THE ENGLISH DISEASE?
The Social-legal Construction of Football Hooliganism

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Introduction
In late 1996, Manchester United launched a new product onto the alcoholic drinks section of supermarkets throughout the country. However, Red Tribe, a full strength lager bearing the Manchester United club crest, soon found opponents. 

Alcohol Concern responded to the sale of Red Tribe by raising the subject of continued media fascination, when a spokesman for the group stated that,

"Having match packs of twelve cans encourages binge drinking by fans on match days and we all know what that leads to - football hooliganism." (The Daily Telegraph, 3/11/96)

What is revealed by this, and dozens of other public statements, is the acceptance of the term, ‘football hooliganism’, into everyday, common usage. What football hooliganism is, and what causes it, is now seen as common knowledge, something which ‘we all know’. With the World Cup taking place in France this summer, the papers are already full of articles concerning the likelihood of incidents of football hooliganism, a process which to some extent had already begun with the crowd disturbance in Rome in the match which led to England’s qualification.

In this article I will be considering, and problematising, the supposedly ‘common-sense’ definitions of football hooliganism which form the basis for our understanding of the phenomenon. In one sense, this is building upon an article by Michael Salt and in Youth and Policy (No. 13 1985) ‘Football Hooliganism: Anticipation and Presence’, which first looked at how football hooliganism was a ‘common sensical’ phenomenon, a result of an active process of cultural construction by the media and those directly experiencing incidents of football-related disorder. However, this article also goes beyond this, noting the direct practical effect in terms of the response of the criminal justice system, that such a construction has upon those traditionally seen to belong to this culture of youth, masculinity, football and violence.

Setting the Argument: The common sense meanings of football hooliganism
What is ‘football hooliganism’? What are the definitions which form the basis for our understanding of this widely reported ‘phenomenon’? For most, it is a familiar term which requires no introduction, and ‘common sense’ definitions of football hooliganism, which rely implicitly on ‘what everybody knows’ (Salt, 1985, p19) about this phenomena, appear quite acceptable. The phenomenon belongs to the realm of the ‘obvious’, where explicit definitions are assumed to be unnecessary.

In contrast to this ‘taken for granted’ attitude, I shall start by examining whether we can uncover a clear definition (or definitional framework) of ‘football hooliganism’ and
its associated terms, or whether the labels are instead built upon 'taken-for-granted' meanings, associations and images; that is, an implicit framework of background understandings which provide resources upon which football hooliganism 'stands out' as an issue of a certain kind but which does not itself become explicit and transparent. Can we even identify football hooliganism as such without already possessing an 'interpretative schema' by whose application we can contrast different incidents and determine which of these incidents are included within the phenomenon?

My research, which has included a wide-ranging literature review and analysis of media coverage, participant observation and interviews with the affected parties suggests that for most, football hooliganism is a term which does not require explicit definition. When it comes to usage of the label by media, social control sources and even academics, both words in the term ‘football hooliganism’ are often unclear and undefined. The meanings they attach are based upon a taken for granted perception which is not so much of a definition as a collection of unclear meanings and ideas, best illustrated by an examination of the use of the ‘disease metaphor’ which has been ascribed to the phenomenon. The role of this metaphor, the past it has played in constructing this ‘common sense’ meaning of football hooliganism, is an essential part of our investigation into the term’s meaning. It aids the process of making the term self-explanatory, a part of ‘what everybody knows’, a quasi-automatic association of certain events with the label ‘football hooliganism’, operating below the level of explicit attention to the interpretative process which constructs it.

It helps us conjure images of tabloid headlines concerning ‘yobs’ and ‘scum’ and pictures of skinheads fighting on terraces and tearing up railway carriages on their way to or from matches. These, our common sense knowledge tells us, are football hooligans. By contrast, the ordinary man on the street who does not attend football is not a football hooligan. Nor are the family of football supporters who sit politely in their seats at matches and politely clap good football. This ‘type’ of spectator is a ‘real’ fan, whereas young men wearing Newcastle United colours who cause trouble after their team failed to win the Premiership Title are only ‘so-called fans’ (Newcastle Evening Chronicle 29/5/96). The media and others involved in the reporting, prevention or analysis of football hooliganism have tended themselves to rely on this ‘accepted’, either or differentiation rather than consider, in a self-reflective fashion, what it is that they are reporting on. It is not so much the type of activity engaged in which leads to labelling as a football hooligan, but more of the type of person involved. Drunken young male supporters shot at by foreign police automatically must take some blame for the disturbance;[1] middle-aged businessmen and women enjoying corporate hospitality who become involved in a similar type of disturbance, on the other hand, must be innocent victims of thug policing, as we saw from the uncharacteristically sympathetic reports following English fans being beaten by Italian police during England’s World Cup Qualifier in Rome this year.[2]

It is only those who go beyond this accepted understanding, and explicitly consider specific definitions which could be applied to the term who realise the confusion, and discrimination, that exists when attempting to produce one definition of ‘football hooliganism’. Only when we have recognised, and tried to counter the extremes and prejudices, can serious analysis into the meanings of the term be considered, and the ambiguity surrounding the label can become clear.

This process is important from a socio-legal perspective because the way in which the phenomenon is constructed has direct practical implication in the sphere of the criminal legal system, at the levels of legislation, the criminal courts, and policing. If we accept the law’s stated liberal objectives, couched in terms of ‘justice’, ‘equality’ and ‘certainty’ then we need to reflect on whether the term is an appropriate basis for criminal law action. We will consider whether real problems lie not just in discerning meaning to the words ‘football’ and ‘hooliganism’, but also in the addressing of the many, diverse, ‘deviant’ actions (carried out in a ‘football context’) as a singular phenomenon in itself (whether it be football-related violence or football-related crime etc.). Do various definitional problems lie deeper than the words themselves, and if so, does this mean that they also permeate the very concept of football-related disorder as a specific singular phenomenon at the pre-linguistic level of immediate experience?

How has the criminal law ‘constructed’ (through an active process of cultural interpretation and labelling) the phenomenon of football hooliganism? Does the disease metaphor influence the legal system’s understanding of the phenomenon, and, if so, does this have a direct practical impact upon society’s response to it? Where those involved in the ‘law-making process’ themselves have been responding to, and building upon the popular ‘meanings’ and values attributed to the term, the area of study expands from a ‘mere’ semantic exercise to incorporate socio-legal and civil libertarian issues.

Unclear Foundations: Defining football hooliganism

Gaining a clear and unambiguous definition of ‘football hooliganism’, as may be sought after by a traditional lawyer interested in legislation or sentencing policy used against football hooligans, is particularly problematic. If ‘football hooliganism’ were a crime in itself, this would help provide us with a formal definition from which we could begin to work (although, of course, this definition may itself be problematic). However, legislation does not provide us with a clear definition of football hooliganism from which to work, although this is certainly not to say that judges and legislators have not responded to the ‘phenomenon’ of football hooliganism as it has been constructed. However, football hooliganism is not, in itself, recognised as a specific crime, so Parliament, through legislation, has not presented a clear definition of the term.

Prima facie, some clarification might be achieved if we focus on the ‘hooliganism aspect’ of football hooliganism and gain an understanding of this social category.
However, the term, ‘hooliganism’ itself is no less of a ‘blanket’ label without the ‘football’ aspect. The word ‘hooligan’ first came into common English usage to describe groups of rowdy youths during the summer of 1898 (Pearson, 1983), and has been defined as ‘A rough lawless young person’ (Collins English Dictionary 1988), or ‘A young ruffian, especially a member of a gang’ (Oxford English Dictionary 1991). At this level, the meanings of the word are particularly ambiguous; what ‘lawless’ actions need to take place, how ‘young’ must the person be and what kind of ‘roughness’ are we talking about? Can any show of rowdy behaviour in any context be considered hooliganism? It has certainly been used in this way, for example when Denis Howell on an interruption by the Home Secretary during the Second Reading of the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1983 commented that, ‘It appears that hooligans are not confined to the terraces of football grounds’ (Hansard (Commons) 3/7/83: 411).

When the ‘football’ prefix is added, we might presume this in fact narrows down the definition, and that the term ‘football hooliganism’ is far more specific than ‘hooliganism’ per se. However, although the prefix in this case does place some restrictions on the context in which the (ill) defined behaviour can take place, it also seems to have the perverse effect of extending the boundaries determining what behaviour can fall under the label. As a result, with the ‘football’ aspect added to the classification, definitions become even less clear.

Presumably, a football hooligan needs to be understood as someone who is, (a) a ‘hooligan’ and (b) acts as a ‘hooligan’ in a football context. Although the emphasis is on the situation in which the criminal act is carried out, the term football hooliganism is usually applied to the certain types of ‘hooligan’ offences encapsulated by the label ‘hooligan’. Threatening or insulting behaviour, affray, looting, common assault, and the carrying of offensive weapons may all be described as football hooliganism if they take place in a context of football (e.g. the offences take place at a football ground, or by supporters on their way to or from a match, or by rival football gangs) whereas, for example, supply of illegal substances in a football context, although obviously ‘football-related’, would not be considered ‘hooliganism’.

However, exactly what this ‘football context’ needs to be for the actor to become a football hooligan as opposed to a non-football hooligan is unclear. Must the hooliganism take place at a football match? Must the hooligan have the purpose of watching football? Must the hooliganism take place at the time of a football match? These are questions to which there is no answer accepted by consensus. Mostly, these are questions which are not even addressed. Furthermore, the addition of the prefix, ‘football’ to ‘hooliganism’ may in fact alter the meaning of the latter word, demonstrated by the fact that a football hooligan does not need to be young to be described as such.³

Another issue which challenges the idea of hooliganism as a quality prior to and independent of ‘football’ arises when it becomes clear that the addition of the prefix in fact extends the meanings which can be attached to the initial label. With the addition of the prefix, the act itself does not need to be of a ‘traditional’ hooligan form to be described as football hooliganism. For example, the manslaughter of a spectator at Cardiff Arms Park after a World Cup Qualifier in 1993 was described at court as the ‘ultimate act of football hooliganism’. However, the killing itself occurred when two fans recklessly fired a marine distress rocket which hit a pensioner on the other side of the stadium. This action was far away from the traditional view of hooliganism as defined in the dictionary meanings of ‘hooliganism’ we considered above. The defendants were aged 31 and 33. Neither were acting as a member of a gang and the action itself was reckless, but was not intended to cause injury or distress.

This apparent confusion between ‘football hooliganism’ and crimes which, if not for their ‘link’ with football, would fall outside a traditional definition of ‘hooliganism’ is also demonstrated by the files kept by the Football Unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. The Football Intelligence Unit was set up at the start of the 1988/9 season and has since grown to become an important part of the national campaign against football hooligans. Armstrong and Hobbs (1994, p222) note that the Unit keeps files on all those arrested for football-related violence (seemingly regardless of successful charge), and by 1990, had 6,000 names on file. They add,

With over 6,000 names of ‘hooligans’, it is interesting to note that the offences that brought them to the attention of the Unit are just 1,500 for violence. Yet over 4,000 for non-violence offences including drugs (470), fraud (446), auto-crime (497) and others (747). What the latter four offences have to do with football hooliganism is a mystery.

The football unit’s use of the term ‘football hooliganism’ appears merely to be a replacement term for ‘football-related crime’, sacrificing a strict adherence to the definition of ‘hooliganism’ for the ‘ease’ of being able to categorise those on its files with the ‘hooligans’ described by politicians and media. The ‘link’ between these offences and football-related violence appears to be that many of these non-violent offences were committed to finance later acts of violence (ibid). Therefore, the non-violent offences are just a means to an end of football-violence, and the whole ‘series’ of crimes can be placed under the ‘football hooliganism’ label. However, regardless of whether a link can be made between earlier non-violent acts and later more ‘traditional’ acts of ‘football hooliganism’, the label becomes more arbitrary and less specific or discriminate.

In these cases (and that of the two Welsh fans), the criminality of the action linked with the football context appears to have led to its labelling as ‘football hooliganism’. On the other hand, behaviour which is not necessarily criminal may be described as hooliganism if it takes place within a football-context, or by those who are traditionally seen as the ‘type’ to attend football matches. As Robert Wareing pointed
out during the Parliamentary debate on the subject in 1985:

People cannot be expected to go to a football match and not be a little boisterous. If they were all public school boys they would be described as high-spirited, but when working-class youngsters engage in boisterous behaviour, it becomes hooliganism. (Hansard (Commons) 3/7/85: 398)

Wearing's comment is one of the few which does not operate on a common-sense basis. Instead, he problematises the identification of football hooliganism as selective labelling, demonstrating that there may be a danger of class-specific value judgements in the very act of identification of who is a football hooligan. It may even be that the class divisions actually form the basis for this construction of football hooliganism. Football has always been a traditionally working class activity, both watching matches and playing (many public schools or selective grammar schools still refuse to allow students to play football) and there is certainly a possibility that if football had traditionally been an upper-class activity, whilst retaining the same potential for disorder, then the singular, threatening 'phenomenon' of football hooliganism may not have been an issue. The idea that football hooliganism is a product of selective labelling, be it on grounds of class or youth, certainly provides us with an explanation for the confusion and lack of clarity surrounding the label.

This ambiguity adds greater scope for subjective variation in the interpretation and usage from individual to individual and group to group. Vastly different types of people, and different actions are grouped together under this title, depending on the individual interpretation of the term. It encapsulates a wide variety of crimes, misbehaviour and other actions, and the only link is an unclear idea about a 'football context'. Words and terms already exist to describe the various acts and actions which the meaning of football hooliganism may entail. The labels, 'football supporter', 'football fan' and 'spectator' already exist to describe watchers of football whose traditional, more active, forms of fandom may be described as 'hooliganism' by a strict interpretation of the term. Added to these, we already have terms given to us by the criminal law to describe actions typically associated with football hooligans, e.g. 'violent disorder', 'threatening behaviour', committing criminal damage and running on the pitch.

However, 'football hooliganism' transcends all the boundaries set up by these pre-existing terms. It is this indiscriminate grouping together of often unconnected acts and actors under one uncertain, blanket term which makes 'football hooliganism' a particularly contrived label. It becomes an unnatural 'construction' because the label, although it does not designate a criminal offence, has created a specific picture in the minds of people receiving the metaphoric images. Perhaps it has even led to the creation of a sub-culture of football hooliganism, recognised by both those involved (who feel that they belong to it), and those who try to distance themselves from it, the 'either/or' distinction between the 'hooligan' and the 'normal fan' referred to above. But the creation, to whatever extent it may lead, is based on unclear and undefined parameters and, as we will see later, may result in serious consequences of stigmatisation which affect all those grouped together under the term.

Football hooliganism, as a label and a concept, is not a natural phenomenon. By 'natural', I refer to a variety of interlinked concepts. Something is 'natural' whose existence for us is unforced and unconstrained. It has existence in itself and does not depend for its existence on acts of recognition by human subjects. A natural construction is something which has come about as an almost inevitable, or at least probable, consequence of the evolution of pre-existing, primary elements. It does not have to continually relate to itself consciously, nor does it have to establish its identity by choosing a certain life for itself. It exists regardless of whether it has been recognised and classified externally by the interpretation of human beings. In other words, the 'natural' is discovered in and through experience, rather than being constructed by it. Even if we remove the 'layers' of social meaning imposed upon a 'natural object' something still remains. The opposite, however, is true of purely cultural objects. If we remove the layers of meaning surrounding the 'object' of 'football hooliganism', we will not be left with a residue that is recognisable as the singular, threatening phenomenon which it has been socially constructed as.

The Role of Metaphor: Football hooliganism as the English Disease

Given that 'football hooliganism' exists first and foremost as a social (and not specifically legal) construct, the next question is, 'how is it constructed?'

One important contribution to this process is the particular metaphorical interpretation of the phenomenon. Comment on football hooliganism has often involved use of the disease metaphor to describe the phenomenon and during the 1980s, the phenomenon became known throughout Europe as the English Disease, or the English Sickness. This analogy between the phenomenon (as it has been constructed) and a clinical disease is particularly significant. The metaphor illustrates the way in which the football-related violence has been constructed by (or for) society. The apparent similarities between what has been constructed as 'football hooliganism' and a disease are clear. Firstly, like disease, football hooliganism is regarded as undesirable for society and the individual, its consequences leading to economic 'waste' and physical injury. Secondly, football hooliganism has been described as 'contagious', for example in the judgement of Justice Waterhouse at the High Court in 1992:

Football hooliganism is not akin to a random outbreak of violence by a gang of bullies on a Saturday night in a public house or other public place. If the evidence for the prosecution in the case is accepted, it is more like a contagious disease, inflamed by the excitement of violence and erupting with depressing and deliberate regularity. (R v Manchester Crown Court QB 6/4/92)
According to Waterhouse, whilst gang violence on a Saturday night can also be described as an ‘outbreak’, it does not have the same specific characteristics of football-related violence. The active role of football hooliganism is emphasised in his judgement. It is likened to a progressive disease, which although continually, and often quietly present in a dormant form within the body, frequently reveals itself in the ‘eruption’ of sore and general ‘inflammation’ of the body as it continues to take over the unfortunate victim. Only with football hooliganism, the eruptions are of violence and the ‘body’ or ‘victim’ is the general public which, like the carrier of a disease, is considered to be an innocent victim. Like the ancient belief that diseases were inherently evil and often sent as a punishment from God, football hooliganism’s ‘malignant’ form is also emphasised, not only its contagious characteristic - its threat of ‘spreading’ throughout society, but also in its apparent ill will and harmful intent.

According to this view, hooliganism ‘spread’ like a plague from England (its apparent place of origin) until the whole of European football was ‘infected’. Those on the continent looking for something to blame for the affliction automatically turned to the nation from where the disease was spread, hence its labelling as ‘the English Disease’. Incidents of football hooliganism are frequently described as ‘outbreaks’, the initial virus being the same, but bursting from obscurity time and time again, occasionally in a new, usually more ‘dangerous’ mutation, creating a new strain of the same disease.

What is also significant is the type of disease which has been associated with football hooliganism. The seriousness which has been attached to the phenomenon by commentators on football, and especially by politicians, means that the characteristics possessed by any contagious disease are not enough to satisfy the imagery which is being created. A comparison with the common cold, or childhood mumps does not seem to be ‘sufficient’ to demonstrate the threat posed to society by football hooliganism. When one strives to find what type of disease is being visualised by the metaphor, we find one which still kills thousands a year, an outright ‘cure’ still beyond the reach of medical researchers. Colin Moynihan, then Minister for Sport, commented in 1988 that football hooliganism was, ‘...a cancer in an otherwise healthy body’ (Armstrong and Hobbs, 1994).

It is fortunate that the cancer comparison is a metaphor, rather than a ‘scientific’ comparison of phenomena. According to traditional medical research, cancer is not a contagious disease, and would not serve to demonstrate how the phenomenon could ‘spread’ from England to the Continent. However, the metaphor here does provoke the image of the cancerous cell, or part, as a singular corruption in a body which is otherwise healthy. The body here is society, and we can see that the characterisation of football hooliganism as a disease also has implications for the ideological representation of the rest of society. According to Moynihan, the ‘body’ of society has only one serious disorder: Football hooliganism. The paradox here lies in the fact that Thatcher’s ‘law and order’ drive of criminal legislation identified football-related crime as only a minor aspect of wider public disorder. A logical following of the metaphor of football-related disorder as a disease would see the ‘body’ of society stricken by numerous crippling illnesses. Fortunately, the use of metaphors does not require, or encourage, reflection or self-criticism, and does not normally lead to critical explication of what is being said. In fact, the use of an established metaphor usually does the opposite. For those for whom the metaphor is intended, it should not be questioned whether the body is otherwise healthy, whether cancer is contagious, or whether the metaphors, when analysed, contradict themselves.

In this way, the disease metaphor has in fact replaced the ‘need’ for a definition. Metaphors are more powerful than definitions, by-passing the ‘rationality’ of the individual and instead conjuring images in the subconscious. Metaphors provide us with a linguistic method by which we, ‘...bring together and fuse into unity diverse thoughts, and thereby re-form our perceptions of the world,’ comparable to the workings of a symbol such as a national flag (Kitay, 1991, p.6). The images provide us with an irreducible meaning, reproduced without reflectivity, whereas unsatisfactory definitions might lead to serious critical investigation. With the ‘image’ of football hooliganism in the mind of the public, it is unnecessary to ask for a definition. We know what football hooliganism is, because we have the ability to reactivate a certain, already formed, picture in our minds of it. Its meaning is implicit, ‘common knowledge’, something which exists without question. As Turbayne writes,

A good metaphor is a beguiling thing. Once it is understood and accepted, one sees the thing illustrated through new spectacles that, when worn for a while, are hard to discard. (1970, p.103).

According to Turbayne, those who are ‘victims’ of the metaphor then confuse the image of the situation as given by the metaphor with the ‘actual’ situation. In effect, the victim of metaphor, ‘has mistaken the mask for the face’ (1970, p.27).

The disease metaphor is one way by which football-related disorder of all kinds has been grouped together under one heading and constructed as a single phenomenon, a gestalt entity. By describing football hooliganism as a ‘contagious disease’ in comparison to other types of violence which (although appearing, prima facie, to have similar foundations,) and to be expressed in similar ways are not comparable to a disease, ‘firm lines of demarcation are being drawn across the sphere of public disorder’. Moreover, by this process, football-related violence is excluded from the more general category. According to this argument, the ‘football hooligan’ is a specific type of person, with his own motives for violence which are ‘not akin’ to his peers who are involved in ‘normal’ gang violence or politically motivated protest. Differences in motives between different types of people involved in football-related disorder are discounted as merely a slightly different strain of the same disease.
Furthermore, the analogy between football-related disorder and a disease can be used to do more than ‘merely’ instil an unquestionable image, or representation, in the public’s mind. There are two separate (albeit interacting) issues at stake here. Firstly, is the issue of how ‘football hooliganism’ is being created as a singular, threatening phenomenon. As we have already seen, the use of the disease metaphor, in rhetoric by politicians, judges and those involved in the sport itself has played a great part in ‘installing’ the idea of ‘football hooliganism’ as a phenomenon not akin to any other type of disorder, and ‘football hooligans’ as a breed apart from other criminals and anarchists, their behaviour threatening the very fabric of our society.

An important point is that whilst the metaphor claims to simply describe the inherent qualities of football hooliganism (emphasising it as ‘singular’ and ‘threatening’), it has in fact constructed the phenomenon as such. The interpretation of football hooliganism according to the metaphor can (for those affected by it) in effect change the very ‘facts’ surrounding the ‘phenomenon’ in the same way in which established metaphors giving animals human characteristics lead to those affected by the metaphors believing that, for example, the fox is cunning (Turbayne, 1970, p.22). Similarly, for those affected by the disease metaphor of football-related violence, football hooliganism is a singular entity, with the characteristics of disease which threaten society itself. In doing this, the metaphor supports and reinforces the common-sense labelling of ‘football hooliganism’ at the implicit level below express explication.

However, for us, the introduction of this disease metaphor is also a useful tool in explaining why football hooliganism is not a ‘natural’ construction. In a comparison with a ‘real’, biological disease (cancer for instance), we can see that football hooliganism is purely a forced construction. All definitions are, in one sense, artificial, whether or not the ‘thing’ being defined is ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’, but the relationship between the definition and what is being defined is what separates football hooliganism from a specific disease such as cancer. As we have seen, football hooliganism exists only (for us as a socially meaningful phenomena) through its identification and recognition as football hooliganism. If such identification and labelling does not exist, then the specific action is not football hooliganism.

This is not true of cancer, however. The existence and operation of cancer as a biological disease is not dependent upon its recognition as cancer and the identification of cancer is not wholly subjective. A different disease may be mis-diagnosed as cancer, but this does not mean that the new disease is cancer. Such a mis-diagnosis is not possible around the boundaries of football hooliganism, as much of the definition of football hooliganism relies heavily upon a subjective element. Furthermore, cancer was a distinct entity, causing specific physical damage, before the label to describe it as such was introduced, but this is not true of football hooliganism. As such, the existence of a word, in this case, ‘cancer’ (and here we are considering the existence of the term, not the build-up of the word itself) to describe the existing disease was, in a developed society, inevitable. The difference between cancer and football hooliganism lies in the fact that football hooliganism itself is not a distinct entity. The term has been invented to describe a wide variety of actions which fit into the category ‘football hooliganism’ dependent on the interpretation of the user of the word, and the context in which the ‘action’ took place. The term, ‘football hooliganism’ is therefore more than just ‘unnatural’. The forcing of such a blanket term upon what is in effect a wide variety of acts and actors gives us a false impression that we are looking at a specific, singular and distinct phenomenon whose pathological character is comparable in this respect to something such as cancer.

From Theory to Practice:
The legal implications of the construction of ‘football hooliganism’
In addition to these theoretical problematics concerning the role of the disease metaphor in the social construction of football hooliganism, the use of the analogy has serious practical implications for those involved within the ‘phenomenon’. Especially problematic is the consequence of the metaphor’s role within the criminal justice system. What is being brought about at the level of social reaction as a result of its use?

It is first necessary to note exactly who is ‘imposing’ the metaphor, and upon whom. The metaphor is one imposed by those who possess power in society: politicians, judges, those co-ordinating social control action against the ‘football hooligans’ and the media. The ‘victims’ of the metaphor are those influenced by it (Turbayne, 1970, p.27), the rest of society (although many judges, media and police officers are ‘victims’, as well as ‘secondary’ imposers), and it is in the minds of these ‘victims’, where the creativity of the metaphor takes place (Kittay, 1991, p.119). The importance of the metaphor lies in the way in which it is used by those in power for their own ends, to construct ‘reality’, or ‘truth’ for us, and to justify action taken on the basis of this ‘truth’.

...truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in a large part by metaphor. Most of our metaphors have evolved in our culture over a long period, but many are imposed upon us by people in power - political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, advertisers, the media, etc. In a culture where the myth of objectivism is very much alive, and truth is always absolute truth, the people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true - absolutely and objectively true. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.159)

In the case of football hooliganism, the disease metaphor’s ‘truth’ helps the construction of the common-sense labelling of the ‘phenomenon’, and also re-enforces the power relationships between those in positions of authority and the rest of society. Political leaders and those with social control ‘interests’ (e.g. police, club stewards, the media) are enabled, in part by the metaphor, to construct the ‘truth’ of the mat-
ter for us. Football hooliganism becomes a singular, threatening problem requiring certain solutions. In addition, the solutions tend to be imposed by those who are also initially imposing the metaphor, preventing an opportunity for analysis and reflectivity at this level of searching for a ‘solution’.

This ‘dual power’ increases the need to be reflective about the ways in which metaphors set social ‘problems’ such as football hooliganism within particular ‘frames’ (Schon, 1993, p.150), if we are truly to understand the construction of a social phenomenon and be able to evaluate the response to this phenomenon. For the construction of social phenomena through metaphor (and other methods) in turn effects how we respond to them. As regards phenomena constructed as social ‘problems’, the ‘frame’ in which we have been set may directly reflect the nature of ‘problem-solving solutions’. Schon explains.

The ways in which we set social problems determine both the kinds of purposes and values we seek to realise, and the directions in which we seek the solutions. Contrary to the problem solving perspective, problems are not given, nor are they reducible to arbitrary choices which lie beyond inquiry. We set social problems through the stories we tell - stories whose problem-setting potency derives at least in some cases from their generative metaphors. (1993, p.150)

The reliance upon a metaphor to construct a social problem is not always problematic, with metaphors often needed to interpret and elucidate on new ‘situations’ (Mooij, 1976, p.14), ‘casting abstract concepts in terms of the apprehensible...’ (Glucksmann and Kayser, 193, p.420). However, problems over the ‘appropriateness’ of social policies can arise when the metaphor may give a picture of the ‘phenomenon’ which does not truthfully reflect the situation. The metaphor may give a picture of the phenomenon in which certain aspects are hidden or over-emphasised, leading to a ‘cognitive myopia’ on behalf of the ‘victims’ of the metaphor (Orrony, 1993, p.5). The disease metaphor applied to football-related violence, for example, emphasises aspects of the phenomenon such as its threatening, contagious and damaging characteristics. This kind of short-sightedness may be particularly concerning where the metaphors are used by those in power to explain, and justify action against, particular social phenomena. As Lackoff and Johnson point out, ...

...in the area of politics and economics, metaphors matter more because they constrain our lives. A metaphor in a political or economic system, by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation. (1980, p.236)

In the case of football-related violence, the re-activation of the analogy with a disease can be used to justify ‘tough action’ to be taken against the football hooligans; new legislation from politicians, heavy sentences from judges, oppressive tactics by police and condemnation from the media. A serious disease is seen as a ‘bad thing’, something which has to be stopped, and a cure for the disease is a top priority if the body (in the case of football hooliganism, the state) is to be protected. The overcoming of the disease is paramount, and often requires sacrifices. Sometimes the leg of the sufferer must be amputated to protect the rest of the body from a spread of the infection. The question to be asked is, what is being ‘amputated’ from society to try and protect it from the phenomenon of football hooliganism?

Despite Margaret Thatcher’s widely reported dislike of the sport as a whole (Butler, 1991, p.238), even the apparent ‘peak’ of football-related violence did not lead to an end to the national sport, or the practice of spectators (or even visiting spectators) attending live matches. The sport itself was not sacrificed for the sake of society. However, individuals convicted of football-related crime following the disorderly 1984/5 season were ‘amputated’ from society for a long amount of time.

The Cambridge United ‘hooligan General’ received a five year sentence for football-related disorder, and the apparent leaders of Chelsea’s hooligan firm received ten year sentences for conspiracy to cause violent disorder. The severe sentences handed down to these, and other football ‘hooligans’ were to relate not just their own crimes, but the ‘shame’ they had brought on society. Deterrent sentences to try and stop the ‘spread’ of the disease were by now expected for cases at the higher courts, with prevention of further infection overriding the desire for individual justice.

Aside from the courts’ responses to the more serious football-crime perpetrators, sacrifice in the course of finding the all-important cure continued on a more general scale, with ‘tough’ action by the police and the state against the hooligans considered necessary and, as a result, acceptable, even when these actions cause infringements on the civil liberties of fans. Fans travelling to football matches are subject to draconian police powers (some based on criminal legislation, others as a result of local police policy or practice) which prevent them consuming or carrying alcohol on transport, and which may force supporters to travel a particular route and which prevent them stopping, or passing through certain public areas. Once inside the ground, many spectators are quite literally ‘caged in’, with tall, often spiked fences which curtail their movement around the ground and obstruct their view.

In addition to these crowd control measures which can be witnessed every week, covert police tactics which have been condemned as methods of controlling other types of social deviance are seen as acceptable as part of the fight against football hooliganism (Pratt and Saltor, 1984, p.201). No justification for spying on fans and the blacklisting and keeping of secret files on those suspected of involvement in football disorders is needed because argument and justification is replaced by the spurious ‘justification’ of arguments by analogy or association of cultural images. In statistical terms, drink driving may account for far more injuries and deaths a year than football-related disorder, but neither statistics nor logical argument are used to explain why covert police tactics are ‘openly’ used to infiltrate and spy on football fans, and yet were condemned in relation to drink driving. It is the symbolic
threat of football hooliganism, 'captured' in metaphorical images, which provides the additional justification needed for such tactics.

Conclusion: The need for a clear basis for criminal-legal sanctions
As we have seen, although the criminal legal system does not expound a singular definition of 'football hooliganism', in terms of both legislation and policing the criminal law does respond to the various 'guises' of the constructed phenomenon as if such a definition exists. This response is based upon the implicit, often metaphorically created, meanings attached to the 'phenomenon', casting it in terms of its singularity and threatening characteristic. Instead of a demarcated definition provided in statute or case law, we see the judges, legislators and police acting upon this 'common-sense' knowledge, a knowledge contained in metaphorical images of disease which protect our 'understanding' from reflective scrutiny. The danger here lies when this 'knowledge' provides the footing for criminal-legal sanctions as it has in the case of the response to football-related disorder by statute, court decisions and police practice. Such sanctions show little respect for the civil liberties of the majority of football fans, for whom support only comes when a vocal minority of middle-aged, middle-class supporters are also caught up in such draconian crowd control measures. Whilst our law claims to adhere to general liberal principles such as certainty, equality and justice, we need to recognise the inappropriateness of a legal response to football-related disorder based upon such an ambiguous and reactionary understanding of the phenomenon.

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Notes
1 The Times (21/9/97) following seemingly innocent Manchester United fans being fired upon by Portuguese police following their team's match in Porto.
2 e.g. The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Mirror 13/10/97
3 It would appear that most of the 'super hooligans' (see J. Kerr: 'Understanding Soccer Hooliganism' 1994 Open University Press) are in their late 30s and 40s. The presence of middle-aged hooligans (mainly doctors) was a distinctive feature of crowd disorders at Millwall in the 1950s and 60s.
4 N.Fairclough points out that the metaphorical representation of other social problems in terms of disease is 'extremely common' ('Language and Power', Longman 1995, p.120)
5 According to Lord Justice Russell (R v Rogers, Hinks and Others 11 Cr App R (S) 234 at 237)
6 Although it is noticeable that the very understanding of a disease as an exogenous entity is incorporating a metaphor for disease itself.
7 The Public Order Act 1985, for example, was not intended to be used against those involved in football-related violence: Government response in the 1980s was concerned more with public disorder in the inner cities (e.g. the 1981 riots) and on the picket lines.
8 Be they based on 'youth culture', 'aggressive masculinity', 'social deprivation' or alcohol consumption
9 e.g. through threatening and aggressive behaviour
10 Schoen describes this reflexivity as 'fame awareness'
11 Paul Ricour points to the inadecuacy of, 'an interpretation of metaphor' that gives in to ontological naivete in the evaluation of metaphorical truth because it ignores the implicit 'in not' ('1986')
12 The use of metaphors by judges has not, however, been limited to their response to football-related disorder, and metaphors have been frequently used by judges to justify decisions (e.g. the 'Neighbour Principle': Donaghue v Stevenson [1932] A.C. 562 and the idea of 'Opening the Floodgates': A.K.Potter v O'Brien [1988] 1 A.C. 419)
13 e.g. Covert observation and fans and undercover police operations such as 'Operation Own-Goal' in 1988.