner saying “THREE POINTS FOR THE beer capital” (*DREI PUNKTE FÜR DIE Bierhauptstadt*).¹²²

Furthermore, there tend to be numerous ultras groups for one team. For instance, FC St. Pauli has over 400 supporter clubs, with multiple St. Pauli fan groups fitting the qualities of what an ultras group is.¹²³ These supporters groups often differ between one another with respect to traditions and beliefs, highlighting how football fans for the same team with similar political leanings might not necessarily act as a monolith. Nevertheless, when it comes to teams with a largely left-wing fan base, these ultras groups tend to all subscribe to common basic tenets. For

¹²² Marco, “Foto: Borussia Dortmund Bei Hannover 96 - Bilder Von Borussia Dortmund,” turus.net Magazin, uploaded March 24, 2015,

<https://www.turus.net/fotostrecke/sport/borussia-dortmund/borussia-dortmund-bei-hannover-96-64257.html>.

¹²³ “Supporters Clubs,” FC St. Pauli, last modified December 5, 2020.

<https://www.fcstpauli.com/en/fans/supporters-clubs/>.

example, registered St. Pauli's supporters clubs must accept St. Pauli's "self-concept statement." Point five of the statement reads: "Supporters clubs oppose all forms of discrimination against people, all forms of racism, sexism and hooliganism, and all forms of disparagement and discrimination against same-sex preferences and tendencies."¹²⁴ This underscores how fans of the same team can differ between each other or between individual fan groups, but they tend to converge around common values, beliefs, and ideas.¹²⁵ In this case, St. Pauli fans are united by a commitment to left-wing values.

The majority of ultras do not perform (or have the goal of performing) violent acts because the main goal of ultras tends to be to support their team; this is where hooligans and ultras primarily contrast. Hooligans are primarily focused on destruction of public and private property and conflict with other hooligans centered on the goal of manifesting their ideals.¹²⁶ Hooligans fighting-related actions range from spitting on others to using firearms and throwing bricks. Riots might also increase when hooligans travel in firms—or a group of hooligans—increasing the chance that hooligans groups will encounter one another.¹²⁷ Many attribute hooligan violence to psychological mechanisms such as mob mentality, but it is also vital to note that a lot of these riots are preplanned and are not only a result of in-the-moment mentalities. For example, some firms make plans to travel across international borders for the intended purpose of rioting.¹²⁸ Therefore, using psychological phenomena as an explanation does not capture the entire picture of hooligans' violence that is arranged in advance. This tendency

¹²⁴ "Supporters Clubs."

¹²⁵ Nevertheless, recall that some fans for some teams will have opposing political beliefs. For example, some Energie Cottbus fans are promoting anti-fascist (left-wing) expressions because of far-right fans in the fan base.

¹²⁶ Matt Hopkins and James Treadwell, eds. *Football Hooliganism, Fan Behaviour and Crime Contemporary Issues* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 1.

¹²⁷ Nick Jardine, "Bruising, Burnings and Beatings: Europe's Worst football Hooligans," *Business Insider*, last modified, September 28, 2011, <http://www.businessinsider.com/europes-worst-football-hooligans-2011-9?op=1>.

¹²⁸ Joseph M Firestone, "Theory of the Riot Process," *American Behavioral Scientist* 15, no. 6 (1972): 859–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427201500606>.

for *organized* violence also means that hooligans can also have a more discreet appearance to get around police control.¹²⁹ For example, some firms wear commercialized brands and meet at predetermined destinations.¹³⁰

Violence continues to be a strong theme in academics' studies of hooligans, with many researchers investigating *why* hooligans have such a tendency for violence. One of the conclusions for this question is that hooliganism reflects broader environmental issues.¹³¹ Namely, there can be a link between football hooligans' violence and the sociopolitical issues that they face outside of the stadium.¹³² This violence can help hooligans—who might feel politically powerless due to often having roots in a working-class background—have a coping strategy for dealing with the social problems that they face and gain a status,¹³³ while also pursuing their passion for football.

But this violence often backfires, broadly causing additional issues for football fans and their reputation. For example, as one can see, this violence—although sometimes blown out of proportion—has resulted in the creation of certain policies to prevent fan violence, such as the implementation of stricter penalties to limit fans' disorderly conduct and increased police presence at games.¹³⁴ Fans' violence has even impacted the physical layout of stadiums. For example, some stadiums have added in-stadium seating—rather than having mostly standing

¹²⁹ Ultras, on the other hand, tend to wear team colors and team gear, appearing easily identifiable.

¹³⁰ "CASUALS: THE LOST TRIBE OF BRITAIN They dressed cool and fought dirty, but their impact on fashion has been largely ignored. Now they are making a comeback . . . in bookshops," *The Herald*, last modified May 7, 2005, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12493851.casuals-the-lost-tribe-of-britain-they-dressed-cool-and-fought-dirty-but-their-impact-on-fashion-has-been-largely-ignored-now-they-are-making-a-comeback-in-bookshops/>.

¹³¹ This is arguably *the* universal cause of most crimes.

¹³² Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 16, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2002.tb00055.x>.

¹³³ Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*, 16.

¹³⁴ Paul Gow and Joel Rookwood, "Doing it for the team—examining the causes of hooliganism in English football," *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 71-82. <http://web.archive.org/web/20141031101939/http://www.joelrookwood.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Paper-6-Gow-and-Rookwood-Vol-2-2009.pdf>

areas—to help break up fan groups, meaning that less members can gather together in one area.¹³⁵ This underscores the establishment’s broad responses to fan behavior, showing a cause-and-effect-like tendency; namely, fans’ messages and actions can prompt a response from the establishment if heard or viewed by it.

It is important to note that football hooligans tend to be far-right. As aforementioned, the far-right has an “explicit predilection for violence”; with a tendency for violence and neo-Nazi actions, the (far-right) hooligan subculture acts as a more micro reflection of the far-right overall.¹³⁶ But again, like most issues that this thesis touches on, there is not a black-and-white distinction between hooligans and ultras. For instance, it is not only hooligans who are violent—ultras can act violently, as well.¹³⁷ Montague emphasizes this lack of a clear distinction between hooligans and ultras when quoting a German ultra: ““We have ultras groups which are so violent that you cannot really separate them from hooliganism. We have left-wing anti-violence groups, left-wing pro-violence groups, right-wing pro-violence groups and everything in between.””¹³⁸ Similarly, Miller-Idriss defines the far-right youth subculture, which includes football hooligans as “youth who are either actively engaged or quietly supportive of nationalist or exclusionary platforms that seek to maintain or restore national ethnoscap...reflect an idealized community.”¹³⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, it will be considered that if they are political, hooligans tend to be far-right—expressing racist and xenophobic beliefs—and violent.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Anthony Gulve, “FOOTBALL HOOLIGANS,” *Subcultures and Society*: Grinnell College, <https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultures-and-scenes/football-hooligans/>.

¹³⁶ “What Is Right-Wing Extremism?” Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, last modified October 25, 2016, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/fields-of-work/right-wing-extremism/what-is-right-wing-extremism>.

¹³⁷ Montague, *1312*, 227.

¹³⁸ Montague, *1312*, 227.

¹³⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Anthony King, “The Postmodernity of Football Hooliganism,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 4 (December 1997): 576–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/591597>.

Because of stereotypes—like that hardcore fans are violent—fans’ relationship with police is quite complex. Both hooligans and ultras can have a tendency for illegal actions, so these fans can often be wary of a police presence, with politically-oriented fans adding a layer of complexity because of being against police for more ideological reasons. The relationship between police and fans should also be examined because as aforementioned, police presence in the fan space has increased both inside and outside of the stadium throughout the years. For example, additional police stations have been added to stadiums throughout Germany, and some ultras have had their homes raided by police who were looking for pyrotechnics and banners.¹⁴¹ However, ultras interviewed by Montague “[Ben and Haggi] couldn't really understand why the state used so many resources to control them,” citing how no one had died in German football since 2008 and how new, safer techniques like “cold pyro” were being explored by fellow fans.¹⁴² At the same time, it is the very nature of youth (sub)cultures—like the football fan culture—to push the “boundaries and limits” of what the establishment puts in place. Ben also stated: “You have certain rules within society and you will break certain rules. That's it with a youth culture. Young people trying to test what they can do and what they can't do.”¹⁴³ Fan cultures—including politically-oriented hooligan and ultras cultures—can differ in their styles, messages, and actions, but are often both highly “All Cops Are Bastards”-oriented.¹⁴⁴ This is not to say that politically-oriented fans always have a negative relationship with police; however, the mix of a police presence and the German politically-based fan culture has had negative implications.

¹⁴¹ Montague, *1312*, 213.

¹⁴² Montague, *1312*, 213.

¹⁴³ Montague, *1312*, 223.

¹⁴⁴ Also known as “ACAB,” or “1312.”

One example of a negative and arguably dangerous implication is that introducing more police stations at football games due to fans' violence helped drive the "hooligans underground," rather than eliminating them.¹⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Montague notes how the police presence has pushed German football fan culture in a different direction: "Germany's ultras scene was perhaps the most political I'd ever encountered. But it was also changing. As the police cracked down harder, the scene had started to become more violent, mixing both hooliganism and the purer ultras scene that had arrived from Italy in the 1980s."¹⁴⁶ Therefore, an increased police presence does not abolish violent, right-wing hooliganism. Rather, increased police presence can encourage the scene to find creative ways to subvert restrictions put in place by the establishment, occasionally causing the fans to become more aggressive as a retaliation. Overall, fans' issues with police mirror the establishment versus anti-establishment phenomena, with police representing the establishment, and politically-oriented fans representing the anti-establishment.

Another complicated relationship that hardcore football fans have is with the media, partly due to how the media can perpetuate negative stereotypes regarding fans. The media, for example, can vilify football fans or hooligans beyond the incriminating actions that the hooligans have actually performed by making it seem like hooligans' violence is more prevalent than it actually is through extensive coverage of some fans' antisocial behavior.¹⁴⁷ The media frequently covering fans' violence likely contributes to people having a sort of availability bias towards fans; that is, people who see this coverage perceive fans' antisocial behavior as more representative than it actually is. Another consequence of this bias is that outsiders can mix up types of fans, further blurring the distinction between them and broadly applying stereotypes to

¹⁴⁵ Montague, *1312*, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Montague, *1312*, 226.

¹⁴⁷ Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 169.

fans. Like increased police presence, the media's coverage of hardcore football fans can also have negative implications. For example, the media can reinforce some hooligans' violent behavior because it helps the hooligans' riots gain public recognition.¹⁴⁸ This vilification, especially by the media, is considered to be a major factor for the creation of sport policies that monitor and control fans' behaviors for the purpose of preventing violence.

Another common feature of the football fan subcultures on both sides of the political spectrum is the embracement of hyper-masculinity. There are women in the fan scene. For example, Babelsberg 03 has Fan-Tastic Females—which focuses on the role of women in the Babelsberg 03 fan culture—but a majority of hooligans and ultras are men.¹⁴⁹ Masculine themes will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

When looking at far-left and far-right football fans—including hooligans and ultras—it is also important to view them as a subculture that unites around specific values and themes, rather than looking at them as individuals or simply as a group.¹⁵⁰ For one, subcultures tend to be class-based, and when it comes to the football fans of interest, one can see that many of them come from working class backgrounds.¹⁵¹ According to some of the first subcultural theorists, deviance from subculturalists—or those in a subculture—can be a result of social and environmental problems, usually related to a geographical location.¹⁵² Therefore, fans' lower-class background that possibly results from environmental factors like lack of opportunities can go hand-in-hand with fans' orientation towards deviant behavior, or a

¹⁴⁸ David Waddington, "The Madness of the Mob? Explaining the 'Irrationality' and Destructiveness of Crowd Violence," *Wiley Online Library* 2, no. 2 (March 2008): 675-687, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00079.x>.

¹⁴⁹ Montague, *1312*, 223.

¹⁵⁰ The literature on subcultures does look at hooligans as a subculture, but there is a lack of literature looking at ultras as a subculture.

¹⁵¹ Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*, 16.

¹⁵² Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*, 16.

“collective desire to ‘act out’” against the established values of a society.¹⁵³ A lot of a subculture’s resistance is channeled through styles and rituals,¹⁵⁴ which football fans highly rely on.¹⁵⁵ This includes certain aesthetics—like some football hooligans emulating a more sophisticated style—and certain actions—like teams playing a specific well-known song before games start. These styles and rituals can differ from team to team, but overall, far-left fans and far-right fans have common styles and rituals, respectively.

Likewise, those in a subculture share ever-changing “values, practices, and cultural objects,” which help distinguish the subculture from the main culture.¹⁵⁶ One can see this with politically-oriented fans and their shared distinct meanings that are unique to their subculture. Hooligans, for example, share several distinct themes, such as masculinity, aggressiveness, and often, xenophobia.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, politically-oriented fans also share styles and rituals through which these common meanings are channeled, like displaying political messages on shirts and holding up banners showing messages with aggressive tones.

Styles, rituals, and meanings are preserved and disseminated through fans’ diffuse networks. A subculture typically does not typically have formal leadership or formal membership and boundaries are fluid; one is also not restricted to interacting only with the subculture.¹⁵⁸ When it comes to football fans, one can join a politically-based fan subculture by displaying politically-based cultural objects, attending games, and helping organize socio-political efforts. The increasing prevalence of technology helps fans’ diffuse networks operate by helping fans stay in contact with one another, to, for example, plan meetings.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Ross Haenfler, *Subcultures: The Basics* (Abingdon: Ross Haenfler, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 81.

¹⁵⁵ “Subcultural Theory,” *Subcultures and Sociology*: Grinnell College, <https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultural-theory-and-theorists/what-is-a-subculture/>.

¹⁵⁶ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 90.

¹⁵⁷ Which often go hand-in-hand for fans, especially hooligans.

¹⁵⁸ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 90.

¹⁵⁹ Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*, 16.

Technology also blurs the line between the boundaries of the subculture and those not in the subculture as it helps the subculture be more accessible to the mainstream through, for example, politically-oriented fans' social media accounts.

A subculture is also often resistant against the main culture; this resistance can be passive or active, at the micro or macro level, and covert or overt.¹⁶⁰ Of special interest is a type of “symbolic resistance” when it comes to football fans. Dick Hebdige, author of the groundbreaking book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* argues that subcultures usually consist of the working-class and that these individuals manage their “status problems” by establishing new norms.¹⁶¹ These norms have ideological implications and result in symbolic forms of resistance, which can involve appropriating objects and styles of the dominant culture or other subcultures in a given society.¹⁶² Subcultures, and their messages channeled through symbols and styles, according to Hebdige, can act as a type of noise or a “...semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation.”¹⁶³ Politically-oriented football fans, for instance, resist the dominant culture through banners, stickers, and shirts overtly expressing fringe political views. They can also utilize certain distracting styles, similar to Germany's punks in the latter half of the 20th century. At the same time, some fans will express extreme political views through coded, disguised symbols to avoid detection from the mainstream. All in all, subcultures' resistance efforts are multifaceted and seek to promote defiance.

Furthermore, subcultures tend to experience shared marginalization. In Howard Becker's labeling theory, the dominant social group—or the establishment—is the “in group,” which determines who the “out group” is based on the fact that the out group cannot perform the same

¹⁶⁰ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 81.

¹⁶¹ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 82.

¹⁶² Hebdige, *Subculture*, 26.

¹⁶³ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 90.

values and norms as the in group.¹⁶⁴ Subculturalists are “deviant” because they do not meet the norms of the establishment, and are therefore marginalized. It is vital to note that subculturalists can *choose* this marginalization.¹⁶⁵ For example, far-right football fans can be deviant because they might choose to break the German laws through illegal actions such as Nazi salutes at football games. In this example, the far-right fans are aware that their actions will result in marginalization because of social taboos and legal restrictions against (some) far-right extremist actions. Similarly, those in a subculture can embrace interrupting the main culture with deviant styles and rhetoric, like with politically-based fans displaying banners including explicit words. A banner reading “FUCK” in large letters at a football game is arguably quite distracting. Again, although they might have already been marginalized for their divergent interests, fans are able to (at times) choose their own marginalization with deviant styles.

Subcultures also often have stratification, shared values, and specialized vocabulary. The stratification within the subculture is a result of the subculture’s changing values and can relate to cultural or symbolic assets and authenticity.”¹⁶⁶ In regards to football fans, hooligans can gain status and a degree of authenticity within their group through confrontational challenges of an equal and display common interests in “social spaces” and “consumption patterns” and believe that hooliganism is a way of life, showing shared values among the subculture.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, hooligans also often also share a working class background; again, inclusion within their group can give them a feeling of status, exhibiting a shared value of inclusion among the subculturalists.¹⁶⁸ But the values of the subculture are not exactly fixed. For example, some football fan groups can move in the opposite direction of which they were originally in. Borussia

¹⁶⁴ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 90.

¹⁶⁵ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 92.

¹⁶⁶ Gulve, “FOOTBALL HOOLIGANS.”

¹⁶⁷ Gulve, “FOOTBALL HOOLIGANS.”; Hooligans especially show an emphasis on rituals.

¹⁶⁸ Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*, 16.

Dortmund's Desperados, set up in 1999, was originally run on “inclusive, activist principles.” After the founder of the group, Janni, left the country, the group began to become more right and became known as a violent ultras group, highlighting the potential flux of some of the fans’ values.¹⁶⁹ Fans’ lack of set leadership and tendency to fluctuate underscores the stratification of the fan subculture.

Although a class-basis, a use of styles and rituals, stratification, shared values, specialized vocabulary, shared distinct meanings and marginalization, resistance, and diffuse networks are important features of subcultures, according to many ethnographers, a shared identity is the most important quality that distinguishes a subculture from an average social group.¹⁷⁰ A collective identity among a subculture, which can be unifying, can innately connect a subculturalist with their fellow group members, even if a subculturalist does not have an individual relationship with each person in their subculture.¹⁷¹ For example, St. Pauli fans act as an extended family: when the St. Pauli fan “Mini” fell 15ft from a football stadium terrace onto concrete, he received financial support from St. Pauli fans around the world and club officials and players, regardless of whether he actually knew them individually.¹⁷² Similarly, fans can teach one another how to “be” fans, or in other words, to perpetuate the identity. For instance, Davidson recalls St. Pauli fans teaching other attendees how to unfurl and throw a till roll to participate in the St. Pauli fan culture at a game, as if subculturalists were “inviting” others to share the identity. Lastly, when outsiders perceive the politically-based fans through the media or through seeing them at games or other events, outsiders often perceive these fans as a *unit*. When fans hold up a banner, for

¹⁶⁹ Montague, *1312*, 227.

¹⁷⁰ Marilyn B. Brewer and Wendi L. Gardner, “Who Is This ‘We’? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 1 (July 1996): 83-93.

¹⁷¹ Marilyn et al., “Who Is This ‘We’?” 84.

¹⁷² Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 52.

instance, viewers do not focus on the individual faces of the fans holding up the banner, but the identities of the fans become blurred under the message of the whole (banner).

But again, it is important to emphasize that fan groups are not a monolith. Ultras can differ between teams, or even within the fandom of a singular team, which can even result in diversions or stratification within the subculture. For example, Montague mentions a falling out between the Babelsberg 03 ultras groups Filmstadt Infernos and the Bulldogs.¹⁷³ As Janni, the founder of Borussia Dortmund's Desperados stated that being an ultras is more about following "a cultural code."¹⁷⁴ Overall, far-left and far-right football fans' shared values can fall under several commonalities: "Against modern football. Against commercialisation. Solidarity with your allies. Scorn for your enemies. And, above all, resentment towards the police."¹⁷⁵ This underscores the fact that although seemingly oxymoronic, both stratification and a shared identity can co-exist among the football fan subculture(s): fans can differ between one another, but they fall under the same "shared identity" umbrella. Mohr highlights this distinct interconnectedness of the politically-oriented football fan subculture well: "If the kids are united, they will never be divided."¹⁷⁶

The Role of Psychological Phenomena

The human is not, however, the passive recipient of his culture, and his individual behavior is not a passive collection of elements randomly combined out of elements maintained in the group. The psychological mechanisms of an individual choose which behaviors observed in surrounding individuals will be adopted, which will be rejected, which will be newly created to fill a need, and they additionally determine how these

¹⁷³ Montague, *1312*, 225.

¹⁷⁴ Montague, *1312*, 227.

¹⁷⁵ Montague, *1312*, 220.

¹⁷⁶ Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 24.

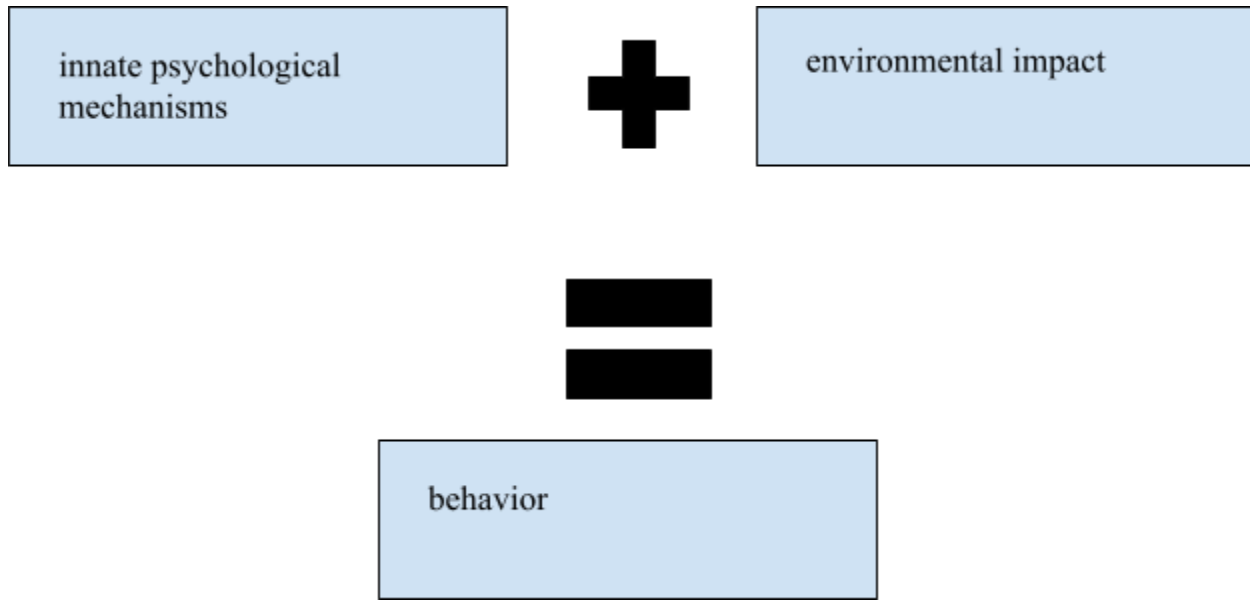
elements of different origin will be integrated. These choices will be made according to the evolved algorithm of the relevant psychological mechanisms (as activated by personal circumstances and available information).¹⁷⁷

The intersection of psychology and cultural studies is essential because without the former, one would look at cultural behavior without a (scientific) basis of *why* this behavior occurs. As psychologists Lena Cosmides and John Tooby state in their above quote, psychological mechanisms are the floor for culture, which is a result of innate psychological mechanisms being impacted by the environment. In other words, “learning and culture are phenomena to be explained, and not explanations themselves,”¹⁷⁸ highlighting that culture is not the most foundational driving factor of behavior. It is therefore vital to not only look at fans’ behavior—or what are seen as cultural processes—but also the psychological mechanisms¹⁷⁹ that drive behavior, and how the environment—like being in a high energy crowd at a football game—further shapes behavior.

¹⁷⁷ Lena Cosmides and John Tooby, “The Latest on the Best Essays on Evolution and Optimality,” 44.

¹⁷⁸ Lena Cosmides and John Tooby, “The Latest on the Best Essays on Evolution and Optimality,” 46.

¹⁷⁹ Why these mechanisms exist is a question for evolutionary psychology.



It is vital to consider politically-oriented hooligans and ultras as a subculture because their performance is not possible at the individual level because the subculture relies so heavily on *collective* actions and *collective* expression through a collective identity. However, individual-level psychological phenomena do occur among football fans, which has implications for the functioning of the subcultures on a collective-scale.

One example of a more individual-level phenomena among fans is cognitive dissonance, or experiencing two cognitions or a cognition and a behavior that clash with one another.¹⁸⁰ In regards to fans, cognitive dissonance can be following what the football subculture does, even if it means acting in ways that go against the fan's individual values.¹⁸¹ For example, one might stand on a football terrace with someone who is performing a "Hitler salute"; if standing with someone acting anti-semitically goes the fan's individual values, their mind can find a way to justify standing with the anti-semitic person in order to protect their to perception of self. This

¹⁸⁰ Elliot Aronson and Carol Tavis, "The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in the Pandemic," *The Atlantic*, last modified July 12, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/role-cognitive-dissonance-pandemic/614074/>.

¹⁸¹ Aronson and Tavis, "The Role of Cognitive Dissonance."

dissonance between mind and behavior often results in rationalization. In the case of standing next to another football fan doing a Hitler salute, one might tell themselves messages to justify their own behavior such as *it is not a big deal to stand next to them* or *maybe they are cheering, rather than doing a Hitler salute*. With these justifying messages, fans can feel more comfortable with obscene or irrational behavior.

There is also a strong social element to cognitive dissonance. That is, irrational beliefs can act as a “glue” for certain groups, and dissonance reduction “depends on social factors.”¹⁸² Discordant beliefs often occur often in a group setting, and one way to mediate these irrational beliefs is to separate the person from their group.¹⁸³ When looking at football fans, one can assume that a fan’s actions and beliefs in an individual setting are likely going to appear to be less irrational and less obscene than those occurring in a group setting because of the social factors of cognitive dissonance. This idea offers insight to both explanation of political extremism among politically-oriented football subcultures and intervention for political extremism.

Another consequence of cognitive dissonance is that if one goes through extreme measures with the group or to join the group, this might further decrease dissonance.¹⁸⁴ Going through the rough process to get into the group causes people's cognition to match the effort they put in to join it: people can unconsciously focus “on whatever might be good or interesting about the group and [blind] themselves to [the group’s] prominent negatives.”¹⁸⁵ Namely, if one puts a large amount of energy or effort into joining a group, they are likely to justify and continue their membership in it.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Robert Kurzban and C. Athena Aktipis, “Modularity and the Social Mind: Are Psychologists Too Self-ish?” *Pers Soc Psychol Rev* 11, no. 131 (2007): 131-149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868306294906>.

¹⁸³ Kurzban et al., “Modularity and the Social Mind,” 139.

¹⁸⁴ Aronson and Tavis, “The Role of Cognitive Dissonance.”

¹⁸⁵ Aronson and Tavis, “The Role of Cognitive Dissonance.”

¹⁸⁶ Aronson and Tavis, “The Role of Cognitive Dissonance.”

Another psychological phenomena to consider when looking at football fans on a more individual-level is one's individual attributes. One can ask, why are *these specific individuals attracted to this specific subculture*? Perhaps the answer lies in personality. Interestingly, a 2020 study by Janko Međedović and Uroš Kovačević explored Serbian football fans' individual characteristics and found that football fans (N=128) had higher scores in all criminal attitude scales that the researchers utilized, including a Violence Scale, Entitlement Scale, Antisocial Intent scale, and Associates Scale, in addition to higher scores on the trait sadism than the control group (N=118).¹⁸⁷ The study found that membership in a football fan group was the most important predictor of the four measures of criminal behavior.¹⁸⁸ According to Međedović and Kovačević, “this means that football fans were more prone to engage in physical violence, antisocial behavior and delinquency, they are centered on their own interests, and reported a higher frequency of criminal peers, than the participants in the control group.”¹⁸⁹ While more research is needed, this study lays the groundwork for the fascinating idea that football fans—especially those with more violent tendencies, like hooligans—have a different personality profile than the general population. It is still highly important to note that behavior is often a result of both nature and nurture, so it is possible that fans' behavior results from the presence of their subculture *and* their intrinsic personality profiles.

At the group level, the idea of cohesiveness provides valuable insights. Football—perhaps sports overall—revolves around the idea of unity. The team needs to work together to score goals and the fans need to work together to show large-scale support for their team, often with the goal of surpassing other fans' support for their respective team. Overall,

¹⁸⁷ Janko Međedović and Uroš Kovačević, “Sadism as a Key Dark Trait in the Link Between Football Fandom and Criminal Attitudes,” *Journal of Individual Differences* 42, no. 1 (January 2021): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000325>.

¹⁸⁸ Međedović and Kovačević, “Sadism as a Key Dark Trait.”

¹⁸⁹ Međedović and Kovačević, “Sadism as a Key Dark Trait.”

group cohesiveness affects both how the group is structured and how exactly the group functions, with high cohesiveness having both positive and negative implications.¹⁹⁰ For example, group cohesion can have multiple benefits, such as cohesive groups having an ability to more effectively accomplish goals than non-cohesive groups.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, high-cohesiveness can also result in lower quality decision making. This is possibly because the tighter-knit a group becomes, the less individual members are willing to interrupt the group's harmony.¹⁹² Research also shows that in high stress situations, group cohesiveness often increases.¹⁹³ Football games can be high stress situations, with tense wins and losses and the perception of other fans as the "enemy"; it is therefore unsurprising that one might see both poor decision making and the successful accomplishing of (negative and positive) goals among football fan subcultures, who often have a unified—or cohesive—identity. Similarly, the concept of identity fusion—or the feeling of "oneness" that fans can feel with their teams—is also interesting here.¹⁹⁴ Fusion to a football club is "associated with lifelong loyalty to the club" and violence towards fans of other teams. This fusion can also result in extreme behaviors from fans, including a willingness to die for one's fellow fans, further highlighting the implications of fans' cohesiveness.¹⁹⁵

Research also points to the physiological basis of the relationship between football attendance and group cohesion. Newson et al.'s study found that football spectators had elevated levels of cortisol—or the stress hormone—especially during a loss, and that cortisol increases were highest in participants with the highest level of fandom, highlighting football's potential to

¹⁹⁰ Paul't Hart, "Irving L. Janis' Victims of Groupthink," *Political Psychology* 12, No. 2 (June 1991): 252.

¹⁹¹ Hart, "Victims of Groupthink," 253.

¹⁹² Hart, "Victims of Groupthink," 254.

¹⁹³ Hart, "Victims of Groupthink," 253-254.

¹⁹⁴ Newson, Martha, Victor Shiramizu, Michael Buhrmester, Wallisen Hattori, Jonathan Jong, Emilia Yamamoto, and Harvey Whitehouse. "Devoted Fans Release More Cortisol When Watching Live football Matches." Wiley Online Library. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, February 5, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/smi.2924>.

¹⁹⁵ Newson et al.

especially arouse those who strongly support a specific football team.¹⁹⁶ This study found that it is this very stress that contributes to the formation of alliances.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the physiological responses that naturally result from football games can contribute to a degree of fandom. This shows how football is a fruitful opportunity for forming social bonds, which can again, contribute to poorer or more successful decision making and execution. In the similar vein of physiological responses, the presence of alcohol—which Davidson notes as particularly unique to German football—also has been associated with public disorder like football hooliganism and vandalism because fans' inhibitions decrease when they drink.¹⁹⁸

Another psychological phenomena on the group-level to consider is the concept of groupthink, or decision making as a group, rather than through individual input and decisions. It is vital to note that groupthink does not occur in all situations involving decision making among a group; rather, there are antecedent conditions that can result in it and other psychological consequences.¹⁹⁹ This can be directly applied to the behavior of football fans at the group level. In the diagram below—which highlights a wide variety of antecedent conditions that, in conjunction with one another, can result in strong observable consequences—hooligans and ultras groups especially fall under the antecedent categories of B-1-4 (“Homogeneity of Members’ Social Background and Ideology”) and B-2-1 (“High Stress from External Threats With Low Hope of a Better Solution Than the Leader’s”). This is in addition fans already being an already cohesive group meeting other antecedent conditions. In regards to the B-1 classification of antecedent conditions of groupthink, hooligans and ultras tend to have a similar ideological and social background, like a similar political-orientation and a shared working-class

¹⁹⁶ Newson et al.

¹⁹⁷ Newson et al.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Marsh et al., “Football Violence and Alcohol,” Social Issues Research Centre, last modified 1996, <http://www.sirc.org/publik/fvalcohol.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Hart, “Victims of Groupthink,” 258.

background. In regards to the B-2 classification of antecedent conditions, sports games can already be high stress environments, and the presence of rival teams and fans presents an additional external threat, and the best solution to which seems to come from those who have a more leadership role among the group. This can result in a myriad of consequences, that, in simplification, can result in a groupthink (concurrency) tendency.

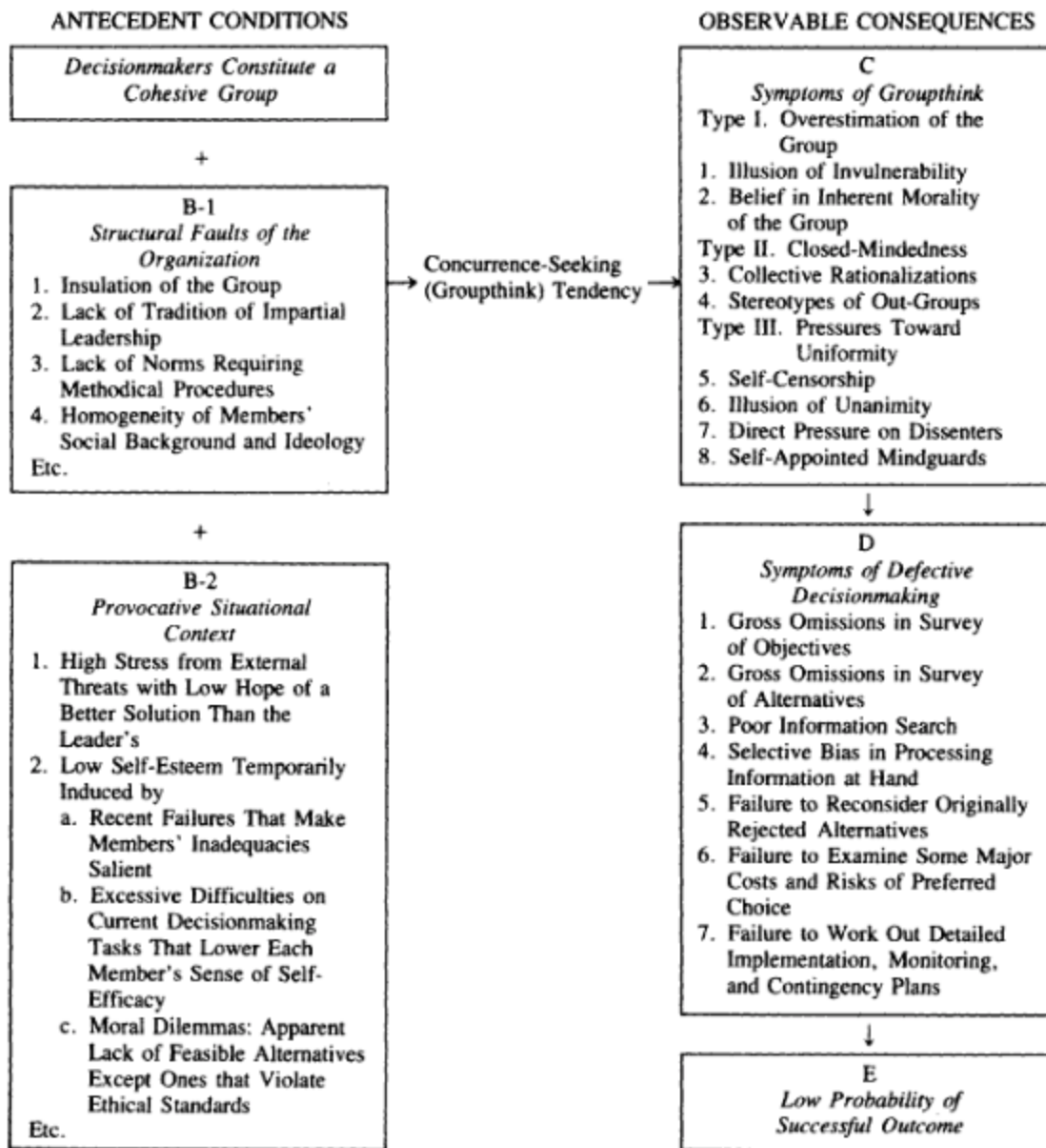


Fig. 1 Groupthink theory: A model. Source: Janis, J. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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²⁰⁰ Hart, "Victims of Groupthink," 254.

Another psychological phenomena that likely occurs among football fans at the group-level is the concept of risky shift.²⁰¹ Decision making can be an interactive process, and when decisions are made in a group, they might not equal the average of the individuals when a “risky dimension” of the decision is involved.²⁰² That is, people's decisions can “become more extreme and risky when acting as part of a group,” resulting in group decisions that “are bolder,” “more adventurous,” and high-risk.²⁰³ On the other hand, sometimes decision making at the group-level can result in decisions that are more conservative than those at the individual level, resulting in a cautious shift.²⁰⁴ One of the determinants of whether the group will have a cautious shift or a risky shift depends on “the group's initial tendency toward risk.”²⁰⁵ Risky shift overall reflects the main conclusion of this section: fans’ individual personality profile and experiences—like cognitive dissonance—and being a part of a highly cohesive group can contribute to fans’ seemingly irrational behavior.²⁰⁶

Football as a Means for Political Expression and Mobilization

The structure of ultras groups has led to a proliferation of supporter-led activism in Germany’s stadiums. Banners and choreo would send whatever message was important to them that week, not just in the stadium, but around the world, meaning that any choreography produced by The Unity, according to Jonas Gabler, was on TV in the best time...I think that this is one of the things that is so fascinating for young people that you have such big visibility.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Carrie L. Wyland, “Risky Shift,” *Encyclopedia of social psychology* 1 (2007): 761.

²⁰² Wyland, “Risky Shift.”

²⁰³ Wyland, “Risky Shift.”

²⁰⁴ Wyland, “Risky Shift.”

²⁰⁵ Wyland, “Risky Shift.”

²⁰⁶ This underscores the nature *and* nurture factors of fans’ behavior.

²⁰⁷ Montague, *1312*, 213.

As Montague highlights in the above quote, one can see that throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, football has acted as a means for political expression, with both those on the far-left and far-right using football as an apparatus for organizing and disseminating political messages. A fundamental question remains: *why football?*

One answer is that football has the innate and unique feature that it is a highly visible sport with an accessible means of infiltration and dissemination. That is, football—on various levels—is broadcasted, can have hundreds or thousands of attendees, and can be attended by almost anyone, providing the opportunity for some to easily “harness a platform.”²⁰⁸ For instance, football is the most popular sport in Germany and worldwide. Germany notably has over 25,000 football clubs, some of which—like FC Bayern Munich and FC Schalke 04—boast membership in the hundreds of thousands.²⁰⁹ The German Football Association (*Deutscher Fussball-Bund*, or DFB) has over 6.8 million members as of 2020, which makes it “one of the biggest social networks in Germany.”²¹⁰ This high visibility means that football is inherently influential, and therefore, inherently highly political. Montague underscores this point: “It’s crazy to think that politics have nothing to do with football because it has everything to do with it. There are eighty thousand people here right now.”²¹¹ One can see through the fact that from St. Pauli to FC Energie Cottbus and non-politically-oriented clubs, many German teams also have fans worldwide, meaning that teams’ games and fans’ actions can have international influence. For example, the East River Pirates are a St. Pauli supporters club based in New York City, who gather to watch St. Pauli games and follow a similar political culture as St. Pauli, such as by

²⁰⁸ Montague, *1312*, 213.

²⁰⁹ Evgeniya Koptuyug, “Number of members of the first Bundesliga football clubs as of March 2021,” Statista, last modified March 23, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/595935/german-bundesliga-clubs-member-numbers/>.

²¹⁰ “Member Statistics,” Members, Deutscher Fussball-Bund, last modified February 26, 2016. <https://www.dfb.de/en/about-dfb/members/>.

²¹¹ Montague, *1312*, 213.

raising money for the Immigrant Defense Project initiative.²¹² What originally started as an obscure alternative left-wing fan base for St. Pauli has enabled the team to gain cult status and a worldwide (political) influence.



East River Pirates—a St. Pauli fan club based in New York City—pose for a photo with members of St. Pauli, wearing St. Pauli tee shirts and holding a St. Pauli rainbow flag.²¹³

Because of football’s popularity, it is also highly covered by the media; one can easily watch football on television and read about football game results in magazines and newspapers. For example, the most popular newspaper in Germany *Bild* has an entire section dedicated to (German) football that it updates daily. Media coverage—albeit controversial because of the negative light it sometimes puts fans in, which results in the perpetuation of stereotypes—also covers the actions of football fans across Germany, in addition to social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter also contributing to the visibility of football.

²¹² “EAST RIVER PIRATES,” FC St. Pauli New York, last modified August 7, 2020, <http://www.fcstpaulinyc.com>.

²¹³ East River Pirates (@eastriverpirates), “This Weekend Last Year We Got to Share a Slice of Brooklyn with Our Favorite Team,” Instagram photo, May 22, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAfbveoHEma/>.

Viewers can also stream games from sports sites, such as ESPN, or watch playbacks from games on sources like YouTube. The prevalence of media and an interest in fans' behavior from both fellow fans and outsiders also means that if fans' actions occur outside of the stadium—such as through a protest on the street—media will likely capture and publicize it, overall contributing to the political power of football (fans) and the dissemination of ideas through football. Montague underscores how the ultras appreciate this media coverage: “The ultras...crave exposure. And power.”²¹⁴ To fans, limelight can mean power and therefore political influence.

In conjunction with media coverage, the physical shape of football fields also means that attendees usually have a 180 degree view and can see most other attendees, increasing their ability to view what is occurring at football games. Typically, one can glance left and right to see what fellow fans are doing or glance across the field to similarly see what fans for the opposing team are doing. The shape of football fields also means that during live streams or playbacks of the games, the fans and their displayed political messages can be highly visible because it is challenging to capture the game without capturing the fans in the background. This means that even if the person streaming the game did not intend to publicize political messages, by broadcasting the fans and their political messages in the background of the game, media sources and streamers are inadvertently spreading fans' political messages. The photo below shows a screencap of a 2020 game between Babelsberg 03 and FC Energie Cottbus, during which Babelsberg fans' politically-oriented banners—like Babelsberg's “against HOMOPHOBIA” (*gegen HOMOPHOBIE*) banner—can be seen in the background. However, spreading an ideology was not the purpose of the stream.

²¹⁴ Raphael Honigstein, “Are German fans really turning against the beautiful game?” *The Guardian*, last modified April 7, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2008/apr/07/europeanfootball.sport2>.; But it is important to remember that fans often have a complicated relationship with the media.



In a YouTube playback of a 2020 FC Energie Cottbus versus Babelsberg 03 game, some of Babelsberg's left-wing banners can be seen in the background of the stream of the match.²¹⁵

The fact that football games are considered entertaining also plays a role in why football is used for political organization and disseminating political messages. For politically-oriented fans, football can mean taking something serious—like racism and economic struggle—and addressing these darker issues through a lighter means. Davidson notes how this concept applies to St. Pauli, such as during one of their protests against neo-Nazi and hooligan attacks: “St. Pauli [uses] guerilla tactics of having ‘fun’ to get their message across.”²¹⁶

Because football arguably has the primary purpose of entertainment, disseminating political messages at football games helps these political messages be unavoidable. Consider how football protests or demonstrations compare and contrast to different types of non-sports related demonstrations. A typical political demonstration—which primarily has a political or ideological purpose—can often be avoidable to those who want to avoid it. That is, those who,

²¹⁵ fcenergiety, “SV Babelsberg 03 vs. FC Energie Cottbus 0:1 | 6. Spieltag Regionalliga Nordost,” YouTube, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8tTmFWCzKw>.

²¹⁶ Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 97.

for example, do not want to hear pro-refugee messages can usually avoid going to a pro-refugee demonstration. At the same time, there are also certain types of protests that are more “interrupting.” For example, protestors can plan a sit-in protest or a protest blocking a major street for the purpose of being both interrupting and unavoidable. Politics channeled through football are often more similar to the latter type of protest. Namely, those going to football matches do not always intend to see politically-oriented messages when they go; the majority of those going to football games go for the sport—for the *entertainment*—and because football is confined to a limited space and highly visible, fans’ political messages can become unavoidable and interrupting to other (non-subculturalist) attendees.

Another reason that politically-oriented messages can be easily disseminated at football games is that the cost to attend a German football game is considerably inexpensive, and as a result, often accessible. Bundesliga ticket prices are some of the cheapest football tickets in Europe,²¹⁷ and some teams, such as Babelsberg 03, offer free entrance to games after the first half.²¹⁸ However, the fact that attending football games do have a price—whereas attending street demonstrations is typically free—means that one could consider football as less accessible than other means of political expression. While this is a valid point, attending football games offers a 2-in-1 deal: one is able to experience entertainment *and* participate in political expression, meaning that one’s entertainment budget, free time, and socializing is serving multiple functions.

Another point to consider is that football can also act as an extension of the community it represents, with fans’ expressed political views representing the issues and voting trends of a football team’s community. For instance, Chemnitzer and Cottbus fans are associated with

²¹⁷ Montague, *1312*, 203.

²¹⁸ “Bundesliga Tickets in 2019/20,” Bundesliga, last modified 2019, <https://www.bundesliga.com/en/bundesliga/news/tickets-2019-20-bayern-munich-borussia-dortmund-schalke-rb-leipzig-5342>.

right-wing views, and one can see higher rates of voting for the AfD in these East German cities.²¹⁹ Overall, there is a triad of representation in football, with the fans, team, and city representing and reflecting one another. Teams' mixed fan base—like Energie Cottbus fans—can also illustrate political juxtapositions in some German cities. That is, some cities with high amounts of far-right activity additionally often have high amounts of far-left activity, and this is represented in fans' clashing activity. This again highlights how right-wing extremism is often a causal agent for left-wing extremism. In other words, the right-wing extremists in these cities have helped those on the left gain traction as a defense against the right.

Overall, football features several innate characteristics that make it ripe for political organization and dissemination:

- The visibility of football: due to its popularity, football is highly covered by a wide variety of media sources. This high coverage results in the media—sometimes inadvertently—sharing politically-based fans' fringe rhetoric. The shape of the football field also means that attendees tend to have an unobstructed view of other fans and attendees.
- The fun side of football: football—being a source of entertainment—can help fans address dark issues in a lighter environment, in addition to helping make fans' politically-oriented messages unavoidable to game attendees who primarily come for the entertainment.
- The affordability of football: the low prices of football tickets—especially in Germany—means that a wider range of people are able to attend football games.

²¹⁹ “German elections 2017: full results,” The Guardian, last modified September 25, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/sep/24/german-elections-2017-latest-results-live-merkel-bundestag-afd>.

The 2-in-1 function of football tickets can also allow one to experience entertainment *and* participate in or view fans' political demonstrations.

- The psychological phenomena that occur through football: psychological phenomena at the individual- and group-level can occur through football, serving as factors that contribute to fans' unique and sometimes dangerous behavior.
- Football as an extension of the community: there is a triad of representation in football between the fans, team, and city. Overall, fans' political orientation often reflects the voting patterns of their community.

However, while football is highly visible and the ultras scene in Germany is more “open to journalists and academic researchers” in comparison to other places like Eastern Europe,²²⁰ this does not mean that the fans are necessarily an open book. Politically-oriented fans often embrace a juxtaposition of both secrecy and bold display. For example, some Babelsberg 03 ultras do not allow journalists to ride on the buses with them when returning home from away games.²²¹ Montague experienced this secrecy when researching for his book on football fan culture after he got in trouble for riding on the bus with the Babelsberg Filmstadt Inferno ultras and was placed in “solitary confinement” at the front of the bus. Montague felt like an outsider—or a non-subculturalist—and as if he was being equated to a threat: “The capo²²² believed me to be as much an enemy as the neo-Nazis they fought week in week out.”²²³ Another example of fans' wariness of journalists and researchers can be seen in regards to the reaction of fan researcher Martin Thein being outed as an alleged agent for the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, or *Verfassungsschutz*) after a

²²⁰ Montague, *1312*, 214.

²²¹ Montague, *1312*, 227.

²²² A leading ultras.

²²³ Montague, *1312*, 228.

2014 story breaking out in the news source Der Spiegel.²²⁴ After these allegations, there was an uproar from fans, likely because fans' wariness of outsiders and the potential of "spying" can be due to the fact that football fans can have a tendency to do things that are illegal—or on the verge of illegal—or taboo, and football is a platform for display, viewing, *and* secrecy. Namely, some aspects of the politically-oriented football fan subculture involves purposely putting on a public display, like through banners with bold, and clear messages, while other parts of the politically-oriented football fan subcultures are meant to be kept more private. Right-wing hooligans especially maintain an element of secrecy, as they tend to have more of an orientation towards violent, illegal, and taboo actions.

All in all, using football as a means for political expression allows politically-oriented football fan subcultures in Germany to take advantage of the innate and unique qualities of German football. However, fans' expressions are not without societal and legal constraints. Germany's societal taboos and the country's laws and sport policies play a large role in shaping and helping viewers interpret politically-based fans' rhetoric through their cultural objects, resulting in fans fluctuating between bold expression and secrecy.

Introduction to Laws and Policies of Interest

Fan culture, which is largely ultras-culture, is a kind of youth culture, and every youth culture brings with it an element of anarchy, which rises up against the establishment. The DFB and DFL will never be able to change that even if they try.²²⁵

Cultural studies largely involves a study of expression.²²⁶ However, many cultural scholars tend to gloss over the fact that legal and policy frameworks are strong contributors to how ideas are expressed in a given culture. Bernd Sauttter—spokesman for the fan culture

²²⁴ Montague, 1312, 214.

²²⁵ Klein, "Discontent over."

²²⁶ Such as how people in a given culture communicate with one another.

preservation “FC Fairplay” initiative—underscores in the above quote how it is in the nature of the football fan cultures to be a thorn in the establishment, which includes the DFB and DFL (*Deutsche Fußball Liga*, or “German Football League”).²²⁷ It is therefore essential to understand laws and policies in Germany which support or oppose left-wing and right-efforts to understand how politically-oriented German football fans rise “up against” them.

When analyzing right-wing fans’ politically-oriented expressions—such as Chemnitzer fans chanting antisemitic tropes at games—one is looking at fringe, right-wing extremist sentiments in a country with some of the strongest hate speech regulations in the west.²²⁸ Part of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung*-related efforts in Germany have involved codifying a stronger resistance to (expressed) hate and discrimination with the goal of preventing future atrocities and to clean up Germany’s international image. According to professor of law Robert A. Kahn, “when societies are forced to choose between tolerating extremist speech and protecting the national image from charges of intolerance, the latter will generally be chosen,” highlighting the relationship between law and national image. Well-known for crimes against humanity during the Nazi regime, Germany *often* seeks ways to prevent being seen as Nazis.²²⁹

One section of German laws particularly relevant to Germany cleaning up their national image is Germany’s introduction of hate speech laws, which again, are some of the strictest hate speech laws in the west. In addition to the European Human Rights Convention weakening freedom of speech, Germany’s codified protection of “personal honor” has made it essentially illegal for a wide variety of hate speech to be expressed. Specifically, Article 5 of Germany’s

²²⁷ Klein, “Discontent over.”

²²⁸ Robert Kahn, “Cross-Burning, Holocaust Denial, and the Development of Hate Speech Law in the United States and Germany,” *University of Detroit Mercy law review*, 83 (December 2005): 163–194.; Mark Scott and Janosch Delcker, “

Free speech vs. censorship in Germany,” Politico, last modified January 4, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-hate-speech-netzdg-facebook-youtube-google-twitter-free-speech/>.

²²⁹ Kahn, “Cross-Burning.”

Basic Law states that “everyone has the right to express and disseminate his opinion in word, writing, and image and to be freely informed from generally accessible sources,” but that “this right finds its barriers in the provisions of the general laws, the legal provisions for the protection of the youth and in the right of personal honor.”²³⁰ Personal honor specifically regards one’s dignity or reputation.

In a similar vein, Section 130 of the German Criminal Code has been used to convict many right-wing leaders of using hate speech. Through Section 130, one can be subjected to up to five years in prison for inciting “hatred against a national, racial, religious group or a group defined by their ethnic origin,” calling “for violent or arbitrary measures against them,” or for violating “the human dignity of others by insulting, maliciously maligning or defaming one of the aforementioned groups.”²³¹ These restrictions are also not limited to spoken hate.

Disseminating material which “incites hatred,” “calls for violent or arbitrary measures,” or “attacks the human dignity” against one of the aforementioned groups, can incur a penalty of up to three year imprisonment or a fine.²³² Similarly, Section 131 of German Criminal Code makes it an offense to disseminate material which “glorifies” or “downplays” inhumane acts of violence.²³³

Often, those in Germany are getting in legal trouble for the dissemination of Nazi-related images, symbols, and messages, but laws and policies can paint a picture of *political extremism* on both sides of the political spectrum being legally forbidden. Namely, politically extreme organizations are often referred to as unconstitutional because they are considered to be a threat to the German democracy; this unconstitutionality provides a basis for making these

²³⁰ Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*, Article 5.

²³¹ Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, *German Criminal Code*, Section 130.

²³² Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, *German Criminal Code*, Section 130.

²³³ Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, *German Criminal Code*, Section 130.

organizations and their associations illegal. For example, under Section 86a of the German Criminal Code symbols of “unconstitutional organizations” not used in art, science, research, or teaching, are outlawed.²³⁴ Unconstitutional organizations often include certain Nazi, Communist, and Islamic extremist symbols, affecting their “symbols” like flags, slogans, forms of greetings, among other cultural objects and actions. Often, laws do not name specific symbols that are banned; that is, an exhaustive list of banned symbols does not exist and what is not allowed is sometimes up to interpretation, especially if a modified symbol is being analyzed. It is also important to note that context is highly important in regards to conviction. For example, the swastika is outlawed when it is used in regards to völkish ideology—or an ideology revolving around an idea of German superiority—but when the swastika is used as a symbol of religious faith, it is legally allowed.

²³⁴ Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, *German Criminal Code*, Section 86.



Before the Nazis' appropriation of it, cultures around the world have been using the swastika as a cultural and religious symbol for thousands of years.²³⁵

Passed in 2017, Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) also helps codify against hate speech, specifically in the realm of online.²³⁶ This law subjects most social media platforms and other profit-making third-party content providers through which users can provide content to fines of up to fifty million euros if they do not remove "obviously illegal speech" in the limits of twenty-four hours of it being reported.²³⁷ Although there are certain provider exceptions under the law, NetzDG applies to some of the most popular content providers, including Facebook and Twitter.²³⁸ "Unlawful content" refers to almost two dozen sections of the

²³⁵ Mukti Jain Campion, "How the world loved the swastika - until Hitler stole it," British Broadcasting Corporation, last modified October 23, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29644591>.

²³⁶ Center for Democracy & Technology, "Overview of the NetzDG Network Enforcement Law." Center for Democracy and Technology, July 17, 2017, <https://cdt.org/insights/overview-of-the-netzdg-network-enforcement-law/>.

²³⁷ Center for Democracy & Technology, "Overview of the NetzDG."

²³⁸ Center for Democracy & Technology, "Overview of the NetzDG."

German Criminal Code, including to content which disseminates “depictions of violence” and “incites hatred.”²³⁹ The NetzDG law also highlights how Germany’s anti-discrimination laws extend to various facets and are continuously being implemented to adjust to how society changes, including with an emphasis on hate speech circulated through technology.

The aforementioned laws in Germany’s Basic Law and Criminal Code make it clear that Germany is attempting to codify against hate speech through laws and policies which disproportionately affect the far-right rather than far-left because of the far-right’s predilection for hate. Laws, however, are not the only ordinances that shape the ways that far-left and far-right football fans in Germany express their political-orientation. The DFB and DFL are also able to have a large impact on the action of fans—especially at the stadium—through the sport policies that they implement. Throughout the years, the DFB, DFL, along with other European policy-making bodies, have passed regulations akin to Germany’s hate speech laws, but more specific to the playing field and football fans’ expressions. Examples of these documents and the bodies that have implemented them are as follows:

- 2008: The “Resolution on the white paper on sport” was implemented between the member states, European Parliament, and sport organizations. This measure invited member states to take strict measures to combat racism and discrimination in sport.²⁴⁰
- 2009: The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) executive committee approved guidelines to help referees deal with racist actions in stadiums. Through these guidelines, referees can even suspend a match if fans are targeting a player with racist insults.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Center for Democracy & Technology, “Overview of the NetzDG.”

²⁴⁰ “European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2008 on the White Paper on Sport,” European Parliament, text adopted May 8, 2008,

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0198+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

²⁴¹ “Empowering Referees to Act against Racism: UEFA’s Three-Step Procedure,” Union of European Football Associations, last modified October 15, 2019,

- 2012: The “Resolution on the European dimension in sport” was implemented after Member States were called upon by the European Parliament to create a legal basis for banning “violent and discriminating fans from stadiums in a coordinated approach with the sport federations.”²⁴²
- 2017: The European Parliament adopted the legally non-binding report “Integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity,” which condemns discrimination in sport and calls for measures to prevent discrimination. This document also emphasizes the importance for sport to integrate refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, and for amateur sport especially to prevent and combat radicalization.²⁴³

In addition to these specific documents that outline policies that restrict right-wing extremism, the DFB and DFL also promote anti-discrimination efforts in sport through positive reinforcement. An example of this is the DFB’s “Julius Hirsch Prize,” which is awarded to initiatives and individuals who show a strong commitment to anti-discrimination efforts in the realm of football.²⁴⁴ The award commemorates Julius Hirsch, who was a Jewish German national football player excluded from his club and murdered at the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943.²⁴⁵ Similarly, in 2014, the DFL called for the “Pool for the promotion of innovative football and fan culture,” which makes 500,000 euros available each season for promoting “activities for tolerance and strengthening the commitment to civil society.”²⁴⁶ An example of this is the DFL supporting the Centre for Democratic Culture, which promotes initiatives that challenge

<https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/about-uefa/news/0256-0f8e70d1f5fd-c982ef234981-1000—empowering-referees-to-act-against-racism-uefa-s-three-step-pro/>

²⁴² “European Sport Policy,” Deutscher Fußball-Bund and Deutsche Fußball Liga, published October, 2019, https://www.dfb.de/fileadmin/_dfbdam/214109-DFB-DFL_EU-Sport-Policy_Oct2019.pdf, 29.

²⁴³ “European Sport Policy,” 13.

²⁴⁴ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

²⁴⁵ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

²⁴⁶ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

right-wing extremism.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, the DFL has regularly held “REX days,” during which policymakers focus on “strategies against Right-wing extremism and discrimination in football” for fans, security personnel, event managers, and fan projects, showing the DFL’s involvement in football broadly, including in the fan culture.²⁴⁸

According to the DFB, funding is provided to socio-educational work “in a football environment” at over 59 locations, with funding provided from the DFB or DFL—depending on what the league the clubs are in—and the public sector. During the 2017/2018 season, the DFB and DFL, for example, together invested about 6.6 million euros in fan projects. Vital to note, the youth academies run by the clubs affiliated with the DFL must “demonstrate that they have organised action days and information campaigns against racism and discrimination covering all age groups” for the annual licensing and approval procedure. Therefore, teams are encouraged by both honorary awards and monetary support to promote anti-discrimination activities through certaining policies, such as those from the DFB and DFL. Left-wing fans—whose antifascist activities are often aimed at fighting the rising tide of xenophobia—are the primary beneficiaries of these positive reinforcements.

This is not to say that the DFB and DFL get along perfectly well with left-wing fans. After the 1985 Heysel stadium disaster—when a human stampede occurred at a British football game, killing 39 and injuring 600 attendees—the Council of Europe adopted the “Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events,” which is focused on improving cooperation between police forces and various football clubs and associations on an international scale.²⁴⁹ Similarly, in 2002, the Council of Ministers of the EU agreed on stronger sport safety

²⁴⁷ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

²⁴⁸ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

²⁴⁹ “European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches,” Council of Europe, entered into force November 1, 2011, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/120>.

cooperations between Member States and in 2006, the Austrian government submitted an initiative to the Council of Ministers to improve information exchange between police services with the purpose of increasing safety at sport events.²⁵⁰ In 2016, the Council of Europe adopted the revised “Convention on an integrated safety, security and service approach at football matches and other sports events”—or Treaty 218—and in 2016, the Council of Ministers approved the updated “EU Football Handbook,” which includes suggestions for international police cooperation and measures to prevent violence.²⁵¹ Under Treaty 218, public and private signatories—from fan organizations to police—were called upon to cooperate in preparing and holding football matches, including ensuring that the infrastructure of stadiums complies with national and international standards. The signatory states also agree to strengthen international police work, in addition to creating the National Football Information Points (NFIP), which includes points of contact in relation to sport-related safety, such as Germany’s Central Information Center for Sports Operations (*Zentrale Informationsstelle Sporteinsätze*, or *ZIS*), which monitors violent fans, like hooligans.²⁵² Germany has yet to sign Treaty 218, but countries that German football teams play against have signed it, and Germany is included on the NFIP, highlighting the coordinated European effort to monitor football fans.²⁵³

Furthermore, in 2017, the European Parliament adopted the legally non-binding “Integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity,” which again, focuses on game safety broadly, from physical safety to corruption in sport. Fans’ role in sport

²⁵⁰ “European Sport Policy,” 30.

²⁵¹ “Council Resolution concerning an updated handbook with recommendations for international police cooperation and measures to prevent and control violence and disturbances in connection with football matches with an international dimension, in which at least one Member State is involved (‘EU Football Handbook’),” EUR-Lex, implemented November 11, 2016, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32016G1129%2801%29>.

²⁵² “European Sport Policy,” 30.; “List of national football information points (NFIPs),” EUR-Lex, last modified November 8, 2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52013XG1108%2802%29>.

²⁵³ “Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 218,” Council of Europe, last modified April 10, 2021, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/218/signatures?desktop=true>.

integrity is also mentioned explicitly in the document: the document states that fans are necessary in the fight against corruption in sport.²⁵⁴ This document also explicitly mentions negative effects of hooliganism: “any act of violence, hooliganism and discrimination directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group, whether in an amateur or a professional sport, tarnishes its image and discourages spectators from attending sport events...”²⁵⁵ Overall, the “Integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity” highlights several key factors:

- The establishment is aware of various aspects of fan culture.
- The establishment understands that fan culture—especially hooliganism—can be dangerous.
- The establishment sees implementing policies as a way to address the potential dangerous implications of football fan culture.

The “Integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity” also repeats the international fight against racism in sport, condemning “all forms of discrimination and violence in sport, both on and off the field,” and underlines “the need to prevent such behaviour at all levels, to improve the reporting and monitoring of such incidents and to promote core values such as respect, friendship, tolerance and fair play” because “sports organisations abiding by high standards of good governance are better equipped to promote the societal role of sports and to fight racism, discrimination and violence...”²⁵⁶ The document also mentions the fight against (right-wing) radicalization and the promotion of left-wing goals, stating that the European Parliament:

²⁵⁴ “European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2017 on an integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity,” EUR-Lex, last modified February 2, 2017, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017IP0012>.

²⁵⁵ “European Parliament resolution.”

²⁵⁶ “European Parliament resolution.”

- “recognises the importance of grassroots sports in preventing and fighting radicalisation, and encourages and supports initiatives in this respect”
- “welcomes two pilot projects adopted by the European Parliament: ‘Sport as a tool for integration and social inclusion of the refugees’ and ‘Monitoring and coaching through sports of youngsters at risk of radicalisation’”

Overall, policy-making bodies that make policies affecting German football and football fans like the DFB and DFL often find eliminating discrimination an integral part of their statutes, making it clear that they “fully supports European initiatives against racism and discrimination.”²⁵⁷ Anti-right-wing extremism statutes are often explicit, such as with the DFB stating that its clubs and member associations are supported in “implementing the recommendations for action against right-wing extremism in sport”; therefore, these major sport policy-making bodies are not simply against political extremism in sport as a whole, but *right-wing* extremism specifically.²⁵⁸ This means that the German and European establishments seek to primarily prevent and punish one side of political extremism in a de jure sense. This is not to say that right-wing extremism does not flourish in Germany and in German football; one can see how PEGIDA and the AfD’s have gained traction in recent years and how right-wing fans will openly chant racial slurs. However, on paper, regulatory bodies in Germany outline policies for preventing and repressing right-wing extremism and encouraging efforts to combat discrimination.

In conjunction with these laws and policies, the German government has also trained individuals—such as law enforcement and other investigative bodies—to be trained to recognize far-right symbols. More recent clampdowns on far-right symbolism have resulted to a “change in

²⁵⁷ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

²⁵⁸ “European Sport Policy,” 29.

the neo-Nazi uniform”;²⁵⁹ therefore, similar to other politically-oriented subcultures in Germany, like the punks and skinheads, the recognition of these political symbols has pushed Germany’s politically-oriented football fan subcultures to ensure that their styles, symbols, and messages are in flux to avoid recognition (and then punishment) from the establishment. This is the basis of politically-oriented fans’ game-playing.

At face value, the establishment’s efforts to quash right-wing extremism are in a de jure sense promoting left-wing efforts; however, this does not paint the entire picture of what the establishment supports.²⁶⁰ Left-wing ideology encapsulates more than fighting discrimination of marginalized groups. Broadly, left-wing values—including those promoted by Die Linke—encourage anti-capitalism efforts. In the realm of football, left-wing football fans continuously fight to avoid the increasing commercialization and privatization of the game to keep it a game of the people, mirroring left-wing anti-capitalism efforts. Fans are continuously at odds with policy-making bodies over commercialization within the arena, including increased advertisements in stadiums, corporate-sponsored shows at halftime, and corporate-sponsored corner kicks and yellow or red cards.²⁶¹ Parts of sport policies even support the commercialization of sport, seeing it as a necessity. For example, the European Parliament’s “Resolution on the white paper on sport” states that “in order to survive...the majority of non-profit sports organisations need to raise revenues from some kind of commercial activity.”²⁶²

²⁵⁹ “Fashion labels worn by Europe's skinheads restore their reputation,” Deutsche Welle, last modified February 16, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/fashion-labels-worn-by-europes-skinheads-restore-their-reputation/a-5226933>.

²⁶⁰ Recall that the far-left party, Die Linke, has experienced ostracism from the other German political parties; this underscores how Germany is not a left-wing country with a left-wing government.

²⁶¹ Thomas Klein, “Discontent over commercialization grows among German football supporters: ‘The situation will escalate,’” Deutsche Welle, last modified August 8, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/discontent-over-commercialization-grows-among-german-football-supporters-the-situation-will-escalate/a-45307540>.

²⁶² “European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2008 on the White Paper on Sport,” European Parliament, adopted May 8, 2008, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0198+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

Thus, left-wing fans are not only functioning as a defense against the right, but as a defense against the establishment.



Tunisian's Club Africain fans display a large banner reading "CREATED BY THE POOR, STOLEN BY THE RICH," highlighting the increasing commercialization of football on an international scale.²⁶³

Fans make their discontent with the policymaking bodies promoting the commercialization of German football pronounced, with chants like "Shit DFB!" (*Scheiss DFB*).²⁶⁴ During some of these events, those in charge and the media will occasionally attempt to censor fans' grievances against the policy-making bodies. For example, technicians dismantled the TV cameras when fans at a Borussia Mönchengladbach vs. Leverkusen game shouted "Shit DFB!" over Monday night games. In 2017/2018, second tier games began to have Monday night

²⁶³ B/R Football (@brfootball), "Football: 'Created by the poor, stolen by the rich' Fans of Tunisia's Club Africain show off tifo before friendly against PSG," Twitter post, posted January 5, 2017, <https://twitter.com/brfootball/status/817004730337677312?lang=en>.

²⁶⁴ Klein, "Discontent over."

games, and many fans revolted: Monday night football meant that in order to go to their team's games, fans would have to take off work to travel to the games, which was not possible for many working-class fans. This instance further highlights the tension between working-class football fans and policy-making bodies.



Football teams' corporate sponsors are often displayed around football stadiums. Here, the athletic brand Puma is displayed at Borussia's Westfalenstadion.²⁶⁵

Although anti-capitalism is strongly a left-wing tenet, the fights against the commercialization of football “cut across ideological barriers,”²⁶⁶ especially because

²⁶⁵ Liam Apicella, “Half-Time Report: Borussia Dortmund leading Jurgen Klopp's Bundesliga farewell game,” SportsMole, last modified 2016, https://www.sportsmole.co.uk/football/borussia-dortmund/half-time-report/half-time-report-dortmund-leading-klopp-s-bundesliga-farewell-game_224418.html.

²⁶⁶ Montague, 1312, 213.

politically-oriented fans on the left and right both tend to be working-class. A lot of these anti-commercialization efforts are a small example of a larger effort from football fans “against modern football” (*Gegen den modernen Fußball*). Fans have also generalized this movement, comparing their feelings of restriction to Tibetan's lack of freedom, with Bayern Munich ultras displaying a placard at a game reading “In Tibet and here: freedom instead of a police state.”²⁶⁷ Overall, fans prefer to be separate from the commercialization that the establishment promotes; increased commercialization in football threatens the homespun culture of football fans, resulting in them feeling like their freedom to express is affected.

Therefore, while laws and policies in Germany explicitly and repeatedly codify against hate speech and discrimination—especially a racially or ethnically-based discrimination, which is a key facet of right-wing extremism—they do not reinforce all left-wing efforts. This shows that while the (fringe) expressions of right-wing football fans are often seen as more of an issue to the establishment, the expressions of left-wing German football fans also remain to be fringe rhetoric, albeit with certain aspects of left-wing ideology supported by German laws and policies.

Overall, laws and policies can shape fans’ expression, whether it be politically-based football fans limiting their rhetoric due to certain laws and policies, or football fans finding creative ways, such as cultural objects, to get around recognized restrictions. Because of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*/-*aufarbeitung* efforts, laws and policies also play a role in impacting how viewers interpret politically-based fans’ rhetoric through fans’ cultural objects and collective actions. The next section on banners and other 2-D cultural objects from football fans in Germany will tie together these ideas.

Chapter 1: Banners and Other 2-D Objects

²⁶⁷ Raphael Honigstein, “Are German fans really turning?”

When a far-right march, connected in part to the local hooligan scene, turned violent in the Eastern city of Chemnitz, Caillera raised a series of banners naming other cities where attacks had taken place. “The Nazi Mob Is Raging, And The State Cooperates. Germany, You’re Shit.”²⁶⁸

It is clear that politically-oriented fans in Germany express their political views through cultural objects and collective actions. One example of fans’ cultural expression is through the two-dimensional objects of banners and stickers, which fans display both within and outside of the stadium. Through using banners and stickers, fans are able to add special effects to their “organized protest”²⁶⁹ at football games that can affect the way that fans’ political expressions are perceived. Montague’s above quote illustrates the powerful effects that banners can have.

Common traits of many cultural objects of politically-based football fans—some more common on one side of the political spectrum—are the following:

- A do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic: whether elaborate or simple, this look makes it clear that the fans’ cultural objects were handmade with various mediums like spray paint and markers. This DIY aesthetic also makes it clear that the particular objects are original to the fans who made them.
- Or a consumeristic, repetitive aesthetic: while many of the fan objects are visibly handmade, some of the fan objects are sold in stores. A consumeristic aesthetic relates to an easier repetition of particular objects and styles, making these commercialized objects more prevalent at times.
- A loud and proud aesthetic: with large, capitalized, and contrasting letters, many of the fans’ cultural objects include straightforward and simple messages, often

²⁶⁸Montague, *1312*, 210.

²⁶⁹ Klein, “Discontent over.”

requiring little thinking from the viewers. This particular type of aesthetic is also associated with an aesthetic of aggressiveness, showing that some fans are accepting of or taking advantage of their aggressive reputation.

- Or an ambiguous aesthetic that requires “insider” knowledge to comprehend: some of fans’ cultural objects convey messages utilizing symbols and more unclear statements that provide a different meaning when the viewer has a particular pre-existing knowledge or if the message is shown in a specific context.
- An illustrative aesthetic: this is a tactic that “shows” rather than “tells,” such as by fans using drawings to get their message across. Artwork on the cultural objects can range from highly detailed and talented work, to more simple and unadorned work. Combining textual and visual elements can also be strategic, as it helps fans show *and* tell.

This section will further explore how these aesthetics are displayed on football fans’ banners and other 2D objects, including how far-left and far-right fans compare and contrast in their deployment of these aesthetics.

Comparing Far-Left and Far-Right Fans’ Banners

The banners at a SV Babelsberg 03 vs. SV Lichtenberg 47 game accentuates the specific qualities that left-wing banners can utilize to interrupt both sport and society, as Lichtenberg fans’ apolitical presentation provides a neutral ground for comparison. The first banner that will be analyzed is the Babelsberg ultras’ banner below, reading DOWN WITH THE PATRIARCHY (*ABSTIEG FÜR DAS PATRIARCHAT*). Although not exclusively a leftist ideal, overthrowing the patriarchy tends to be a left-wing concept, encapsulated by the idea that women are exploited by capitalism.



Babelsberg fans display a banner with the phrase DOWN WITH THE PATRIARCHY (*ABSTIEG FÜR DAS PATRIARCHAT*) at a 2020 SV Babelsberg 03 vs. SV Lichtenberg 47 game.²⁷⁰

One of the main features of this banner is its illustrative message. For instance, the background behind the forefront anti-patriarchy message shows over fifty diverse and likely female figures that were painted by fans. One can see that there is diversity in skin tone; albeit most of the figures being white—probably representative of the German population by race—there are some figures with varying degrees of darker skin tones. The female figures also display other diverse qualities, with several of the figures wearing hijabs and having varying degrees of gender presentation, ranging from a more feminine presentation to a more masculine presentation. The latter is likely painted to show an inclusive presentation of women. The figures in the background also show a diversity of flags that unite under the umbrella of left-wing

²⁷⁰ “SV Lichtenberg 47 (H),” Nulldrei Fotos, last modified 2020, https://03fotos.de/?page_id=3232.

philosophy, including the flag purple and black flag representing anarcha-feminism, the red flag representing socialism, and the blue, pink, and white flag representing transgender pride. With the use of an illustrative message, the left-wing Babelsberg fans who created and held up the banner are able to clearly depict their idealized society where diverse women are recognized and supported. Because the banner was clearly handmade, this banner is also distinct to the Babelsberg fans and unique to specifically what these fans want. Babelsberg fans' idealized society as depicted in the banner—which supports trans-inclusive feminism—can be contrasted against the AfD's ideologies, especially as the party publicly mocks gender-inclusive language.

Furthermore, the words of the banner are also displayed with a loud and proud aggressive aesthetic with confrontational tone. In addition to the banner featuring a demanding message, the bold display of the command in all caps stands out as the black words contrast with the banner's white background, further making the words “loud” to viewers. The boldness of the words also perpetuates the fans' confidence in their message, as large and capital letters show that fans do not have a desire to hide their words at times.

As seen with this Babelsberg banner, fans can use their handmade banners to encapsulate their activism through image and text. Interestingly, this banner seems to have almost nothing to actually do with football at face value; the banner could easily be displayed in a different context related to left-wing activism. Here, one thus sees Babelsberg fans taking advantage of the high visibility of football to display an almost purely progressive message.

This is a single example, but the photo below shows how prevalent the politically-based fans and their cultural objects are for some teams; this ubiquity also means that as aforementioned, the media will (sometimes inadvertently) capture fans' politically-oriented messages in the background of shots. For instance, it seems like this photo below is supposed to

focus on the players, but the many banners in the background—including the pro-feminism banner—are still quite salient in the shot.²⁷¹ Like the contrast of the letters and background, the black clothing of the fans also makes the colorful and large banners stick out, making it hard for attendees to avoid seeing them. This is a prime example of fans using cultural objects to “interrupt” the purely sport aspect of football games.



Babelsberg 03 fans’ politically-based cultural objects are salient in the background of football coverage.²⁷²

Another banner at the SV Babelsberg 03 vs. SV Lichtenberg 47 game shows similar, but more simplified qualities. The below banner reads “FIGHT AGAINST RACISM IS PROMISED 1,000 TIMES FOR NAZI SON HOPP THE PROMISE IS BROKEN” (*KAMPF GEGEN RASSISMUS 1000MAL VERSPROCHEN FÜR NAZI SOHN HOPP WIRD DAS WORT*

²⁷¹ It should be mentioned that these photos come from 03FOTOS.DE, a project by Babelsberg ultras to document fans’ activities.

²⁷² “SV Lichtenberg 47 (H),” Null drei Fotos, last modified 2020, https://03fotos.de/?page_id=3232.

GEBROCHEN). Dietmar Hopp is a software engineer and entrepreneur who put 300 million euros into the Bundesliga team TSG 1899 Hoffenheim over a 20-year period of time.²⁷³ Fans' anger over Hopp's actions is in regards to Hopp helping commercialize and privatize the sport.



Babelsberg 03 fans hold up a banner reading “FIGHT AGAINST RACISM IS PROMISED 1,000 TIMES FOR NAZI SON HOPP THE PROMISE IS BROKEN” (*KAMPF GEGEN RASSISMUS 1000MAL VERSPROCHEN FÜR NAZI SOHN HOPP WIRD DAS WORT GEBROCHEN*).²⁷⁴

One can see this banner has similar qualities as the previously mentioned Babelsberg banner, with bright all-caps letters contrasted against their background, showing a loud, proud, and aggressive aesthetic. Like the last banner, this banner is also clearly homemade, but because of the more simple lettering and the lack of decoration on the banner, it was clearly made more quickly and with less effort. The simplicity of this banner also shows that extra, creative, and detailed artwork is not necessarily compulsory for fans to get their message across. In this case,

²⁷³ Montague, 1312, 216.

²⁷⁴ “SV Lichtenberg 47 (H),” Nulldrei Fotos, last modified 2020, https://03fotos.de/?page_id=3232.

fans can show their disdain for the privatization of football with a straightforward banner, underscoring the range of effort that politically-oriented football fans put into their cultural objects.

Looking at SV Lichtenberg banners from the same game shows a lack of politically-oriented messages, several shared features with the Babelsberg banners can be seen. For example, like the Babelsberg banner, Lichtenberg fans used large and capitalized letters, contrasting with the banner's background. Through bold lettering, Lichtenberg fans show an aesthetic of pride through their straightforward message. The Lichtenberg banner also appears homemade, with nonuniform and simple lettering. Therefore, similar to the Babelsberg banner, the Lichtenberg banner also shows a DIY aesthetic, showing that it is original to the fans and their team.



SV Lichtenberg 47 fans display a banner with the statement “SV Lichtenberg 47” at a 2020 SV Babelsberg 03 vs. SV Lichtenberg 47 game.²⁷⁵

However, the Lichtenberg banner concentrates only on the team, while a high percentage of Babelsberg fans’ banners are political in nature, while sometimes being focused on both politics and team. Therefore, while the banners of both teams can take similar aesthetic and communication approaches, their messages and delivery still differ, with some of Babelsberg’s banners sometimes having little to do with football at face value by, for example, including a more complex, diversity-focused background illustrative of the left-wing fans’ ideal society or focusing more on anti-commercialization of the game rather than the actual performance of their players.

Banners from left-wing Borussia Dortmund fans have similar qualities as the Babelsberg banners. Borussia Dortmund is especially known for their complex choreographies—or choreos—combined with banners. For example, Dortmund’s “Yellow Wall” on their “South Stand” (*Südtribüne*)²⁷⁶—created by several ultras groups in the 1990s—has about 25,000 fans standing on it at every home game, holding up yellow flags and banners to hold up during games or to assist in fans’ choreographed performances.²⁷⁷ In the photo below, one can see a mix of political and team-focused banners at Dortmund’s Yellow Wall.

²⁷⁵ 03 FOTOS. “SV Lichtenberg 47 H.” Nulldrei Fotos, 2020. https://03fotos.de/?page_id=3232.

²⁷⁶ “Dortmund face Südtribüne closure and 100,000-euro fine,” Deutsche Welle, last modified February 10, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/dortmund-face-südtribüne-closure-and-100000-euro-fine/a-37496725>.

²⁷⁷ Uli Hesse, *Building the Yellow Wall: the Incredible Rise and Cult Appeal of Borussia Dortmund* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019), 3.



Fans at Dortmund's highly active Yellow Wall hold up politically-oriented banners aimed against Nazis and racism.²⁷⁸

There are at least several large antifascist banners at the Dortmund game stating messages like “UNITED AGAINST RACISM” and “UNCOVER AND FIGHT THE NAZIS” (*NAZIS ENTTARNEN UND BEKÄMPFEN*). Like the Babelsberg banners, one can also see quite straightforward messages here, also with a DIY aesthetic; overall, little thinking is required to understand what the Dortmund fans want to get across and they want to be represented to outside viewers.

Many of the banners created and displayed by left-wing football fans analyzed so far feature a boldly loud and proud aesthetic. Namely, the messages the fans want to display are often straightforward: the letters on the banners are large, clearly legible, capitalized, and in a color that contrasts with the background of the banner, making the words pop out to viewers. Far-right fans, however, might be more ambiguous with their communications. This could be due

²⁷⁸ “BVB Fans Make Statement against Right-Wing Extremism,” Borussia Dortmund, last modified December 2, 2020, <http://www.bvb.de/eng/News/Overview/BVB-fans-make-statement-against-right-wing-extremism>.

to the fact that a picture of someone holding a right-wing banner could be legal evidence for hate speech convictions. Often, banners displayed by far-right football fans can be more ambiguous, relying on the use of an “insider” knowledge of the symbols and messages deployed.²⁷⁹

Chemnitzer FC fans’ display mentioned in the introduction in honor of far-right activist Thomas Haller is an example of this, as it relies on a degree of insider knowledge.



Chemnitzer Fans display two banners, with one reading “Rest in Peace, Tommy” (*Ruhe in Frieden, Tommy*) and another featuring a large white cross, honoring the late far-right activist Thomas Haller.²⁸⁰

This display features two banners, with one reading “Rest in Peace, Tommy” (*Ruhe in Frieden, Tommy*) and another featuring a large white cross. Here, one can see a juxtaposing aesthetic of loud, proud, and aggressive, but also ambiguity. Chemnitzers fans clearly wanted viewers to see their messages: the symbols are large, with the banner covering dozens of fans,

²⁷⁹ Of course, this is not always the case; far-right fans can have “loud and proud” expressions, which will be later explored.

²⁸⁰ Tamsut, “Why Was a Neo-Nazi Hooligan Mourned at a Football Game in Germany?”

and stand out through contrasting colors. However, while banners from many far-left fans tend to display quite straightforward messages—like how Dortmund fans’ “UNITED AGAINST RACISM” banner requires little interpretation to quickly understand fans’s message—unless one has background knowledge of who Thomas Haller was and background knowledge of Chemnitzer fans’ political leaning, viewers would likely question what this display means and to whom Chemnitzer fans were referring to. Therefore, in order to understand the political-orientation of this banner, one would need an extent of insider knowledge. The image above capturing Chemnitzer fans’ display for Haller also shows politically-oriented football fans functioning as a subculture as many of the fans in the background hold up scarves in support of Haller, reflecting fans’ “shared identity.” Unified in action and appearance, the fans appear as a unit with a far-right orientation thriving on inconspicuously game-playing with the establishment’s restrictions through their cultural objects.

But like the far-left, far-right cultural objects in the realm of football will sometimes be more conspicuous. For instance, in 2012, a far-right banner was shown in support of the violent right-wing extremist group Dortmund National Resistance (NWDO) at a Dortmund game after the group was banned, reading “Solidarity with the NWDO” (*Solidarität mit dem NWDO*).²⁸¹ A year and a half after the banner was flown, the 25-year-old who brought it—said to have connections with the Dortmund hooligan group “Northside”—had to go to the regional court in Dortmund for his actions, but ended up being acquitted.²⁸² This case highlights the risks of the far-right *not* strategically game-playing; salient far-right messages can at times result in legal action, albeit not always prosecution.

²⁸¹ “Prozess wegen Neonazi-Banner bei BVB-Spiel beginnt,” *Der Westen*, last modified January 1, 2014, <https://www.derwesten.de/staedte/dortmund/prozess-wegen-neonazi-banner-bei-bvb-spiel-beginnt-id8878926.html>.

²⁸² “Prozess wegen Neonazi-Banner.”; “Neonazi-Banner auf Südtribüne: 26-Jähriger freigesprochen,” *24 VEST*, last modified January 22, 2015, <https://www.24vest.de/sport/bvb/solidaritaet-nationalem-widerstand-neonazi-banner-suedtribuene-26-jaehriger-freig-esprochen-12455084.html>.

In addition to the legal proceedings, after the occurrence of the NWDO banner being displayed, BvB fans started a task-force with the purpose of combating right-wing extremism and racism in the football stadium, in conjunction with the team enacting stronger regulations to prevent right-wing extremism in football.²⁸³ The latter also highlights how the far-right and far-left interact as a route of communication (or expression) with one another that reflects how far-right extremism is the antecedent for left-wing extremism. Namely, a left-wing orientation is often a *response* to right-wing extremism. For example, some Dortmund fans display a fascist-orientation, and in response, some Dortmund fans display an antifascist-orientation.



Attendees hold a banner reading “Solidarity with the NWDO” (*Solidarität mit dem NWDO*) at a Borussia Dortmund game, referring to the right-wing extremist organization “National Resistance Dortmund.”²⁸⁴

Game-playing can also involve a use of contextual details, which again, might require a use of insider knowledge to understand political-orientation of the cultural objects. For example, the aforementioned banner that Chemnitzer fans held up to commemorate Haller employs a use of the Fraktur—or Black Letter—font, which is associated with being the “Nazi font” throughout Europe.²⁸⁵ At one point in time, Fraktur was used throughout Germany and served as a means of unification for the “nation without nationhood,”²⁸⁶ as “Germany” was essentially

²⁸³ “Prozess wegen Neonazi-Banner.”

²⁸⁴ “Prozess wegen Neonazi-Banner.” (Cropped.)

²⁸⁵ “Fraktur,” 99% Invisible, last modified February 18, 2020, podcast, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/fraktur/>.

²⁸⁶ “Fraktur.”

non-unified principalities, kingdoms, et cetera, until German unification in the 19th century. Interestingly, in 1941, Nazis actually called for a ban on Fraktur because of the font using “Schwabacher-Jewish letters”—which was actually an erroneous claim—with Hitler believing that the “gothic romanticism” that Fraktur involved did not suit what was supposed to be Germany’s transition to modernity. Thus, Germany transitioned to utilizing Roman letters during the Third Reich.²⁸⁷

Today, the interpretation of the use of Fraktur highly depends on the context. For example, Fraktur is commonly used as the font for newspapers, on restaurant labels, and for the names of heavy metal bands, but in other contexts—such as the Chemnitzer fans' banner—it can have “nationalistic tones.”²⁸⁸ In the instance of Haller’s banner, the far-right fans are likely using Fraktur as an ode to a “traditional” Germany. In conjunction with perhaps not knowing about the Nazi's later rejection of Fraktur, many nationalists are actually not employing Fraktur, but similar looking fonts like the Old English Font,²⁸⁹ reflecting a historical ignorance.

The use of Fraktur also underscores the importance of context when looking at certain symbols or aesthetics. It is generally considered acceptable when the Fraktur font is being used to take advantage of the medieval or gothic appeal of the font.²⁹⁰ However, when used to promote German superiority, it is considered nationalistic. Overall, when it comes to symbol bans in Germany, context is highly important; again, one would likely not face legal trouble for displaying a swastika at a religious temple, but they would face legal trouble for wearing one on a jacket at a football match. In regards to the contextual implications of employing Fraktur, a police anti-terror unit in Saxony was fined in 2017 for using a logo featuring a Fraktur font in

²⁸⁷ “Fraktur.”

²⁸⁸ “Fraktur.”

²⁸⁹ “Fraktur.”

²⁹⁰ “Fraktur.”

one of their vehicles because of what was considered an inappropriate context to use the font.²⁹¹ Overall, small details like font can have heavy meanings—especially in the German context—but the use of controversial symbols and aesthetics is complicated by which context they are deployed.

The importance of context is further highlighted in regards to the display of the German flag. For instance, in Germany, a proud display of the German flag can signal nationalism because proud displays of the German flag during the (nationalistic) Third Reich were common. One would likely need an extent of insider knowledge to understand in which contexts the displayers of the German flag are doing it in a nationalistic way. A 2014 demonstration, “Hooligans against Salafists” (HooGeSa)—which is a right-wing movement composed of hooligans and non-football involved neo-Nazis with the aim of fighting against Islam “infiltrating” Germany—demonstrated how context can affect interpretation.²⁹² At the HooGeSa demonstration, some of the 5,000 neo-Nazi and far-right²⁹³ attendees strived to be vague with their political beliefs. For example, in one interview, an attendee stated that he is not “right-wing,” but he was attending the demonstration to “stand up for his country.”²⁹⁴ This highlights the far-right’s game-playing: because of laws, policies, and social taboos against right-wing extremism in Germany, the quoted attendee used a pathos-oriented approach to justify his presence at the demonstration.

The display of German flags at the HooGeSa demonstration also reflected a nationalistic message, as these flags were displayed in the context of a right-wing demonstration. The first

²⁹¹ “Fraktur.”

²⁹² VICE News, “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany: Hooligans Against Salafists,” YouTube, uploaded December 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRZiTreKcCk>.

²⁹³ Montague, *1312*, 212.

²⁹⁴ VICE News, “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany.”; Interestingly, Sven Lau, a German Salafist preacher, was interviewed and stated: “we have nothing to do with football, and they don’t have anything to do with religion.” Lau’s statement accentuates how the views and actions of the hooligans are also focused beyond the arena.

banner in the screengrab of the rally below features a statement written in black spray paint reading “our flag, our country maximum resistance” (*Unsere Fahne, unser Land maximaler Widerstand*). The latter screengrab features attendees holding up German flags that simply state “Germany.” With the knowledge that these banners are being displayed in the context of a demonstration against Islam in Germany, one learns that the attendees are holding up these flags in a nationalistic manner, emulating Nazis’ idealized ethnically homogenous society. A simple DIY message over the German flag gave it—albeit arguably inconspicuous—political connotations, accentuated by the context that the flag was displayed. Overall, one can also see how the pride of being a far-right comes into conflict with the necessity of remaining ambiguous.



A banner at the 2014 Hooligans against Salafists (HooGeSa) demonstration reads “Our flag, our country maximum resistance” (*Unsere Fahne, unser Land maximaler Widerstand*) written in black spray paint on a German flag.²⁹⁵

There are also cases of far-right fans displaying more straightforward messages, but hiding their individual identities to avoid the consequences of far-right extremism. Below is an image of fans from the team FC Energie Cottbus celebrating Cottbus being promoted into the third tier of the Bundesliga by marching through the city wearing KKK hoods and holding a

²⁹⁵ VICE News, “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany.”

banner reading “the rise of the evil” (*Aufstieg des Bösen*), written in a Fraktur-like script on a red banner.²⁹⁶ In turn, FC Cottbus released a statement against the fans’ actions calling their actions “inhumane, repugnant and in no way tolerable,” stating that the fans would face life-long bans if they were identified.²⁹⁷ This instance highlights how it is essential for right-wing football fans to conceal their identity if they want to do clearly right-wing actions or display clearly right-wing cultural objects. Interestingly, in an oxymoronic way, the object to conceal the Cottbus fans’ identity was the object that resulted in issues for the fans.

Furthermore, the message of the fans is arguably not as straightforward as some of the other banners; however, the self-labeling of “evil” shows that fans acknowledge how their far-right perceptions are perceived in German society, especially among a culture promoting *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*/-aufarbeitung. This is a clear example of far-right fans using fringe rhetoric to interrupt society—as Cottbus fans’ actions were highly covered by the media and met with outrage—while adjusting to the constraints of Germany’s laws and policies by remaining inconspicuous with somewhat-ambiguous messaging and concealing their identity.

²⁹⁶ “German police investigate Energie Cottbus soccer fans clad in Ku Klux Klan hoods,” Deutsche Welle, last modified March 28, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-police-investigate-energie-cottbus-soccer-fans-clad-in-ku-klux-klan-hoods/a-43967888>.

²⁹⁷ “German police investigate Energie Cottbus.”



Some FC Energie Cottbus fans' celebrated Cottbus being promoted by marching through the city wearing KKK hoods and holding a banner reading "the rise of the evil" (*Aufstieg des Bösen*).²⁹⁸

Overall, far-right fans use of ambiguity and concealment is likely due to the fact that because of laws and policies in Germany that affect football fans—like Article 5 of Germany's Basic Law, Section 130 of the German Criminal Code, and the "Resolution on the European dimension in sport"—deter those on the far-right from displaying their far-right messages in a straightforward way to the degree that left-wing oriented fans do and can. Displaying messages that require a degree of interpretation, background knowledge, and/or context cues allow those on the far-right to avoid easily and quickly incriminating themselves. The fact that these messages rely on a degree of interpretation and political-awareness also means that it is likely that other politically-based fans are picking up on these more inconspicuous messages. This

²⁹⁸ Jüdisches Forum (@JFDA_eV), "Dieses Foto soll Anhänger von @nur_energie zeigen..." Twitter post, posted May 27, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-police-investigate-energie-cottbus-soccer-fans-clad-in-ku-klux-klan-hoods/a-43967888>.

means that while some messages interrupt, others remain fringe, being more limited to communication between politically-based fans or those seeking to understand them.

The Commercialization of Cultural Objects

Consumerism is a topic of importance when it comes to the cultural objects of far-left and far-right football fans. As aforementioned, many laws and policies in Germany support in a de-jure sense anti-discrimination efforts of left-wing football fans. However, left-wing ideology incorporates more than addressing discrimination. That is, anti-capitalism beliefs are also a major part of left-wing politics. Again, this idea has manifested into a strong anti-commercialization effort that has resulted in rifts between football policy-making bodies like the DFL and DFB.

Anti-commercialization efforts can be channeled through banners. For instance, FC Freiburg Schwarzwald fans displayed a banner reading “Kind Disappear” (*Kind Verschwindet*) against Martin Kind, the president of Hannover who vocally opposed the fan-supported 50+1 rule—a German league rule since 1998 that requires clubs to have the majority of their own voting rights, rather than an external investor.²⁹⁹ Kind was opposed to the 50+1 rule because—as he stated—it would act as a “restraint on his investment” into the club and hinder “German clubs from competing in Europe against countries that allowed almost unlimited investment.”³⁰⁰ Kind stated that limiting business in football impedes Germany’s “sporting future.”³⁰¹ However, the 50+1 model is highly supported by many football fans, inspiring fans around the world to aim for a similar system.³⁰²

It should be noted that some teams do provide an exemption based on investment to the 50+1 rule, like TSG 1899 Hoffenheim provided an exception to Dietmar Hopp, who invested

²⁹⁹ Matt Ford, “Coronavirus, the Bundesliga and the 50+1 rule,” last modified May 10, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-the-bundesliga-and-the-501-rule/a-53373349>.

³⁰⁰ Montague, *1312*, 215.

³⁰¹ Montague, *1312*, 216.

³⁰² Montague, *1312*, 216.

300 million into Hoffenheim.³⁰³ Similarly, Redbull bought the playing license to SSV Markranstadt and changed the name of the team to RB Leipzig, claiming—much to the skepticism of fans—that the RB did not stand for Redbull, but rather for Rasenballsport.³⁰⁴ Interestingly, the league actually prevents sponsors names being in clubs names,³⁰⁵ so sponsors will also find ways to game-play to slip in commercialization to the game.

Fans have not been silent about their unhappiness with the increasing commercialization of the game: protest after protest from ultras followed after RB Leipzig's promotions, with ultras across Germany not attending away games against RB Leipzig after it reached Bundesliga-level playing.³⁰⁶ Outside of the stadium, some fans also planned a campaign called “50+1 Stays!” Within the span of four days, “a thousand different supporter organisations and ultras groups” signed the campaign’s petition.³⁰⁷ This number more than doubled after a few more days, and fans unfurled the signatories’ names on the printed petition at the DFL's annual general meeting.³⁰⁸ These instances highlight both the solidarity and extensive networks of fans, in addition to fans’ long-term and determined fight against commercializing German football.

Another example of fans’ anti-commercialization, pro-working class efforts in German football is seen with the opposition against Monday night games. For example, Borussia fans emptied their terrace for a game, which silenced the stadium, and Eintracht Frankfurt fans covered the pitch in tennis balls to protest the Monday night games.³⁰⁹ Eventually, fans got their way, as it was in the end “decided that Monday night football was more trouble than it was

³⁰³ Montague, *1312*, 216.

³⁰⁴ Montague, *1312*, 216.

³⁰⁵ Montague, *1312*, 216.

³⁰⁶ Montague, *1312*, 217.

³⁰⁷ Montague, *1312*, 217.

³⁰⁸ Montague, *1312*, 218-219.

³⁰⁹ Montague, *1312*, 219.

worth.”³¹⁰ Consistent and distracting protests and demonstrations can pay off for fans, resulting in the changes that they desire.

But in an oxymoronic way, politically-based football fans sometimes give in to consumerism and capitalization: many politically-oriented fan items are easily available for purchase (by anyone) online. For example, FC St. Pauli has an online Fanladen where one can easily buy objects—from sweaters to blankets with St. Pauli’s symbol, the Totenkopf—online. However, this self-imposed commodification is not entirely self-destructive to the football subculture. Rather, the businesses that sell fans’ politically-based objects are often associated with the teams and fans, meaning that the funds derived from these sellers go to financially supporting the subculture. Giving into consumerism is therefore a way to actually (financially) support political expression. The result is that because items can be purchased or copied, certain items can display a consumeristic aesthetic, showing repetition of the object or symbol. This consumeristic aesthetic helps others become more involved in the subculture, showing the unity, but also the fluidity of the subculture. This repetitive, pattern-like aesthetic also makes the fans’ symbol or object take over how outsiders view fans. In the image below, it is as if the identity of the fans—concealed by the images they are holding up—become the cultural objects they display. That is, fans' collective identity “is” their cultural objects.

³¹⁰ Montague, *1312*, 219.



St. Pauli fans hold up the same display of the Totenkopf symbol.³¹¹

St. Pauli's arguably commercialized and highly replicated Totenkopf symbol also demonstrates the power of symbols. Something simple—lacking written-out messages and many details—can represent an association with a political movement. Like statements on banners, symbols can also be ambiguous and have several meanings. For example, the skull and crossbones at first glance could represent anything, or be associated with the Nazi-use of the Totenkopf symbol. But with the insider knowledge of the St. Pauli subculture, one knows that it represents a team and fan culture that fight for progressive values. Many fans utilize symbols in an apolitical-sense, but for a team with a prominent politically-oriented fan culture like St. Pauli, a symbol can represent a fan base's political movement.

³¹¹ Bild. "FC St. Pauli: Kein Terror-Verdacht - Organisation Klärt Auf." bild.de. BILD, January 19, 2020. <https://www.bild.de/sport/fussball/fussball/fc-st-pauli-kein-terror-verdacht-organisation-klaert-auf-67424742.bild.html>.

Highly commercialized symbols can be used strategically, as when highly produced and therefore repeated, they can become widespread. In regards to the Totenkopf, fans are able to show support for St. Pauli through reproduced and printed Totenkopfs on posters, stickers, and clothing. Similarly, stickers—which can quickly be printed by the hundreds—can have an even more prevalent effect outside of the stadium. Fans will stick stickers around buildings, stadiums, and restaurants, which increases the visibility of the team and their associated ideas. Since stickers are available for purchase and are repeated, this also means that stickers can give off a consumeristic aesthetic, with the same team sticker repeated through cities. For example, the “Energie Fans Against Nazis!” stickers appear throughout Germany and Europe, highlighting how moving away from a DIY-aesthetic can help the subculture become more widespread and appear more prevalent, leaving a (literal) mark on societies around the world. But again, when it comes to cases like the Totenkopf and fans’ stickers, these objects are often commercialized through the inside, or through fan stores.



An “Energie Fans Against Nazis!” (*Energiefans gegen Nazis!*) sticker is displayed in Paris, France, hundreds of miles away from Cottbus.³¹²

Overall, left-wing fans tend to be more against an outsider, capitalistic type of consumerism, opposing the over-commercialization of football, such as corporations advertising at football games. The policy-making bodies support left-wing fans’ actions to an extent, but the policies and laws in Germany do not explicitly state support for anti-capitalism efforts in football. Therefore, for left-wing football fans, like right-wing football fans, their rhetoric remains in opposition to the mainstream. This is not to say that fans with a right-wing orientation are not against the commercialization of the game, but left-wing fans are particularly interesting to note because while Germany has many laws and policies that seem to support progressive, more left-wing anti-discrimination efforts, some laws and policies still allow for actions that many left-wing fans despise.

By analyzing fans’ cultural objects—like banners and stickers—one can see how fans are able to interrupt mainstream society through objects with messages ranging from straightforward to more ambiguous, the latter often requiring more of a background knowledge to understand. Furthermore, because of codified anti-discrimination efforts in Germans laws and sport policies, left-wing fans’ tend to be more “loud and proud” with their banners, while far-right fans will rely on ambiguity and concealment to avoid incriminating themselves with illegal or socially taboo words and actions. However, the rhetoric of fans on both sides of the political spectrum remains fringe because German laws and policies do not necessarily cover all facets of left-wing politics—including anti-capitalism efforts. Utilizing cultural objects allow fans to reap additional benefits: rather than speaking their messages, fans are able to emulate various aesthetics that help

³¹² FC Energie Cottbus - Fans gegen Nazis, “Ganz viele Menschen bekommen vor Aufregung aktuell wahrscheinlich nur schwer Luft...” Facebook, uploaded August 12, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/EnergiefansggNzs/photos/a.1991874487713100/2413315458902332>.

them illustrate their message, avoid incrimination, unite under common themes, and display a louder, clearer message.

Chapter 2: Clothing

English singer-songwriter and left-wing activist Billy Bragg's encapsulates how political movements can be commodified and participation in one can be “bought” through purchasing objects in support of or specific to the movement like clothing: “So join the struggle while you may. The revolution is just a T-shirt away.” This is perhaps one of the most commercialized areas of football fan culture: one can easily buy team clothing—apolitical or politically-oriented—in fan shops at the stadiums or online or even through more mainstream brands with hidden political extremism-oriented symbols. For example, while the majority of the clothing for sale in Babelsberg 03's online shop is not political in nature, one can also easily purchase a shirt with the message “Nazis out! Of the stadium” (*Nazis raus! aus den Stadien*) for fifteen Euros—even in five different colors—or a sweater stating “LONSDALE LONDON AGAINST RACISM & HATE” for 30 Euros, referring to the English brand Lonsdale.

Commercialization of clothing goes hand-in-hand with the inclusion of hidden political symbols—especially right-wing symbols—because when more mainstream brands utilize the illegal or taboo symbols, they often have to be hidden to dodge punishment from the establishment. This is likely because these far-right commercialized brands maintain a strong online presence and are monitored by the authorities and/or those on the left; therefore, both far-right oriented fans wearing the symbols and non-football far-right brands need to game-play to remain secretive and ambiguous.

Mainstream Far-Right Brands

Throughout the years, clothing brands and style have been important elements of subcultures. For example, many skinheads have embraced a practical, working-class style by wearing steel-toed boots and suspenders.³¹³ As the subculture developed and fluctuated, clothing brand—rather than primarily the actual items worn—became important. This meant that far-right individuals commonly wearing a particular brand actually made that perhaps originally apolitical brand politicized through association or helped these originally politically-oriented brands gain traction and recognition.³¹⁴ For example, as the style of parts of the (far-right) skins subculture community changed to a more “sophisticated” look in the early 2000s, certain more suave brands became more popular among the skins,³¹⁵ particularly “brands that deploy coded far right extremist symbols.”³¹⁶ These outside politically-oriented brands not directly associated with football teams or fans are most often far-right. But these brands’ brick and mortar stores throughout Germany do not overtly express far-right statements; walking by these stores without knowledge of the brand’s political association, one would likely see it as just another store. Therefore, one of the less conspicuous aspects of political expression through clothing is not through overt political expression, but rather by (known) association.

These far-right brands and the use of them were the inspiration for Miller-Idriss’s research and concept of “game-playing” because of how those on the far-right use coded symbols through these brands, which allow their wearers and creators to avoid punishment and censorship by the establishment. Interestingly, the widespread commercialization of the right-wing is not a new concept in Germany, or internationally. For example, in 1930s Germany, vendors sold Nazi products—such as chocolate candies with swastikas—but Nazi party leaders

³¹³ Deutsche Welle, “Fashion labels worn by Europe’s skinheads restore their reputation,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 16, 2010, <https://www.dw.com/en/fashion-labels-worn-by-europes-skinheads-restore-their-reputation/a-5226933>.

³¹⁴ Deutsche Welle, “Fashion labels.”

³¹⁵ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 1.

³¹⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 2.

found that it “cheapened the National Socialist ideology.”³¹⁷ Eventually, these far-right symbols displayed on these commercialized objects would not be the symbols in their raw, original form, but would become less overt, more complex, and more coded, especially in post-WIII society as Germany embraced Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung. In the 1980s, this right-wing commercialization resurged during the 80s right-wing music scene, when low-budget and screen printed cultural objects like pins and tee shirts were sold “with coded symbols and references to far right ideology.”³¹⁸ Interestingly, Miller-Idriss notes how this commercialization is unique to Europe,³¹⁹ calling attention to the irony of citizens from a continent that dealt with a fascist dictatorship less than a hundred years ago finding unique ways to express their adoration of far-right extremism.

Broadly speaking, utilizing clothing to disseminate information is not necessarily a political tactic, but it is a well-known strategy that the far-right takes advantage of through these brands. This is likely because, like banners and football itself, clothing is highly visible. For example, the photo below shows an image from the popular clothing brand H&M with children wearing sweaters with the message “THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US.” This is not necessarily a politically-oriented message, but this photo shows how designers across brands will utilize messages on clothing, even children’s clothing. Clothing might even be more visible than banners because one can wear politically-oriented clothing far beyond the football stadium, opening up the messages worn on clothing pieces to a wider audience than banners. Miller-Idriss underscores this by pointing out how tee shirts and sweaters “act as billboards” and the consumer serves as a “literal [embodiment] of nationalist messages.”³²⁰ Similarly, like football’s

³¹⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 2.

³¹⁸ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 2-3.

³¹⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 6.

³²⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

dichotomous function of entertainment and political organization, there is a dichotomous function of clothing: one needs to wear clothes, so why not wear clothes *and* display political views simultaneously?



The popular clothing brand H&M sells children's clothes with messages on them, like these sweaters reading "THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US."³²¹

Another reason clothing is such a commodified object among far-right football fans is that wearing more expensive brands gives the subculturalists the opportunity to employ the clothing as a "status symbol."³²² More expensive and higher quality clothes from some of these companies highly differ from the working-class (skinhead) aesthetic that was originally embraced by some of the far-right football fans, underscoring the flux of politically-oriented subcultures' aesthetics. In a similar vein, brands also see the economic benefit of tailoring their clothes to specific groups, especially groups which rely on style as a part of their collective

³²¹ "Jungen," H&M, https://www2.hm.com/de_de/kampagnen/4033e-everyday-essentials.kids.html.

³²² Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

identity; these brands know that appealing to the far-right can be a lucrative endeavor, especially if they help wearers express taboo political views in ways that allow them to avoid prosecution.

Several notable far-right brands in Germany and across Europe worn by far-right football fans include the following:

- Thor Steinar: This brand refers to a Norse god and the misspelled name of a Nazi general—Felix Martin Julius Steiner—in its name.³²³ Thor Steinar sells an expensive, suave, and comprehensive line for men and women, from jeans to sweatshirts to belts.³²⁴ The brand has also expanded internationally, even with a United States branch, Dortrix. Like the following brands, Thor Steinar caters to “micro-cultures”³²⁵ on the far-right political spectrum—such as the hooligans—and its website mirrors that of apolitical sophisticated clothing brands.³²⁶
- Erik and Sons: Like Thor Steinar, this brand also sells a broad high-class range of clothing, but at a slightly lower price. Erik and Sons also refers to itself as a “Viking brand,” and like many other far-right brands in Germany, plays on a Nordic aesthetic.
- Ansgar Aryan: This brand also sells a wide-range of clothes that are commonly worn by neo-Nazis. Ansgar Aryan’s “pro-Identitär” website states that wearing the brand in public is “an aesthetic-political act” against multiculturalism, the “actionless” middle-class, and “visionless pessimists.”³²⁷ At the end of their mission statement, the brand states “yes to heroism.” The latter shows how these brands prey on a “heroism” trope—namely, that those on the far-right need to “save” their country from multiculturalism.

³²³ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 3.

³²⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 3.

³²⁵ Or “subcultures.”

³²⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 3.

³²⁷ “Ansgar Aryan,” Ansgar Aryan, <https://www.ansgararyan.com/index.php?cPath=60>.

- Fourth Time and Label 23 Boxing Connection: These brands are a “crossover market” that are worn by youth in various far-right sport subcultures, from the football hooligans to those in martial arts subcultures. This shows a clear intersection between sports, athletic clothing, and a far-right political orientation.
- Ostfront-Versand: This brand sells more overt “white supremacist merchandise” online.³²⁸ Some of these items include clothes referring to various German cities, with the city name being written in a Fraktur-like font.³²⁹ Ostfront-Versand is an example of the range of far-right subcultures’ overtness: some use more coded symbols, while some are more conspicuous about their political-orientation.

Although these brands have some differences in political overtness and aesthetic, the brands tend to employ common themes. For example, a commonly employed theme for these far-right brands tends to be hypermasculinity, with many models for these brands being adorned with (over the top) muscles, tattoos, and piercings.³³⁰ This hypermasculinity also preys on the ideas of dissent and fraternity³³¹—ideas frequently employed by the far-right—because the brands often encourage the wearers to be both separate from the establishment and unified with other “tough” men through their self-imposed marginalization. Miller-Idriss also points out that despite many of these far-right brands selling clothing for women too, more of the far-right coded symbols are seen on men’s clothing,³³² so it is often primarily the men’s clothing that encourages and reflects being far-right and anti-establishment.

³²⁸ “White Supremacists Commodify Coronavirus Racism,” Anti-Defamation League, last modified May 21, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-commodify-coronavirus-racism>.

³²⁹ “White Supremacists Commodify Coronavirus Racism.”

³³⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 4.

³³¹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 6.

³³² Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 22.



A stoic Thor Steinar model appears quite muscular, preying on a hypermasculine aesthetic.³³³

Far-right commercialized brands often complement hypermasculinity with a Nordic aesthetic, such as through the employment of Viking imagery. Many of the models for these brands, for example, emulate a Viking-look, with beards, longer hair, a stoic, warrior-like facial expression, and muscles, which are overall considerably and stereotypically masculine traits. Furthermore, many of these brands will utilize actual Nordic symbols, even selling clothing items with Nordic flags and names, like the name “Thor” in Thor Steinar. Similarly, “Erik” in Erik and Sons—the brand which refers to itself verbatim as a “Viking Brand”—is the Nordic

³³³ Thor Steinar Herbst/Winter 2020 (Thor Steinar, 2020), 4, https://issuu.com/thorsteinar/docs/katalog_hw_2020_web/1?ff&showOtherPublicationsAsSuggestions=true.

spelling of the German name “Erich.” Generally, many of these brands are conspicuous about their desire to employ Nordic or Viking imagery.



A hat costing 24.90 euros from Erik and Sons features a Danish flag.³³⁴

Miller-Idriss postulates several reasons for these far-right brands utilizing Nordic imagery. Foremost, these brands prey on the (white) “fantasy of nordic heritage”—a fantasy which the far-right associates with traits like purity, beauty, and integrity, making the utilization of the historic Nordic portrayal emulate a simpler, purer past that offers solace in a troubled, contemporary world.³³⁵ This is a similar tactic as when those on the right employ a Fraktur(-like) font to reference a more traditional and perhaps what in their eyes is a “simpler and purer” Germany. A more specific implication of these brands’ Viking and Nordic imagery includes promoting a sense of nationalism by supporting the fantasy of an “aspirational nationhood” or “nation that never existed but that is nonetheless aspired to,”³³⁶ additionally evoking a sense of

³³⁴ “Strickmütze FLAG,” ACCESSOIRES, ERIK AND SONS, <https://erikandsons.com/index.php?cPath=22>.

³³⁵ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³³⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

loss by encouraging the “preservation, survival, resurrection, or rebirth of [this] particular kind of nation.”³³⁷

This nationalism goes hand-in-hand with promoting whiteness. Namely, people from the Nordic countries—Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland—tend to be from a North Germanic ethnic group, with the vast majority of the people from these countries being white. Supporting Nordic imagery alludes to supporting whiteness. These brands also touch on to Germany’s colonial and Nazi history by prompting messages that refer to loyalty to one’s homeland. In a similar vein, one can also see the idea of xenophobia being promoted, which encompasses islamophobic and antisemitic ideas. Phalanx Europa, for example, states that it is a brand that “embraces the tradition and heritage of [the European] continent” (*das sich der Tradition und dem Erbe unseres Kontinents*). These traits arguably fall under an umbrella regarding belonging; the Nordic ideas especially promote this because they perpetuate the idea of one belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group.

Similarly, wearing clothes from the same brand promotes the collective identity of the fan subculture because it can strengthen in-group bonding and identification, showing how fashion acts as a collective behavior, or a “social ritual” and a “type of common thought and action which depends upon certain currents of ideas and actions running through a group.”³³⁸ The symbols on the clothes themselves also promote the idea of in-group versus out-group.³³⁹ That is, many of these clothing objects contain symbols and messages that promote an opposition to the out group through “exclusionary ideology,” like xenophobic symbols against Muslims.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³³⁸ Kimball Young, “Public Opinion,” *Social Psychology: An Analysis of Social Behavior*, (1930): 552-569.

³³⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³⁴⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 23.

These brands often also display symbols relating to death and violence, alluding to deaths of individuals or the “death” of a society or culture.³⁴¹ These symbols also can cause viewers to feel anxiety because they confront death head-on,³⁴² acting as a distracting and sometimes distressing aesthetic for viewers. Conversely, “performative strategy” can evoke an image of fearlessness of death from the wearer.³⁴³ In conjunction with Nordic imagery, death imagery also alludes to nationalism, as it can “crystallize a kind of ‘magical thinking’ about the death (or potential death) of a blood-based ancestral group.”³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³⁴² Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³⁴³ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.

³⁴⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 21.



A muscular model dons an aggressive graphic jacket from the far-right clothing brand Yakuza reading “NO MERCY, NO REGRET ONLY VIOLENCE.”³⁴⁵

Miller-Idriss argues far-right brands commercializing and/or creating symbols which prey on various aesthetics from Nordic to death-related can have various implications. For one, the

³⁴⁵ “No Mercy No Regret Zip Hoodie,” Yazuka, <https://www.yakuzastore.com/en/no-mercy-no-regret-zip-hoodie/men/hoodies/a-7205/>.

symbols can serve as a means of ideological recruitment.³⁴⁶ That is, it can be easier for young people to wear these symbols referring to far-right extremist content without understanding the original meanings behind the brands and symbols.³⁴⁷ Wearing these brands and symbols can also serve as a more discreet signal that one is part of a subculture and willing to act out for their in-group, further strengthening the far-right football subculture's collective identity outside of the stadium. Miller-Idriss quotes twenty-two-year old construction worker Timo who explains this idea: "Lots of people wear [such symbols] on a T-shirt so that it can be seen. So that you can see, OK, good, they are maybe a little *gewaltbereit* [ready to be violent]."³⁴⁸ Timo's quote illustrates how one can easily send out a strong image by donning a particular symbol. This reflects how politically-oriented football fans—especially those on the right—can choose a specific type of visibility: they want to be seen by others in their in-group but avoid being spotted by the establishment.

Using discreet symbols that reference far-right themes—as Miller-Idriss writes—means that wearers “game-play” with bans, as consumers are often aware of the legal bans on symbols and phrases associated with them.³⁴⁹ Namely, those wearing these brands will change their “codes and their display to navigate bans.”³⁵⁰ For example, some brands will combine various banned symbols to produce a new symbol that essentially is allowed because it no longer refers to a banned organization.³⁵¹ Therefore, banning policies can actually backfire, causing those being censored to continue this “game-playing” by constantly modifying their coded symbols. They are then utilizing the same aspects of circumventing banning policies that made the coded

³⁴⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 10.

³⁴⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 10.

³⁴⁸ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

³⁴⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 14.

³⁵⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 20.

³⁵¹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 3.

symbols originally appealing.³⁵² For example, over time, Thor Steinar began to embrace a more Nordic aesthetic in its brand,³⁵³ which serves as a more minor example of the broad idea that subcultures and their aesthetics can fluctuate to game-play. Because of the powerful ambiguity of many symbols, it is likely that they will continue to be missed by the vetting government bodies, avoiding legal repercussions.

Commercialization of clothing also occurs with left-wing fans' clothing, but often in a dissimilar way. Namely, like the left-wing banners, left-wing commercialized clothing is often also "loud and proud," oftening not requiring such a degree of game-playing as the far-right. For example, with a caption reading "ST. PAULI ANTIFASCIST" the shirt below from St. Pauli's fan store makes the intersection of St. Pauli and antifascism unmistakable.



A shirt from St. Pauli's fan store reads "ST. PAULI ANTIFASCIST" and features the antifascist symbol of a black and red flag, with the black flag displaying St. Pauli's Totenkopf symbol.

Furthermore, much of the commercialized far-left clothing is made from the inside, such as by the fans, or those openly involved in it. For example, many of these clothes are sold by the

³⁵² Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 8.

³⁵³ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

teams' fanladens. However, there are also outside stores that sell left-wing clothes, like the online store "No Borders," which sells clothing at the intersection of football and politics. The fact that the football teams' *official* fan stores sell far-left clothing is a key difference between far-left and far-right fans' commercialized clothing. Since far-left teams and fans *can* sell their own clothing in fan stores, the profits from their politically-oriented clothes can go back to supporting the far-left efforts of the teams and fans by giving them the financial opportunity to continue to develop their left-wing cultural objects. On the other hand, far-right clothing brands like Thor Steinar primarily keep the revenue for themselves, so this money does not go back to supporting the far-right football fan subculture to the same extent. For example, at one point, Thor Steinar was "sold to a



conglomerate based in Dubai," reflecting profits even going to those outside of Germany.³⁵⁴

However, some brands have financially supported far-right efforts, instead of only taking financial advantage of them. For instance, Erik and Sons has sponsored far-right gatherings.³⁵⁵

But again, the destination of profits from these brands is often not directly towards supporting the politically-oriented subculture. Because of Germany's anti-discriminations laws and policies, it would not be possible for the teams to officially sell far-right clothing, so outside sources have to do it.

While loud and proud messages on clothing are more common on left-wing commercialized clothing and the selling tactics of the two differ, one can see how left-wing

³⁵⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

³⁵⁵ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 5.

clothing relies on a use of symbols similar to that of right-wing commercialized clothing. For example, the black shirt with the rainbow skull seen below relies on the use of the Totenkopf to represent the larger message of being associated with St. Pauli's far-left fan subculture. Like far-right clothing, wearing clothes with left-wing associated symbols can act as a signal to others that one is associated with a far-left culture. Some symbols—like the Totenkopf symbol—also require politically-oriented insider knowledge to understand the political connotations of the symbol. Therefore, symbols like the Totenkopf can serve as a signal to others in or associated with the far-left football fan culture *specifically*. When one with insider knowledge notices that someone is wearing the Totenkopf symbol, they can know that the wearer is another far-left ally.

Far-left clothing also especially takes advantage of layering ideological causes through design. For example, on the tee shirt below, one can see a layering of political messages. The Totenkopf symbol alone could represent St. Pauli's left-wing beliefs, but the rainbow color of the Totenkopf specifically accentuates a support for the LGBT community. Here, a symbol can serve as an additional signal—rather than the primary signal—because one can see that the wearer supports the LGBT community without knowledge of the left-wing community that the Totenkopf symbol represents.



A tee shirt from St. Pauli's fan store features a rainbow Totenkopf symbol.

The other shirt below from St. Pauli's fan store also shows a layering of political messages—referring to fighting homophobia, fascism, sexism, *and* racism—but in this case, without overt references to the actual football team. Furthermore, this shirt is a prime example of the loud and proud quality many left-wing clothing pieces have, with the message of the shirt requiring little thinking from the viewer. That is, the shirt clearly states the wearer's broad disdain for discrimination.



A shirt from St. Paul's fan store states "NO PLACE FOR HOMOPHOBIA FASCISM SEXISM RACISM."

Overall, far-left commercialized clothing is similar to far-right commercialized clothing in that it can serve as a signal to others in the subculture or associated with the subculture—especially when specific symbols are used—but the far-left has the advantage that they do not constantly have to game-play when it comes to their commercialized clothing. The implication of the latter is that far-left fans can utilize more overt, loud and proud messages, in addition to employing more insider commercialization.

Appropriating History and Historical Ignorance

The far-right's appropriation of Nordic symbols is a specific example of the far-right's "weaponization" of the (European) Middle Ages; appropriating historical symbols alluding to Europe's history is a tactic used by the far-right throughout western countries. For example, the

far-right attendees of the infamous United the Right rally—when various far-right groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia to oppose the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue from a Charlottesville park—displayed Nordic symbols, such as a Nordic rune symbol.³⁵⁶ Similarly, the far-right terrorist who attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 used weapons that were inscribed with messages referencing the Crusades, like the Battle of Lepanto and Acre.³⁵⁷ These examples—in addition to the use of the aforementioned use of Fraktur font—display a historical ignorance; many of those on the far-right displaying these historical symbols have limited knowledge of their contexts and uses, showing a tactic of picking and choosing which history to acknowledge.

³⁵⁶ Jennifer Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars Joust With White Nationalists. And One Another,” last modified May 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html>.

³⁵⁷ Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars.”



A Nordic rune symbol—which was also appropriated and displayed by the Nazis—is displayed on a flag at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville.³⁵⁸

One of the implications of right-wing extremists employing medieval symbols includes Medieval Studies academics having to grapple with whether their field has a white supremacy problem.³⁵⁹ Some believe that the study of Medieval Studies—and fascination with certain parts of European history as a whole—can contribute to a romantic nationalism for “an idealized past populated by Anglo-Saxons,”³⁶⁰ paralleling the reasons that the far-right employ Fraktur, for example. Although some Medieval Studies scholars have far from agreed over whether this is true and how to address it, some of these scholars have actively taken action to address the issue when after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, over two dozen scholarly groups—such as

³⁵⁸ Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars.”

³⁵⁹ Some have called upon medieval scholars to confront the structural racism of the discipline.

³⁶⁰ Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars.”

the Medieval Academy—put out a statement to condemn the “fantasy of a pure, white Europe that bears no relationship to reality.”³⁶¹ Other academic disciplines are making similar moves to address the possibility of their European -oriented discipline being appropriated and twisted by white supremacists. For example, many German studies scholars are making commitments to acknowledge the atrocities of the Holocaust and study non-white aspects of German culture and history, such as by focusing on the experiences of afro-Germans and discussing the genocides Germany committed against the Herero and Namaqua people in Africa decades before the Holocaust. By working towards a more inclusive and accurate teaching of these disciplines, academics are attempting to address white supremacists appropriating the history that they study. Overall, academics attempting to keep the far-right out points toward the fact that these majority white European countries are more than how the far-right chooses to see them, that many of these countries have and still do commit small- or large-scale discriminatory and/or violent acts towards people of color and other marginalized groups, and that many cultural and academic successes come from non-Western European countries and/or were appropriated by Western European countries. By doing so, academics are trying to reclaim what the far-right has appropriated through cultural objects.

Wearing Illegal or Extreme Symbols

The European pride that is emulated through the commercialized brands worn by far-right football fans is especially taboo in Germany because of Germany’s Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung efforts. Again, wearing far-right, nationalistic, white pride-related items carries a certain weight in the country because of Germany’s history of fascism. One of the more immediate implications of Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung is

³⁶¹ Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars.”

that these symbols and brands—which toe the “line of legality in Germany”³⁶²—are banned or limited on various levels. As a reminder, 86a of the German Criminal Code forbids the use of speech, signs, and symbols that are associated with organizations considered to be against the constitution, including National Socialist organizations. A Hitler salute, for example, would be an arrestable offense under article 86a. However, wearing a hat from Erik and Sons with Norwegian flag arguably lacks a clear connection with a banned organization albeit sharing connotations—namely white supremacist ones—with these organizations. This is a clear example of how cultural objects allow those on the far-right to game-play by being far-right, but not always *clearly* far-right.

One of the ways the state can monitor new brands in Germany is when they are registering for a patent through the German Patent and Brand Office (*Deutsches Patent- und Markenamt*).³⁶³ This means that the establishment must often be aware of the brand to an extent, making it hard for new brands to completely dodge the authorities. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Verfassungsschutz*) in Brandenburg, for example, states that the Thor Steinar brand can act as a “scene-typical badge of recognition and demarcation,” making it clear that the state is sometimes even aware of the political associations of these brands.³⁶⁴ In a similar vein, several football stadiums have banned these brands. For example, Tennis Borussia Berlin, Hertha BSC Berlin, Werder Bremen, Borussia Dortmund, and Hamburger SV have banned wearing the Thor Steinar brand in their stadium. Furthermore, visitors and employees of the Bundestag cannot wear Thor Steinar and the brand is also commonly banned in other public sector

³⁶² Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 6.

³⁶³ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁶⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 8.

buildings, schools, and stadiums.³⁶⁵ This underscores that although these brands are harder to spot, far-left fans and the mainstream recognize them to an extent.

The majority of the existing bans related to this commercialized far-right clothing do not necessarily relate to the brand, but the *symbols* that they deploy. The Patent Office approves applications sent to them after determining that the applications are not copying other brands, but also that the application does not include illegal content.³⁶⁶ These are not the only ways that an application can be rejected: the Patent Office can additionally reject applications on moral grounds (*Verstoß gegen die guten Sitten*), a reason commonly used with pornographic and clearly right-wing extremist content.³⁶⁷

In regards to the latter, extremist content is not always caught by the Patent Office, highlighting how the far-right's game-playing can be successful. For example, Miller-Idriss refers to the brand Consdaple, who originally passed their submitted review because those reviewing the application did not at first catch the initials of the Nazi Party—NSDAP—in “Consdaple.”³⁶⁸ The Consdaple clothing is allowed to continue to be produced, but without the protected brand status (*Markenschutz*).³⁶⁹ Brands will find creative ways to get around bans to still display the symbols and messages that they want to show. Similarly, Thor Steinar originally combined two banned symbols, creating a new symbol for their brand that parallels a Swastika. Like Consdaple, the Thor Steinar symbol is allowed to continue to be produced because courts overturned bans on the symbol, relying on a “semiotic argument” to defend it.³⁷⁰ These examples show how in recent years, the courts in Germany have sided with defendants who argue for their right to use these right-wing symbols, underscoring that the German establishment often has

³⁶⁵ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁶⁶ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁶⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁶⁸ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁶⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

³⁷⁰ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 9.

policies and laws to avoid the growth of fascism, but still at times prioritizes free speech, even if it can be interpreted as a type of fascist and hate speech. This also highlights the role and impact of association rather than overtness; in order to ban a symbol, phrase, or action, the courts rely on symbols associating with banned organizations.³⁷¹ The process is often not black-and-white nor is it predictable.

Outside of the realm of commercialized clothing, another commonality between far-left and far-right clothes is that both will at times dress primarily in black, likely because the fans are utilizing the black bloc tactic. This is a protest tactic often used to disguise their identity; it involves wearing all black clothing, as well as sunglasses, ski masks, and helmets, among other clothing items. At protests, the black bloc tactic can make it harder to spot and identify individual protestors, making it easier to avoid police and being doxxed. Because of illegal or rambunctious actions at and outside of the stadium, deindividuation through wearing all black can have similar benefits for football fans. In addition to increasing fan unity and in-group identification, wearing all black makes it easier for fans to express political messages that might be considered extreme, taboo, or illegal. So even if left-wing fans are not necessarily doing illegal actions, the black bloc tactic can prove beneficial for fans to avoid being doxxed for fringe rhetoric and symbols, including those that are specifically used to antagonize right-wing fans. Similarly, wearing team colors—for both the left and right—can act as a signal to other fans and increase deindividuation and in-group bonding.

Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, the deindividuation among the individuals in the black bloc also likely reduces inhibition because of the anonymity that the deployment of the black bloc tactic can provide. Wearing balaclavas, masks, face coverings, and

³⁷¹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 8.

matching clothes can perpetuate violence and other dangerous behavior one would normally not do if their identity was instead being shown.



Fans at a Babelsberg 03 game wear (mostly) all black, emulating the black bloc protest tactic.³⁷²

Wearing symbols or messages that are extreme or toe the line of what is legal can also cause a quick interception from authorities. Occasionally, fans' clothes and belongings will be searched as they enter games, with police focusing on fans of teams with politically-oriented subcultures, sometimes resulting in "aggressive" strip searches.³⁷³ For example, Montague mentions how the police likely became interested in searching Cottbus fans during a specific instance because of their "FCK CPS" (fuck cops) bags, which likely served as a signal to the authorities that these fans might be planning violent and/or illegal activities.³⁷⁴ This highlights a consequence of not game-playing and instead using more in-your-face anti-establishment messages, which can result in monitoring from the authorities. A message does not necessarily

³⁷² "So kämpft der kleine SV Babelsberg gegen Nazis in den Stadien – und ein ungerechtes Urteil," Watson, last modified March 30th, 2018, <https://www.watson.ch/!680419496>.

³⁷³ Montague 225.

³⁷⁴ Montague 225.

need to be illegal to prompt a response from the authorities; fans—who on the left and right are united by an ACAB-orientation—can strategically be more loud and proud with certain anti-establishment messages, knowing that they are (for the most part) allowed because of one’s legally-guaranteed freedom of expression.³⁷⁵

Satirical Responses

Founded by SDP politician Mathias Brodkorb in 2008, Storch Heinar is an antifascist brand that parodies Thor Steinar. The brand was launched as a part of Endstation Rechts, which is located in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Germany and fights right-wing extremism.³⁷⁶

Thor Steinar actually tried to bring the parody label to court on the claim that the parody brand damages its image, but the case was dismissed due to lack of similarity between the brands, with the courts claiming that viewers would not get Storch Heinar and Thor Steinar mistaken for one another.³⁷⁷ It was also claimed that Brodkorb’s freedom of speech and expression needed to be protected since the brand was not-for-profit, but rather for political purposes.³⁷⁸

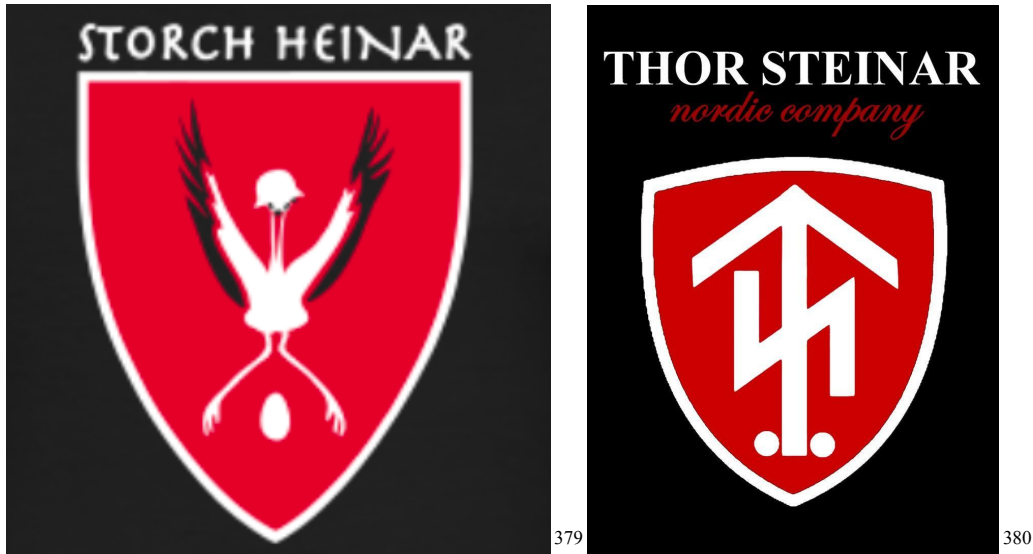
Many of Storch Heinar’s products feature a simply drawn, feeble, and arguably comedic stork directly contrasting with the strong, masculine, and stoic image that Thor Steinar strives to portray. For example, the first image below (left) shows what seems to be Thor Steinar’s label (right), but with a closer look is actually the frail stork.

³⁷⁵ Interestingly, “ACAB” and “FCK COPS” can be punishable insults when they are directed at a specific group, but allowed when used to reference police in general because this is an expression of opinion. (“‘Kollektivbeleidigung’ nur bei Bezug zu einer hinreichend überschaubaren und abgegrenzten Personengruppe,” Bundesverfassungsgericht, decided on February 26, 2015, <https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2015/bvg15-023.html>.)

³⁷⁶ Deutsche Welle, “Satirical brand that lampoons far-right fashion wins court victory,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 11, 2010, <https://www.dw.com/en/satirical-brand-that-lampoons-far-right-fashion-wins-court-victory/a-5892437>.

³⁷⁷ Deutsche Welle, “Satirical brand.”

³⁷⁸ Deutsche Welle, “Satirical brand.”; However, Brodkorb was claimed to have broken trademark law by using Thor Steinar’s label, Wuestenfuchs. (Deutsche Welle, “Satirical brand.”)



But not all of the Storch Heinar products are poking fun at right-wing extremism. For example, in some left-wing circles, a symbol showing a person kicking another person with a circle accompanied by the saying “GOOD NIGHT WHITE PRIDE” as seen below (left) is commonly adorned on buttons, stickers, or tee shirts. The Storch Heinar symbol below parodies this symbol, by similarly featuring a person inside a circle, but he is throwing a snowball at a snowman within the saying “GOOD NIGHT WHITE SPLENDOR” (*GUTE NACHT WEISSE PRACHT*). While the vast majority of Storch Heinar merchandise is making fun of Nazi or neo-Nazi imagery, it is possible that Brodkorb making fun of not just right-wing extremism, but political extremism broadly, perhaps showing how the mainstream does not always take those on the left and right seriously.

³⁷⁹ “Wappen Storch Heinar,” Storch Heinar, <http://www.storch-heinar.de>.

³⁸⁰ @caveman, “Thor Steinar Wallpapers,” WallpaperCave, last modified 2015, <https://wallpapercave.com/thor-steinar-wallpaper>.



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Additionally, the Storch Heinar brand shows that while a lot of the politically-oriented clothing worn by far-left and far-right football fan subcultures requires an extent of insider knowledge to be aware of the political connotation of the messages and symbols on the clothing, there is not always complete departure from the establishment; since Brodkorb is a German politician, he is arguably the epitome of “establishment.”

Another example of parodied responses through clothing is Phalanx Europa’s sweatshirt blow reading “STILL NOT [LOVE]ING ANTIFA!” This sweatshirt is poking fun at the far-left commonly used symbol “STILL NOT [LOVE]ING POLICE!” on the right. As aforementioned, both sides tend to be ACAB-oriented, but this design is specifically associated with the left. This underscores that actual messages accompanied with symbols—although often the most straightforward part of the display—are not necessarily the more important part of the display: design also has important implications. Parodying the other side through clothing also highlights the specific route of communication between the left and right because through parodying, brands show that they know the designs and messages used by the other side.

³⁸¹ Bienpatch, “Good Night White Pride Iron-On Patch,” Amazon, <https://www.amazon.de/-/en/Night-white-Pride-Iron-Embroidery/dp/B07H2LGJ9M>.

³⁸² “Gute Nacht weiße Pracht,” Storch Heinar, <http://www.storch-heinar.de>.



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Left is a sweater from the far-right clothing brand Phalanx Europa reading “STILL NOT LOVING ANTIFA!”, poking fun at the commonly deployed left-wing message “STILL NOT LOVING POLICE!”, seen on an ultras Sankt Pauli banner in the right image.

Chapter 3: Chants and Songs

In April 2017, FC Energie Cottbus fans drove over an hour north to attend the SV Babelsberg 03 vs. FC Energie Cottbus game.³⁸⁵ Throughout the match, Cottbus fans—accompanied by some Chemnitz fans—held up their arms to do Nazi salutes, shot rockets and flares towards Babelsberg fans, and chanted phrases like “Work makes you free, Babelsberg 03” (*Arbeit macht frei, Babelsberg 03*) to agitate the strongly far-left Babelsberg fans.³⁸⁶ The latter was a phrase hovering over Auschwitz and several other concentration camps.

³⁸³ “Women’s hoodie: Antifa,” Ladies, Phalanx Europa, <https://phalanx-europa.com/damen/hoodies/298/damenhoodie-antifa?number=SW22215>.

³⁸⁴ Marwan Shousher (@shousherphotography), “Honestly the NYPD response has gone far past policing and become full on assault...” Instagram photo, posted on June 1, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA5-bjyASwv/>.

³⁸⁵ There would have been a high police presence at this game; authorities tend to be notified when there is a game between two teams with a high potential for violence and hooligan behavior. This includes teams with fans from opposite sides of the political spectrum.

³⁸⁶ Andrej Reisin, “Randale und Nazi-Parolen: Cottbus-’Fans’ rasten aus,” *Das Erste*, last modified May 4, 2017, <https://daserste.ndr.de/panorama/aktuell/Randale-und-Nazi-Parolen-Cottbus-Fans-rasten-aus,fussballfans326.html>.



A WORK MAKES YOU FREE (*ARBEIT MACHT FREI*) sign over the concentration camp Auschwitz.³⁸⁷

When masked hooligans from the Cottbus side attempted to approach the Babelsberg fans, Babelsberg fans chanted “Nazi pigs out!” (*Nazischweine raus!*). 19 criminal proceedings followed the match.³⁸⁸ Babelsberg fans were fined about 7,000 euros by their regional football association (NOFV) for their side’s other crowd behavior and use of pyrotechnics. Cottbus fans were fined about 10,000 euros for their crowd behavior at the Babelsberg game and two additional games. However, in the court verdict, Babelsberg chants were the only ones mentioned. Cottbus fans’ actions were eventually added to the verdict when the DFB intervened, but Cottbus’s punishment was even reduced from 10,000 euros to 6,000 after they appealed. On

³⁸⁷ “‘Arbeit macht frei’-Inscription im KZ Auschwitz gestohlen,” Hannoversche Allgemeine, December 18, 2009, <https://www.haz.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Deutschland-Welt/Arbeit-macht-frei-Inscription-im-KZ-Auschwitz-gestohlen>.

³⁸⁸ Reisin, “Randalen und Nazi-Parolen.”

moral grounds, Babelsberg decided to risk insolvency and refused to pay the fine for their fans' behaviors. What seemed to have started off as a normal football game would end up receiving international attention and ignite a fire in Babelsberg 03 fans to address the football association seemingly ignoring right-wing extremism in football. This was the game that started Babelsberg's "Nazis out! Of the Stadium" (*Nazis Raus! aus den Stadien*) movement.³⁸⁹

Looking at the infamous Babelsberg vs. Cottbus game highlights several key ideas. For one, although the sport policy-making bodies seem to be highly for preventing and stopping right-wing extremism, this is not always the case. This is also seen with the German courts siding at times with right-wing extremists to protect their freedom of speech rights. In this instance, the regional football association not only did not include the Nazi chants and far-right symbols in the verdict, but punished the side performing anti-Nazi actions. The DFB arguably remedied the situation for Babelsberg to an extent, but again, they still relaxed Cottbus's initial punishment. In addition to highlighting the fact that the sport policy making bodies are not inherently supporting progressive, antifascist efforts, the Babelsberg vs. Cottbus game highlights the power and impact of chants. This phenomena is not new: historically, football stadiums have served as a means of expressing "oblique" political frustration. For example, East Germans expressed their frustrations with the East German regime through football chants decades ago.³⁹⁰ This chapter will further explore how fans have contemporarily utilized this practice at football games, from simple, monotonous, three-line chants to more complex, melodious songs accompanied by complex choreo.

Utilizing Mainstream Music

³⁸⁹ "#nazisrausausdenstadien," Babelsberg 03, <https://babelsberg03.de/nazisrausausdenstadien/>.

³⁹⁰ Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 92.

Before, during, and after games, stadiums will frequently blast well-known songs, often chosen by fans. For example, St. Pauli opens its home games with AC/DC's "Hell's Bells" and plays Blur's "Song 2" after every home goal. These songs tend to be high energy songs—or songs that "pump up" the crowd—and have not only "catchy" lyrics, but also a catchy melody. Blur's "Song 2," for example, starts with a simple, softer drum beat, adds on a similarly soft guitar riff before breaking out into a loud chorus, repeating a sung "woohoo!" "Hell's Bells" features a melodious guitar riff, and the singer of the song repeats the phrase "Hell's Bells" throughout the chorus. Since there is a good chance that fans at the game know the words or melody to these familiar and repetitive songs, fans can dance and sing with one another to the song. Furthermore, because of their simplicity, songs like "Hell's Bells" and "Song 2" are arguably catchy and easy for fans of various backgrounds to dance and sing along to; even if one does not speak English, phrases and sounds like "woohoo" and "Hell's Bells" do not require a strong grasp of the English language to repeat.

The unity that results from fans singing and dancing together—especially in conjunction with wearing similar clothing—can be analyzed from a psychological standpoint. Studies have shown that music-associated spontaneous, unprompted group movements can progress to synchronized movement and synchronized respiratory control rhythms, with this synchronization reflecting one's empathy for their surroundings.³⁹¹ This synchronization can even be a natural physiological response that plays on innate human mechanisms; namely, sometimes synchronization cannot be avoided, and one's movement will unintentionally mirror that of others.³⁹² Even if one is not part of the football fan subculture, attendees can act as a part of the

³⁹¹ Erwan Codrons, Nicolò F. Bernardi, Matteo Vandoni, and Luciano Bernardi, "Spontaneous Group Synchronization of Movements and Respiratory Rhythms," *PLoS One* 9, no. 9 (2014): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4162643/>.

³⁹² Johann Issartel, Ludovic Marin, and Marielle Cadopi, "Unintended interpersonal co-ordination: 'can we march to the beat of our own drum?'" *Neuroscience Letters* 411, no. 3 (January 2007): 174-179.

fan unit by participating in the physical responses to the music, reflecting how the subculture and participation in it is a contemporary response to humans' highly social and empathetic nature.

Song lyrics themselves can also reflect the unity that music perpetuates for fans. For instance, "You'll Never Walk Alone" is a British song from 1945 that is well-loved not only by many German football fans, but by fans around the world. Liverpool Football Club's fans began to play the song at their games, and fans from German teams like Dortmund and St. Pauli later followed the tradition. Promoting fans' solidarity and unity with one another, the song's lyrics focus on staying together through trials and tribulations:

"When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark
At the end of the storm
There's a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of the lark
Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain...
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone..."

The lyrics of the song reflect politically-oriented fans' self-reflection of the challenges—or "storms"—that they go through. From dealing with antagonistic fans on the other side of the political spectrum to experiencing increased vetting from authorities, fans acknowledge the shared identity and values of their subculture, reminding each other and themselves through singing the song's lyrics that they do not have to go through these challenges alone.

Music also helps accentuate political solidarity outside of the fan scene. For example, there is an intersection of politically-oriented football fans and the more politically-based music

scene, which attracts people from outside of the football subculture. This is interesting to look at because there has long been an association between politically-oriented subcultures and the politically-oriented music scenes. For example, the anti-establishment punk scene in the GDR started as a music scene—through which the punks channeled their rebellion by listening to anti-establishment bands—and the skinheads have strongly associated with the right-wing music scene since the 1980s. In regards to the contemporary intersection of more mainstream (politically-oriented) bands and politically-oriented football fans, some (left-wing) bands around the world like Gaslight Anthem, Anti-Flag, and Pateón Rococó have publicly worn St. Pauli's Totenkopf symbol. Extremely well-known German bands like Fettes Brot and Die Ärzte also identify as St. Pauli fans. Sometimes these bands will even perform charity concerts for the teams. The intersection of more mainstream bands and the politically-oriented football subcultures can boost the visibility of fans, and therefore, their politically-oriented messages.



The lead singer of the American band Anti-Flag—Justin Sane—wears a FC St. Pauli shirt.³⁹³

The intersection between the politically-oriented fan subcultures and the music scene has several benefits for the fan culture. For one, having well-known bands support the team and fans provides the opportunity for charity concerts, and therefore, positive publicity. Positive publicity is particularly beneficial because it combats negative publicity from the media, which often focuses on fans' violence—which is sometimes blown out of proportion—and contributes to negative stereotypes about the fan culture. Like football, concerts are also highly visible: that is, they are covered by the media, preserved on platforms like YouTube, and are often shown on

³⁹³ Da Hog'n, "Sanfte Polit-Punks: Anti-Flag können's auf 'American Reckoning' auch akustisch," last modified September 25, 2018, <https://www.hogn.de/2018/09/25/2-kultur-im-bayerischen-wald/3-grenznlos/sanfte-polit-punks-anti-flag-koennens-auf-american-reckoning-auch-akustisch/113448>.

livestream to viewers around the world, easily disseminating the ideologies of the fans at charity concerts.

Like the far-left, there is also an intersection between the far-right football fan subculture and the far-right music scene. Hannes Ostendorf, for example, was one of the hooligans from Werder Bremen's hooligan and neo-Nazi punk scenes, connected to Bremen's oldest hooligan group, Standard Bremen, sometimes abbreviated as Standard 88, a coded phrase for “Hail Hitler” (*Heil Hitler*).³⁹⁴ Ostendorf was the founder and lead singer of the extreme-right punk band Kategorie C, which released an album “glorifying the far right as well as the hooligan terrace culture” right before the 1998 France World Cup, reminding officials of the “strength and reach” of German hooligans.³⁹⁵ The band’s name alludes to how police refer to football fans:

- Kategorie A: “harmless, ultras who flew banners and flags”
- Kategorie B: “those who let pyro and fireworks off in the stadium”
- Kategorie C: “those who were involved in the worst of the violence”³⁹⁶

The band’s name “Kategorie C” highlights the intersection of the far-right and violence in German football, and how hooligans actively attempt to emulate this violence, self-reflecting on it. Again, this connects to the far-right’s “explicit predilection for violence.”³⁹⁷ At the aforementioned HooGeSa rally, Kategorie C performed, writing and performing a song specifically for the rally that utilized violent and aggressive lyrics that match the connotations of the band’s name. The lyrics sung by the lead singer especially prey on fear, which again, the far-right often uses to gain traction:

³⁹⁴ Montague, *1312*, 211.

³⁹⁵ Montague, *1312*, 210-211.

³⁹⁶ Montague, *1312*, 211.

³⁹⁷ “What Is Right-Wing Extremism?”

“Today, they’re butchering sheep and cows,
tomorrow may be Christian children.
Hooligans against Salafists.
We don’t want a religious state.”



Hannes Ostendorf performs with his band Kategorie C at the far-right HooGeSa rally.³⁹⁸

Ostendorf sings about how Salafists are a danger to Christian children—likely synonymous with *white* German children—but because of the far-right’s broad xenophobia against migrants and refugees, Ostendorf is likely referring to Muslim migrants overall. The strong sense of fear instilled in the song through Ostendorf singing about Salafists “butchering...Christian children” and Germany becoming an (Islamic) religious state parallels the AfD posters that have been hung around Germany reading “Stop Islamization!” (*Islamisierung stoppen*) and “More safety for our women and daughters!” (*Mehr Sicherheit für unsere Frauen*)

³⁹⁸ VICE News, “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany.”

und Töchter!). The far-right overall gain traction and bond with one another over their xenophobic messages and fears. In this instance, the rally attendees—oxymoronic—dance to and add further energy to their fears.

Chants and songs also show how easy it is to disseminate messages quickly to a broad audience. Blasting politically-oriented music through speakers means that messages like Ostendorf’s are practically unavoidable; hundreds of attendees were easily able to hear, sing along with, and dance to far-right messages sung by Ostendorf. This is similar to the loud and proud technique often seen with left-wing cultural objects, like banners. In this case, the messages are proud and *literally* loud.



Hundreds of attendees dance to and sing with Kategorie C’s far-right songs at the Hooligans Against Salafists (*HooGeSa*) rally.³⁹⁹

Chants: Short, Simple, Powerful

³⁹⁹ VICE News, “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany.”

Perhaps almost conversely, fans' chants are often quite simple, and take advantage of rhythm, rather than melody. Like songs, fans' individualized chants are often passed down from fan to fan within the subculture and preserved on platforms like YouTube and sites like FansChants.com. While many of these chants do not have a political orientation, there is a strong secondhand effect of these chants. That is, chanting together contributes to fans' collective identity, and therefore, political impact. For example, the chants below from Borussia and Babelsberg fans do not have a direct political orientation:

Borussia:

“Heja BVB, Heja BVB, Heja Heja BVB Heja BVB, Heja BVB, Heja Heja BVB
Today we want to win. We are going for it, Borussia is playing really big today. Up to the last man...”

*(Heja BVB, Heja BVB, Heja Heja BVB Heja BVB, Heja BVB, BVB
Stürmen wollen wir das Tor. Ja das ist unsere Pflicht. Wir geben heut das Tempo an. Der
Gegner stört uns nicht...)*⁴⁰⁰

Babelsberg:

“Oh Babelsberg zero three,
Shoot a goal for us,
In the Karl-Liebkecht Stadium,
For the North Curve”

*(Oh Babelsberg null drei,
Schießt ein Tor für uns,
Im Karl-Liebkecht-Stadion,
Für die Nordkurve)*⁴⁰¹

Although lacking clear politically-oriented messages, with lines like “we are going for [the win]” and “shoot a goal for us,” the fans are in unison self-referencing themselves as a

⁴⁰⁰ @onkeliltis, “Heja BVB chant during the game,” Reddit response, responded 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/borussiadortmund/comments/90jblb/heja_bvb_chant_during_the_game/.

⁴⁰¹ “BABELSBERG 03 SCHIESST EIN TOR FÜR UNS SVB SONGS,” Fan Chants, <https://www.fanchants.com/football-songs/sv-babelsberg-03-chants/oh-babelsberg/>.

group, repeatedly claiming their solidarity with one another. Like songs, chants do not have to be literally political to have a spillover effect on the politically-oriented actions of fans. As explored in the previous section, chanting and moving together can increase fan unity, which can in turn result in better group cohesion for expressing politically-oriented messages.

But of course, fans do at times have clearly politically-oriented chants, such as Babelsberg's "Nazi pigs out!" (*Nazischweine raus!*) chant. Since chants are a collective action, when chants are disseminating extreme, taboo, or illegal messages, fans have the advantage that it can be harder for people to spot who exactly is participating in the chant because one's voice becomes mixed with the others. One could also claim they were speaking, rather than participating in the chant, and one can hide their mouth, such as by wearing a balaclava. When it is challenging to spot the fans, it is harder to dox or prosecute them.



It is challenging to know which individual Cottbus fans were chanting far-right chants at the infamous 2017 Babelsberg vs. Cottbus game for several reasons, including because Cottbus fans wore balaclavas, which obscured fans' faces. Here is a screencap of fans chanting Nazi-alluding chant, "ticks, gypsies, and Jews, Babelsberg 03."⁴⁰²

While many of those on the far-right do seek to obscure their identity when participating in illegal or socially taboo politically-oriented actions, again, some far-right fans will be loud and proud about their views. For example, below one can see two men doing a Hitler salute, clearly showing their identity, and chanting along with Cottbus's far-right chants at the 2017 Cottbus vs. Babelsberg game. This may seem quite precarious, but it is possible that fans' can experience collective bonding over their "loud and proud" risk. This again underscores how fan behavior is at times counterintuitive and taboo, likely to catch the attention of outsider viewers. Confidently breaking laws and taboos also helps the far-right strategically put out a message saying that even if it is taboo to express neo-Nazi views in Germany, there is a community that could welcome one with similar ideas. Openly white-supremacist fans use football's publicity to act as a signal for recruiting and bonding. From a psychological perspective, people are more likely to make risky decisions when in a group, rather than when acting individually.⁴⁰³ This also helps explain why some fans behave confidently when doing highly taboo or illegal actions.

⁴⁰² Reisin, "Randale und Nazi-Parolen."

⁴⁰³ Michael A. Walloch, Nathan Kogan, and Daryl J. Bem, "Group Influence on Individual Risk Taking," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 65, no. 2 (1962): 75-86.



Some Cottbus fans proudly did Hitler salutes without obscuring their identities at the 2017 Cottbus vs. Babelsberg game.⁴⁰⁴

While collective actions like chants likely increase in-group bonding, chants also provide an easier route for participation in fans' collective actions for attendees outside of the subculture. At games, fans tend to stand together in a certain area. However, one does not need to be standing exactly with the fans to participate in the chants since sound travels. Furthermore, since chants are repetitive—often with the same lines or stanzas chanted over and over again—one often does not need to originally know the lyrics to chant along at games because as the chants continue, outsiders can “catch on” and eventually chant along. Like songs, chants also increase fans' solidarity with one another.

Layering Through Choreography

German ultras are united in “their fascination with choreography in the stadium,”⁴⁰⁵ which as aforementioned, involves fans making a choreographed display of flags, banners, or signs along with music or chants. German fans' large and noteworthy use of

⁴⁰⁴ Reisin, “Randale und Nazi-Parolen.”

⁴⁰⁵ Montague, 1312, 223.

choreography—which arguably acts as both a cultural practice and collective action—often shows a clear layering of both cultural objects and collective actions. That is, choreo serves as a showcase of fans’ banners, posters, flags, coordinated clothing, music, and performance, ultimately highlighting the subcultures' reliance on aesthetic, detail-orientation, creativity, and emphasis on a collective identity.



Borussia Dortmund fans are well-known for their choreo performances, like the one above which shows hundreds of Dortmund fans working together to largely display the word “DORTMUND” using yellow flags.⁴⁰⁶

The photo below is a clear example of Babelsberg fans’ layering of cultural objects through the collective action of choreo. Fans wear matching black clothes, some wave white flags, others flags of various colors to make a rainbow, while some fans in the front hold up a large display of two men kissing through a choreographed display accompanied by music. This

⁴⁰⁶ 20TU01, “BORUSSIA DORTMUND INTERNATIONAL - Paris Saint-Germain CHOREO,” YouTube, posted February 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aim8sKet7tg>.

display required teamwork from Babelsberg fans and reflected the creativity that goes into the fan culture.



Babelsberg fans' choreographed display—which won liga3-online's "choreography of the month"—shows a layering of fans' cultural objects through a collective display.⁴⁰⁷

Overall, choreo often plays on the idea of "strength in numbers." That is, the more fans who participate in a unified choreography, the louder, and more significant the fan base appears, reflecting resiliency and strength among the fans. Notably, Dortmund—who again, has the largest standing terrace in European football—⁴⁰⁸has their renowned Yellow Wall, where

⁴⁰⁷ "Stellungnahme zur Choreo des Monats April," liga-online.de, last modified May 14, 2013, <https://www.liga3-online.de/stellungnahme-zur-choreo-des-monats-april/>.

⁴⁰⁸ Philip Oltermann, "Borussia Dortmund's 'yellow wall' stands tall in face of attack on team," The Guardian, April 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/apr/12/borussia-dortmunds-yellow-wall-stands-tall-in-face-of-attack-on-team>.

thousands of Dortmund fans stand clad in yellow often performing choreos, which Montague describes as “loud and intimidating”⁴⁰⁹ because of the sheer number and energy of Dortmund fans. These large, layered, and politically-oriented displays are most often seen with left-wing fans, as the far-right’s game-playing limits the extent to which they can put on such eye-catching performances.



With coordinated clothing, politically-oriented and apolitical loud and proud banners, and loud music, Borussia Dortmund’s Yellow Wall is the epitome of German fan culture.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Montague, *1312*, 214.

⁴¹⁰ Rory O’Callaghan, “Borussia Dortmund forced to close famous Yellow Wall as punishment for crowd trouble against RB Leipzig,” last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-4219626/Borussia-Dortmund-forced-close-famous-Yellow-Wall.html>.

In 2017, Borussia Dortmund was targeted by a terrorist attack that injured player Marc Bartra.⁴¹¹ The choreography on the yellow wall helped the team and fans “to regain its fierce composure of old” in the aftermath of the attack.⁴¹² Fans covered the stadium terrace in a yellow and black cover, reemerging with war paint on their face and plastic ponchos to create the Borussia emblem, while “You'll Never Walk Alone” and ultras beating drums played in the background.⁴¹³ The fans then revealed a banner during the performance that read “6:45 kick-off: are you kidding? Fuck Uefa,”⁴¹⁴ to complain about the match being rescheduled.⁴¹⁵ From banners to songs to a pre-planned performance, this instance reflects the layering of the football subculture. Fans’ coordinated performances also especially highlight the creative work that can go into the fan culture: the solidarity of fans is perpetuated through their cultural objects and collective actions.

Conclusion

Political extremism can have dangerous implications, resulting in violence, unfounded logic, limited free speech, and authoritarian leadership. After two politically extreme dictatorships in the twentieth century, Germany knows this all too well. As a way of coping with or working through their past, to avoid repeating it, and to better their reputation on the international stage, Germany has implemented various laws and policies to prevent right-wing extremism in particular, such as some of the strictest hate speech regulations in the west. However, Germany has a clear and continued issue with right-wing extremism: violent right-wing extremism in Germany highly exceeds that of other European countries.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Philip Oltermann, “Borussia.”

⁴¹² Philip Oltermann, “Borussia.”

⁴¹³ Philip Oltermann, “Borussia.”

⁴¹⁴ The Union of European Football Associations.

⁴¹⁵ Philip Oltermann, “Borussia.”

⁴¹⁶ “Germany is belatedly waking up.”

In Germany, football has served as a highly viewable nexus point for the far-right to gain traction for and disseminate hate fueled ideas; this has occasionally resulted in the cultivation of a left-wing football subculture as defense. With growing (violent) political extremism in Germany—especially on the far-right—and the commercialization of political cultural objects, fringe ideas and networks become more accessible to everyday citizens. This seems puzzling because the intention of subcultures—including far-left and far-right football subcultures—is to diverge from the mainstream, or the establishment. But these subcultures have almost a dichotomous operation: they can be both highly public and highly private.

In regards to their more overt operations, football subcultures on both the left and right are commercialized to an extent. For example, much of the clothing on both the far-left and far-right is available to the mainstream, either through football-associated fan shops or as is especially the case for the far-right, through brands not officially associated with the teams. In regards to fans' deliberate openness, fans on both sides of the political spectrum will also often hold up large banners and post stickers with anti-establishment messages both inside and outside of the stadium, chant politically-oriented chants loudly for others to hear, and post their actions on social media.

At the same time, fans—especially on the far-right—will display items with more coded messages often requiring a use of insider knowledge to understand and perform their actions in ways that promote deindividuation. One of the reasons that the subcultures will operate in this more obscured way is because of the aforementioned laws and policies: hate speech restrictions mean that politically-oriented football subcultures will find unique ways to avoid being restricted by the establishment, resulting fans “game-playing” with their items, actions, and the laws and policies in place. Overall, both subcultures and the mainstream fluctuate; subcultures continue to

“game-play” to position themselves against the mainstream,⁴¹⁷ often utilizing cultural objects and collective actions to do so. The combination of text and design through cultural objects also allows fans to put creative and at times more emphatic touches on their messages. For instance, fans are able to put their messages in bold, brightly colored lettering that makes it more challenging for game attendees to miss their messages. Furthermore, even when actions are apolitical at face value—like when fans sing songs before games or after their team scores a goal—actions like these can contribute to fans’ formation of a collective identity, which in turn affects the fans’ ability to collectively fight for certain political goals.

Overall, fans’ communications are not black-and-white; cultural objects and collective actions allow fans to pave routes of communication that lead to different destinations. I postulate 4 main routes of politically-oriented football fans’ expressions taking into account the more public and more private sides of politically-oriented football fan culture:

Route 1: Football fans communicating with others in the subculture. For example, fans will use social media or forums to organize creating banners with other fans to display at games or to set up pre-game meeting points. Other examples of this first route when fans are using symbols that are likely primarily understood by those in their subculture. For example, Thor Steinar items and the meaning behind wearing these items is not confined to far-right hooligans and the establishment is to an extent aware of the political association of these brands, but wearing this clothing acts a signal to others in the subculture, further strengthening their ability to identify one another and bond over shared values. Concealed items from far-right fans often are communicated along this route.

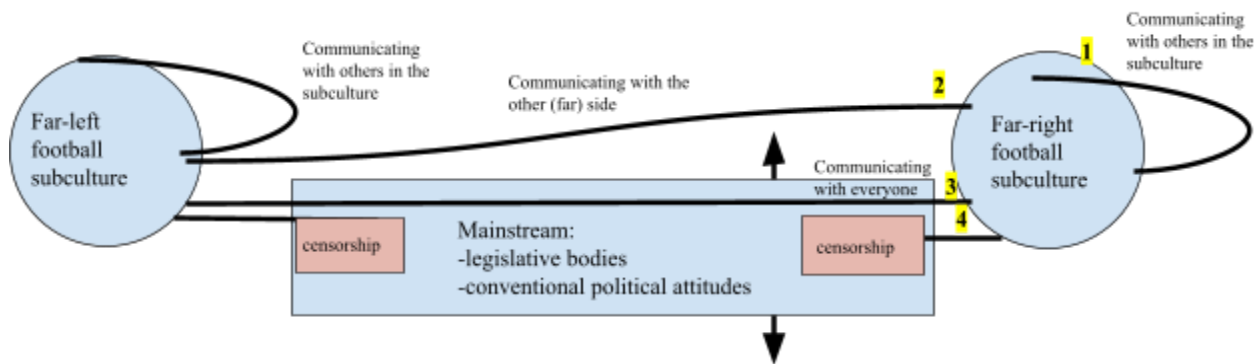
⁴¹⁷ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 14.

Route 2: Football fans communicating with fans on the other side of the political spectrum. One can especially see examples of this with the far-left; that is, a lot of fans with a far-left orientation are utilizing cultural objects and collective actions to antagonize far-right fans with the overall message that far-right sentiments are not welcome. A prime example of this is when Babelsberg 03 fans chanted “Nazi pigs out” (*Nazischweine raus!*) as a response to Cottbus fans doing Nazi salutes and chanting phrases alluding to concentration camps. Overall, expressions in this category often function as an action—one side expresses—and consequence—another side responds.

Route 3: Football fans communicating with a general audience. These expressions are available to the mainstream, including to Germany’s legislative bodies, authorities, and those with more conventional political attitudes. Examples of this include fans holding large banners with bold and clear messages at games, such as ACAB- and anti-commercialization-oriented messages. In this area, one often sees game-playing: fans will sometimes want to be perceived, but not obvious to the extent that their fringe rhetoric is censored. For instance, one can see a lot of far-right politically-oriented actions and rhetoric coming from fans of lower-ranked teams—who are often less viewed than higher-ranked teams—or fans will hide their identity by wearing similar clothes, covering their faces, or hiding behind banners to still communicate to a general audience, but avoid prosecution. Far-left clothing and banners often fall under this category, with fans’ cultural objects emulating a “loud and proud” message for others to see.

Route 4: Football fans’ attempted communications, which are intercepted—or censored—before they reach viewers or a large number of viewers. Examples include when fans’ are not allowed into the game, when their items are taken by authorities, or

when the cameras at games are turned off, like when fans at a Borussia Mönchengladbach vs. Leverkusen game shouted “Shit DFB!” over Monday night games and the cameras were dismantled.⁴¹⁸ It is important to note that right-wing messages are not the only ones censored: left-wing fans’ anti-establishment messages can also be censored and result in consequences for the fans, especially when they involve profanities, like in the aforementioned example, or when symbols or messages are associated with left-wing organizations deemed unconstitutional, like the hammer and sickle when it is used to represent the Communist Party of Germany. It is also important to note that while overt right-wing speech is at times censored or prosecuted—often more frequently than left-wing speech—not all loud and proud right-wing rhetoric falls under this category; freedom of speech rights mean that some right-wing speech is not prosecuted.



Fans’ various routes of communication show a clear, but occasionally disregarded idea:

censorship is not the key to preventing political extremism. By utilizing coded symbols and

⁴¹⁸ Klein, “Discontent over.”; I refer to this as an action that is ideologically-oriented because these sentiments were based on anti-capitalism attitudes. That is, Monday night games would not be feasible for working-class fans to attend.

coded messages, the far-right especially is able to avoid the mainstream and other (far-left) fans intercepting. Germany is an interesting case study for this idea because despite having some of the strongest hate speech regulations in the world, hate speech is still prevalent—and growing—in German society due to the far-right’s strategic communication. Namely, by using banners, stickers, clothing items, and chants, politically-oriented football fans find creative ways to still express their banned messages, taboo, and/or extreme messages. This is not to say that hate speech regulations should not exist, but to point out the fact that even with strict regulations, hate can still thrive in a society.

In her book, Miller-Idriss notes a lack of empirical research on the influence of bans on the consumption of these coded symbols and commercial products,⁴¹⁹ so more research is needed, especially in-country. Researchers should specifically further analyze the dichotomy of hate speech regulations: on one hand, they help prevent hate groups from gaining traction, but on the other hand, they push dangerous speech underground, making it harder to spot and combat. Germany is a special case that researchers should pay attention to, as social taboos resulting from *Vergangenheitsbewältigung/-aufarbeitung* mean that far-right Germans have more motivation to creatively game-play.

But the question remains: what *is* the key to addressing far-right extremism? One solution is to positively reinforce initiative that address discrimination, which the policy bodies are already utilizing in the domain of sport to an extent. For instance, recall the “Julius Hirsch Prize” which is awarded to initiatives and individuals who show a strong commitment to anti-discrimination efforts in the arena of football. Many of these rewarded initiatives are left-wing initiatives, as the left often acts as a response to the far-right.

⁴¹⁹ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, 14.



Ultras fan group **Schickeria** receives the 2014 Julius Hirsch prize.⁴²⁰

While football has served as a nexus point for spreading hate, it can also serve as a means combating hate by promoting the United Nations' key ways of decreasing potential for radicalization and violent extremism, including empowering youth, providing a positive means of socialization, and promoting communication with alienated groups and former extremists. For example, Babelsberg 03's Welcome United 03 initiative highlights the societal influence and societal response of football. Welcome 03 was a team composed entirely of refugees; the team no longer exists due to several issues and has been met with controversy—such as the idea that players should be integrated into existing teams, rather being put on their own team—but the

⁴²⁰ “DFB PRESIDENT WOLFGANG NIERSBACH PRESENTS JULIUS HIRSCH PRIZE,” Deutscher Fussball-Bund, last modified October 15, 2014, https://www.dfb.de/en/news/detail/dfb-president-wolfgang-niersbach-presents-julius-hirsch-prize-108105/?no_cache=1.

existence of the team has had positive implications. For one, it has given native Germans the opportunity to frequently and positively socialize with refugees, from playing against them to post-game barbeques. In former East Germany—which has some of the highest rates of neo-Nazis and hate crimes against refugees—positively interacting with refugees can have beneficial implications. The refugees who are seeking community inclusion are benefited, and East Germans can get to know the refugees on a personal level, and therefore counteract stereotypes that might be prevalent in East German cities especially. Furthermore, initiatives like Welcome 03 can encourage positive civic engagement, including for those who do not have voting rights: being a fan means that one can participate in decision making that affects how one's area is represented, and being a player means playing to represent one's municipality or country. Overall, positive social interactions through initiatives such as Welcome 03 can challenge right-wing extremism. This highlights that when done purposefully, football can be used to address xenophobia and discrimination by taking advantage of opportunities for positive change.



Welcome 03 players—who are refugees from around the world—gather together on the field during a game.⁴²¹

As explored in the introduction, the German establishment does to an extent support political de-radicalization through football. For example, the aforementioned “Integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity” discusses ways that grassroots sport initiatives can address radicalization.⁴²² The research shows that it would be beneficial for Germany to continue initiatives through football that serve the purpose of helping integrate refugees and migrants. Additionally, Germany could focus more on football initiatives that provide a positive social environment for those who are at risk of becoming political

⁴²¹ “Welcome United 03 geht den nächsten Schritt,” Babelsberg 03, last modified 2014, <https://babelsberg03.de/blog/2018/08/05/welcome-united-03-geht-den-naechsten-schritt/>.

⁴²² “European Parliament resolution.”

extremists, particularly youth in lower income areas, areas with less opportunities, and/or in areas known to have strong far-right support. It is extremely vital that the powers at hand take advantage of social opportunities innately provided by sport because those who are ostracized are more at risk of illogical beliefs and becoming radicalized.⁴²³ Creative, immediate, research-driven solutions that appeal to the youth are needed for Germany to truly embrace Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung.

This research fills several gaps in the literature by looking at football subcultures on the left and right, legislation, *and* why fan behavior is important to look at through the lens of the unique German-context. Previous research has lacked such a broad analysis in the domain of football. For example, Miller-Idriss's work does not look at football nor the left-wing to such an extent; her research on "game-playing," however, provides a vital groundwork for understanding politically-oriented subcultures in various domains. Taking Miller-Idriss's work and applying it to football is essential because of football's high visibility, role as a national pastime in Germany, and the opportunity for football to address the problem of far-right extremism, rather than perpetuate it. Other research has also looked at primarily right-wing fans, but this thesis has sought to serve as a reminder that both the left- and right- are often anti-establishment through a common anti-police, anti-commercialization-orientation. This is important to regard because while at face value the German establishment may seem more left-wing, there are still political subcultures that wish to be and stay separate from the establishment because they want to offer an alternative to the establishment.

Further research should additionally look at smaller football teams in Germany because this is where one can especially see political initiatives on both the far-left and far-right. This is

⁴²³ Kai-Tak Poon, Zhansheng Chen, and Wing-Yan Wong, "Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Following Ostracism," *Journal of Health Psychology* 46, no. 8 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219898944>.

quickly clear when looking at politically-oriented fan subcultures in Germany; there is a good amount of research on St. Pauli, however, there is little research on Babelsberg 03. Smaller teams are also interesting in regards to illegal or socially taboo political actions and expression because being a fan of a smaller team means less surveillance, but enough so that ideas are perceived by a wider audience. In addition to Babelsberg 03, other less-covered teams in Germany with politically-oriented fans include Berliner FC Dynamo,⁴²⁴ BFC Türkiyemspor 1978, and Roter Stern Kicker e.V. 05. Politically-oriented football fans are also not limited to Germany. Examples of international teams with a large politically-based fan base include Celtic F.C. (Scotland), Zenit St Petersburg (Russia), Hapoel Tel Aviv FC (Israel), and Seattle Sounders FC (USA). Further research could compare and contrast politically-oriented football fan cultures around the world, which could provide further insightful information regarding the impact of the German context on Germany's fans.

⁴²⁴ See the Gegengerade fan club.



Seattle Sounders FC fans in Seattle, Washington, USA show a loud and proud left-wing, antifascist-orientation.⁴²⁵

There are also key limitations to the current research that future research could seek to amend. For one, this research was conducted in the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a part of the research process, sources were used that included first-hand interviews with fans, such as Montague's book, *1312: Among the Ultras*. When possible, on-the-ground research involving first-hand accounts is highly recommended to ensure the integrity of the research. Furthermore, a large part of the football fan subculture remains concealed to outside viewers—including researchers—because fans' of fans' taboo, illegal, and/or extreme actions. Future research could look at the more concealed parts of the fan culture,

⁴²⁵ Jeremiah Oshan, "Iron Front flag ban formally removed from MLS fan code of conduct," SB Nation, last modified February 19, 2020, <https://www.sounderatheart.com/2020/2/19/21143875/iron-front-flag-ban-formally-removed-from-mls-fan-code-of-conduct>.

but the extent to which researchers should is up for debate because of the ethical implications. Data from future research could include being anonymous in regards to the fans' and team names, but determining how to conduct ethical research on this topic could prove beneficial for further understanding Germany's political (sub)culture(s) beyond voting results. This is because some people cannot vote due to age or citizenship and some views are not expressed by political candidates, especially ones that are extreme and/or illegal. Looking at different loci of political culture where ideas can disseminated and gain traction through text and image—like through football—can reveal more about the political views, prejudices, and potential occurrences in an area. That is, looking at how many votes an area has for the AfD can be a predictor for how far-right that area is, but when one looks at football fans, it can give one a more concrete idea of what those on the far-right are supporting.

Overall, German football is more than a game: it is a place for community, artistic expression, and entertainment. And through the combination of these, it is also a place for the dissemination of political-expressions. The qualities which make football powerful, politically-interrupting—both metaphorically and literally—and research-worthy are not necessarily the players or the coaches, but the outsiders who gather around the sport. Davidson puts it perfectly: “Football without the fans is nothing.”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ Davidson, *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, 97.

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