

Sport Mega Events, Urban Football Carnivals and Securitised Commodification: The Case of the English Premier League

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Abstract

This paper explores the interrelationships of security policies and processes of commodification with respect to contemporary sport mega events (SMEs). First, it is argued that we need to move beyond conventional understandings of SMEs, as specific occasions fixed in time and space. Instead, we should examine more diffuse forms of SME, as illustrated by major sport leagues such as the English Premier League (EPL). Secondly, the paper discusses the popular cultures that have long been intrinsic to urban sporting spaces and which have been marginalised by strategies of securitisation and commodification since the late 1980s. Thirdly and fourthly, the principal juridico-political and political-economic forces that prevail within the EPL, and UK football in general, are examined—notably in regard to constrictive legislation and advanced security technologies, alongside policies of neo-liberal governmentalisation and urban revanchism. Fifthly, the paper explores expressions and irruptions of public unease, transgression and conflict within UK football settings with respect to these forces.

Introduction

As urban sport mega events (SMEs) have expanded massively in size over the past two decades, so they have attracted growing attention from social scientists (see, for example, Alegi, 2008; Brownell, 2008; Burbank *et al.*, 2001; Close *et al.*, 2006; Roche, 2000; Samatas, 2007; *Sociological Review*, 2006). Although there are some

exceptions (for example, Klauser, 2008), little of this work has examined in detail the interconnections between political-economic interests and security policies that underlie these SMEs. In this paper, I seek to move towards filling that lacuna by providing a critical sociological analysis of the interrelations between social control

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and commodification which underpin these massive urban events. I explore the public interface between contemporary sport, strategies of surveillance and securitisation, and the moulding of new consumer identities within commodified urban landscapes. In developing this analysis, I also seek to extend the range of urban and transurban sport tournaments and events that we may now classify as SMEs.

The main substantive focus of the paper is on the interrelated commodification and securitisation of English football, particularly the English Premier League. The discussion here is divided into five main parts. First, the focus of this journal Special Issue is primarily on conventional SMEs, such as the Olympics or football World Cup finals, which are events that occur within fixed, specific time-periods and spatial settings. I submit here that we should also examine more *diffuse* forms of SME, as illustrated by major sport leagues such as the English Premier League (EPL). Secondly, I place the securitisation and commodification of the EPL within a historical context, by discussing the popular or 'folk' cultures that have long been intrinsic to urban sporting spaces, such as UK football stadia, and which have been marginalised by particular security and commercial strategies since the late 1980s.¹ Thirdly and fourthly, I examine respectively the principal juridico-political and political-economic forces that prevail within the EPL, and UK football in general, notably in regard to constrictive legislation and advanced security technologies, alongside policies of neo-liberal governmentalisation and urban revanchism. Fifthly, I explore expressions and irruptions of public unease, transgression, resistance and conflict within UK football settings with respect to these dominant forces.

The discussion thus examines the EPL as the paradigmatic, 'diffuse' SME, in which intensified and interrelated forms of

securitisation and commodification have occurred, particularly in and around urban sporting spaces. However, the paper has relevance to other sports in the UK, mainland Europe, North America and Australasia, that have undergone or which are experiencing similar processes (see Lynch, 1991; Ritzer and Stillman, 2001). The analysis provided here may also be useful for exploring comparatively how commerce and security interact in other social fields, such as in the wider leisure industries, media, health and education.

Sport Mega Events: From Specific to Diffuse

Most analysts examine sport mega events as exceptional occasions that occur within specific host cities or nations, and across limited time-periods that tend to range from one day (for example, Cup finals) to one month (for example, football's World Cup finals). This conventional reading of SMEs, as *specific* occasions, is underpinned by modernist assumptions regarding their fixed time-space nature.

Here, I argue that SMEs also include more time-space *diffuse* sporting occasions. This approach has two analytical benefits. First, it registers the ontological and social impacts of contemporary processes of post-modernisation and globalisation, notably the *dedifferentiation* of social categories (including time-space boundaries), the spatial disembedding and deterritorialisation of social practices and identities, the emergence of 'global cities' and the growth of transurban connectivities (particularly through media networks) (see Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1991; Robertson, 1992; Tomlinson, 1999). Secondly, it enables analysts to consider a wider range of sport tournaments that have major multi-urban and transurban impacts, which are on a par

with conventional SMEs, notably in regard to economic scale, transnational media coverage and extensive security arrangements.

Thus, we may model four different categories of SME with reference to their specific/diffuse qualities in time–space terms. Figure 1 locates the four SME categories within four quadrants. The most conventional SMEs fall into quadrant three and are specific in both time and space. Illustrations here include single-day and single-location events, such as Cup finals, as well as more complex SMEs, such as the Olympics (which lasts a fortnight) and football’s World Cup finals (lasting one month). These latter, more complex events have become increasingly multiurban or spatially diffuse. For example, the 2012 London Olympics has seven ‘Olympic Park’ venues, twelve other London venues and nine ‘out-of-London’ locations (including Cardiff, Glasgow and Newcastle); and, football’s 2012 European Championship finals will be contested across eight cities in two nations (Poland and Ukraine). However, I continue to position these more complex SMEs within quadrant three because they are periodic events; moreover, these events are staged within specific settings (for example, one or two nations) *vis-à-vis* their strongly international or global spectrum of participants.

Turning to the other quadrants, SMEs that are time-specific yet space-diffuse are located in quadrant four. Illustrations of these SMEs are provided by continent- or world-wide rounds of sporting fixtures that are played at roughly the same time—for example, the qualifying fixtures that are played on specific dates for football’s World Cup finals.

Quadrants one and two feature time-diffuse SMEs. Quadrant two is fully diffuse in both time and space terms: it usually features SMEs which have ‘seasons’ that last several months; the SME participants are drawn from across the full territory of

potential competitors; and, the participants contest rounds of fixtures across multiple urban locations. The most obvious illustrations are major sports leagues such as American football’s NFL, or football’s major club competitions, like the European Champions’ League or major national league championships (for example, La Liga in Spain, Serie A in Italy, the EPL in England).

Quadrant one refers to SMEs that are time-diffuse but spatially specific. It is best illustrated by a specific town, city or region which has a representative sports team that competes within one or more season-long sport leagues. Crucially, the specific hometown of the team must play host to a series of ‘home’ sports events, particularly over the course of a season; the scale of these events or fixtures may vary strongly, but their cumulative dimensions will be substantial, particularly in terms of audiences over the course of the year.

Diffuse and specific SMEs are not hermetically sealed categories, but they are instead in social relations that are shaped by a form of enforced proximity. The success of some specific SMEs will depend partly upon the effectiveness of some diffuse SMEs: for example, in bids to host World Cup finals, national governments and sports bodies will draw heavily on resources that are derived from league tournaments, such as their popularity, high-standard stadia and proven security systems. If the diffuse SMEs are weak or ineffective, then the chances of hosting specific SMEs are jeopardised: thus, for example, inadequate stadia and prominent fan violence in English club football meant that the UK had little hope of bidding successfully for the World Cup finals in the 1970s and 1980s. The hosting of specific SMEs may have legacy spin-offs for clubs and urban centres which are associated with diffuse SMEs. For example, these specific SMEs may inspire the construction of new

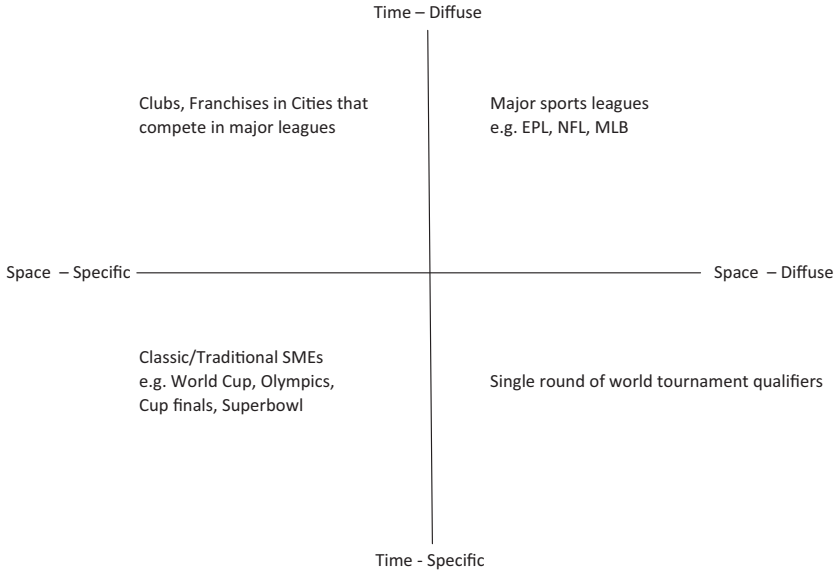


Figure 1. Specific/diffuse sport mega events.

stadia and transport infrastructure, and the testing of new surveillant assemblages for the wider monitoring and control of urban spaces (see Haggerty and Ericson, 2000).² However, conflicts also arise between specific and diffuse SMEs, notably over relevant cultures and techniques of securitisation. For example, spectators familiar with particular policing methods within diffuse SMEs (such as national football tournaments) may encounter problems in adjusting to alternative control techniques at specific SMEs (such as continental or global football championships).

In the remaining discussion, I focus on one particular diffuse SME—the EPL—to explore processes of securitisation and commodification. The EPL provides the ideal case study for four main reasons. First, the EPL is one of the most globally successful of all diffuse SMEs, with the financial analysts, Deloitte (2009, p. 2), highlighting a long-term “virtuous circle of growth” wherein “clubs have transformed their stadia into state of the art venues, while the league now

attracts the world’s greatest players, who have attracted a new and increased fan-base”. Annual EPL revenues total over £2 billion; its 20 clubs have attracted international ownership and investment (notably from the US, Gulf states, east Asia and Russia); matches are televised in over 200 nations and are watched in over 650 million households world-wide.³ Further globalisation seems certain: proposals in 2008 to play a round of fixtures in overseas urban settings—turning the EPL into a globally diffuse event—were shelved for five years, but may resurface given that rival sports leagues have taken similar steps.⁴

Secondly, fitting quadrant one, the EPL enables season-long SMEs to occur in the specific cities that host participant clubs. In 2008/09, each round of EPL fixtures was watched by an average of over 350 000 people in 10 different stadia. Across the season, eight clubs attracted over 800 000 fans to their 19 ‘home’ fixtures.⁵ The 20 EPL clubs were spread across England’s urban centres in the north-east (for example,

Newcastle, Sunderland), the north-west (for example, Liverpool, Manchester United), the Midlands (for example, Aston Villa, West Bromwich), Yorkshire (for example, Hull), London (for example, Arsenal, Chelsea, West Ham) and the south coast (for example, Portsmouth).

Thirdly, the EPL's economic growth is striking given English football's association in the mid 1980s with half-empty stadia, poor facilities and fan disorder, which culminated in the 1985 Heysel disaster and the five-year banning of England from European club competitions.

Fourthly, the EPL has particular transnational significance, as it is seen by many other nations as an exemplary form of neoliberal, securitised and commodified elite sport, to be studied and, where practicable, replicated.

In sections 3 and 4, I explore how commercial and security imperatives have underpinned the EPL. Before doing so, it is important to establish the historical context of these processes, with particular respect to the long-standing urban popular cultures in English football that have been most substantially affected.

Historical Context: Football and Popular Cultural Urban Spaces

In Britain, many major football stadia were first built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in urban settings and they became vibrant recreational spaces for local spectators, particularly working-class men (see Beaven, 2005, pp. 79, 180; Holt, 1989; Inglis, 1987). Here, I briefly consider three aspects of popular fandom that were established within and beyond these stadia, but which were increasingly challenged and marginalised from the late 1980s onwards.

First, strong cross-generational social solidarities have long connected local clubs,

supporters and urban communities. The football ground is a key touchstone across these 'structures of feeling', as a common symbolic resource in the collective myths and memories inside supporter communities and as a focus for what Bale (1993, p. 64), adapting Tuan (1974), has called 'topophilia' (or, 'love of place'). Affectivity and atmosphere are facilitated by inclusive admission prices and the urban accessibility of stadia, often being near train stations or city centres. The 'home' football ground, with its distinctive history, atmosphere and architecture, constitutes a powerful symbolic resource for building club identification, not only for locally born supporters, but even for 'long-distance' supporters, such as home-born, migrant fans and foreign-born, television-inspired followers (see Eichberg 1995; Farred, 2002).

Secondly, supporter cultures have long featured distinctive, socio-spatial patterns of sociability. In Simmelian terms, this sociability affords participants "an emancipating and saving exhilaration" that, in ideal form, is "free of any disturbing material accent" and is characterised by "the most engaging kind of interaction—that among *equals*" (Simmel, 1949, pp. 255, 257, 261; Duncan, 1959, p. 105). Individual participation within this sociability approaches "something amounting to a moral duty" (Tester, 1998, p. 94). Football supporters travelling outside their home city or nation, to attend 'away' fixtures or international tournaments in other urban settings, strongly illustrate the informality, fun, humour and 'classlessness' of this sociability, although their practices—such as singing, heavy drinking, colourful language—are more associated with a masculine working-class habitus. This sociability is most potent when spontaneous forms of movement are possible, such as walking around stand concourses, mingling on the terraces, moving between pubs

or ‘marching’ *en masse* through urban centres towards the stadium.

A more sub-cultural pattern of sociability occurs through processes of ‘bordering from below’ across spectator groups, as manifested through bottom-up, grassroots territory-making tactics with respect to specific urban ‘turf’. In most nations, young spectator sub-cultures have long held deep topophilic ties to their favoured stadium ‘ends’ which are defended in physical and symbolic terms from outside incursion (see Marsh, 1978; Armstrong, 2002; Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1998). Arguably, contemporary debates on borders and territory have rather underplayed the significance of ‘bordering from below’, compared with the substantial analysis that is accorded towards system-driven strategies of ‘bordering from above’.

Thirdly, spectator sociability has long featured potent undercurrents of the public carnivalesque. Derived from medieval folk carnivals, the carnivalesque is marked by ‘temporary liberation’ from the established order and by public licence, excess, profanity, “the suspension of all hierarchical rank”, transgression and resistance (see Bakhtin, 1968, p. 109). Through the carnivalesque, “models of decorous behaviour and classical ideals” are “subverted” or “dethroned”; “the language of the market-place”, the “grotesque image of the body and its functions” and earthy, vulgar and mocking humour come to the social fore (Hall, 1993, p. 6). The social cohesion of carnivals is double-edged: these “integrative institutions” may unify diverse social groups, while also facilitating the public abuse and “displaced abjection” of minority communities (Cohen, 1993, p. 129; Stallybrass and White, 1988, p. 19). In the context of the pure carnivalesque, participants roam quite freely so that the carnival has few territorial boundaries. Various authorities—state, church,

bourgeoisie—endeavour to constrain and pacify this sociability, for example through a licensing or regulation of modern carnivals, to permit forms of “authorised transgression” that are “reserved for certain places, certain streets, or framed by the television screen” (Eco, 1984, p. 6). Yet external regulations often stoke resistance or confrontation, which in effect serve to politicise carnivals. Moreover, despite its “filthy” practices and moral inversion, the carnival exerts a potent attraction for urban bourgeois audiences who absorb its social *frisson* and licence within their own “fantasy lives” (Stallybrass and White, 1988, pp. 178, 187).

In medieval times, ‘folk football’ games were often part of public carnivals during festive periods. In modern football, the urban carnivalesque has been particularly evident in stadia through profane language, ribald laughter and supporter ‘banter’ that celebrate cultures of excess, notably in terms of drinking, sex and violence. In carnivalesque inversions of social hierarchy, supporter groups often mock, parody and abuse various authorities and celebrities, such as players, match officials, police, club directors, journalists and football officials. Urban codes of corporeal civility are also transgressed within stadia, as the grotesque body is displayed and celebrated, when overweight supporters appear bare-chested or, most liminally, when ‘streakers’ penetrate the pitch.

The integrative aspects of stadium carnivals are double-faced. Urban social divisions may dissolve in the midst of a unified, team-focused crowd that is driven by “an extraordinarily affective, almost primordial power” (Robson, 2000, p. 179). In southern Europe, these social bonds are crystallised through spectacle, as *ultras* (militant fans) ignite fire-crackers and multicoloured smoke-flares, unveil enormous *bandieri* and give mass airings of supporter anthems. Yet urban social divisions also linger, as reflected

by the VIPs and bourgeoisie in the main stand, differentiating themselves from the raucous stadium ends; and, in the abuse that is sometimes directed towards marginalised social groups (notably ethnic minorities, women and gay men).

The possibility of social breakdown hovers in the background of the intensive carnivalesque. If disorder does occur, 'respectable' fans may respond with a mixed sentiment that combines "relish as well as condemnation" (Hopcraft, 1968, p. 185). For participants and close associates, such incidents offer 'peak experiences' and 'flow sensations', an escape from mundane urban life, while also creating 'seductive' spectacles that transfix the public gaze (see Hobbs and Robins, 1991; Katz, 1988). These aspects of the football carnivalesque would appear to run counter to the market-oriented manufacturing of pleasurable entertainment, or to the 'Disneyisation' of some stadia, as evidenced in the depiction of Manchester United's Old Trafford as the 'theatre of dreams' (see Bryman, 2004). Meanwhile, the 'fantasy' aspects of football violence have snowballed into a mainstream entertainment industry featuring hooligan-focused films, documentaries and autobiographies (see Poulton, 2007).⁶ This is a form of *virtual*, violent football carnival, which engages in often nostalgic terms with particular representations of pre-EPL patterns of solidarity and sociability among young, male supporters.

Thus, overall, potent supporter solidarities, patterns of sociability and types of carnivalesque have been intrinsic to British football's popular culture since the game's mass popularisation in the late 19th century. Many of these features have been marginalised by diverse neo-liberal policies and social control functions within the urban spaces of UK football. It is to an examination of these latter processes that I now turn.

Juridico-political Transformations of UK Football

Three key juridico-political forces have transformed the socio-spatial experiences and urban control of UK football spectators, and were crucial in establishing the public order context for the EPL. First, the 1990 Taylor Report—which followed the 1989 Hillsborough disaster that had fatally injured 96 Liverpool fans through crowd crushing—recommended that all UK stadia should become all-seated and install CCTV systems (Taylor, 1990, pp. 12, 79). The report was a key driver of UK social policy on football; granted widespread political support, it initiated a nation-wide programme of stadium renovation, redevelopment and relocation.

The modern UK stadium is now a highly securitised, private urban space that facilitates the bio-political classification, zoning, immobilisation, monitoring and control of its publics. Most EPL fixtures require fans to pre-purchase tickets (thereby having passed through forms of anti-hooligan dataveillance); to accept their 'segregation' into specific stands (a practice dating from at least the 1970s), thus eradicating interaction with fans of opposing teams; to enter at allocated turnstiles, whereupon they may be searched by security personnel; and, to take up their allocated seats, thus curtailing sociability by fragmenting large supporter groups. All-seated stadia—first established in the UK at Coventry City and Aberdeen in the early 1980s—function to restrict mobility and expressivity, thus easing the process of observing and monitoring spectators, while enabling stewards or police officers to identify, warn and remove 'offensive' fans. Moreover, UK football stadia functioned as crucial socio-spatial laboratories for the piloting of CCTV systems before wholesale implementation across

urban spaces from the early 1990s onwards (Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1998).

Secondly, security-focused policies within football have been facilitated through a raft of legislation on the social control of football spectators. These measures have been directed increasingly towards ‘policing the future’ through preventing or pre-empting violence, aiming at the earliest moments in the assumed aetiology of hooligan practice (see Bigo, 2009). In turn, key legislation has facilitated the progressive spatial diffusion of social control techniques, from the stadium, to urban centres, to international settings. Key legislation includes

- *The Criminal Justice Scotland Act 1980*: pioneered prohibitions on alcohol consumption within or *en route* to football stadia.
- *Public Order Act 1986*: introduced ‘exclusion orders’, preventing convicted fans from attending specific games in England and Wales.
- *The Football Spectators Act 1989*: introduced ‘restriction orders’, preventing attendance at matches abroad for specified fans (including ‘reporting duties’ to police stations); also proposed a national membership scheme for all football fans, which was later dropped.
- *The Football Offences Act 1991*: criminalised the throwing of missiles, ‘indecent’ or racist chanting and entry on the pitch. This effectively criminalised peaceful demonstrations on the pitch, or post-match celebratory pitch invasions.
- *The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*: included increased stop-and-search police powers (aimed particularly at football fans); prohibitions on selling-on match tickets (even at cost price); and, the new offence of ‘causing intentional harassment, alarm or

distress’, such as through ‘threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour’. The scope for interpreting and implementing this legislation is wide.

- *The Football (Disorder) Act 2000*: increased police powers, notably on banning orders, for example by empowering police to prevent individuals from travelling abroad to a match if there is believed to be a threat of violence. In *Gough v. Chief Constable of Derbyshire* (Court of Appeal), it was accepted that banning orders “are capable of being applied in a manner which is harsh and disproportionate”; however, police intelligence on violent fans was considered to provide “a satisfactory threshold for the making of a banning order”.⁷ By 2007, over 6300 banning orders had been made.⁸
- *The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003*: established offences ‘aggravated by religious prejudice’, applying particularly to Celtic-Rangers football fixtures.
- *The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006*: *inter alia* removed time limitations on football banning orders and empowered police to ‘move on’ anyone (including football supporters) if an alcohol-related offence might occur.

Arguably, at least some of this legislation has consequences that breach European conventions on human rights, notably the imposition of banning orders on individuals without a fair trial or criminal conviction (Coenen, 2010; also Tsoukala, 2009).

Thirdly, implementation of the Taylor Report and football-related legislation has interconnected closely with the growing proliferation of specific policing discourses, techniques and technologies that prioritise the identification and control of urban enemies (here, ‘football hooligans’) through advanced intelligence-gathering methods

and profiling systems (Bigo, 2009). In addition to CCTV systems, policing techniques over the years have included ‘hoolivans’ (a camera-equipped police van); football intelligence units within police forces, to compile data on hooligans, associates and violent incidents; use of informants, ‘spotters’ and undercover officers to track specific ‘hooligan’ groups, often followed by high-profile ‘dawn raids’; and the National Criminal Intelligence Service, founded in 1992, which included football hooliganism among its remit of serious organised criminal activities (see Armstrong and Hobbs, 1994).

At this juncture, we may explore the utility of Foucauldian panoptical theory for explaining surveillance technologies within the EPL and UK football in general. First, we might argue that sport stadia are exceptional urban centres in terms of sustaining a carnival logic by fully inverting the disciplinary gaze of the panopticon, enabling the seemingly powerless many (viewers/fans) to watch the otherwise-powerful few (celebrities/players) (Fiske, 1993, p. 82).

However, there are two problems with this thesis. On the one hand, stadium CCTV systems allow a *double inversion* to occur, wherein ‘the even fewer’ (police/security officials in CCTV control rooms) still watch the many (all fans). On the other hand, even if we use Mathieson’s (1997) idea of the ‘synopticon’, in which ‘the many watch the few’ inside the stadium, it is still the case that social hierarchies are reaffirmed, as powerful figures continue to influence what ‘the many’ may see and how ‘the few’ should behave. For example, UK television producers and football authorities usually prevent television viewers from seeing any crowd disturbances or pitch invasions; ‘offensive’ language or chants emanating from football crowds tends to be silenced on television by production teams. These forces also exert

strong influence on the public conduct of players (the few) both on and off the pitch. Moreover, the police reaffirm power hierarchies and disciplinary cultures by directing the gaze of the many onto the ‘deviant’ few—for example, by issuing public appeals through the mass media for the arrest of specific ‘hooligans’.

Secondly, we might consider the applicability to football of Latour’s notion of the ‘oligopticon’. Unlike the omniscient panopticon, the oligopticon refers to more fragmented and localised information technologies that see “just a little bit” but which still “see it well” (Latour, 1998, 2005, p. 181). Arguably, the oligopticon is evidenced by surveillance-based policing that concentrates on specific supporter groups—for example, by police ‘spotters’ who track the movements of identified ‘hooligan’ formations. However, we need to recognise that football policing still involves information from diverse oligopticons—such as different CCTV sources, patrolling officers, football intelligence specialists and overhead helicopters—being put together, as ‘surveillant assemblages’, to track fan mobilities across urban spaces (see Haggerty and Ericson 2000).

Thus, advanced panopticism in and around urban stadia has taken hold in the UK and has provided a security-focused social policy model for other nations to follow. For example, in Italy, following UK practices, the policing of *ultras* (militant fan groups) makes extensive use of urban CCTV systems (now mandatory for all sports events), intelligence-based surveillance and banning orders (or ‘DASPOs’, with over 4000 served on individuals by 2009) (Testa, 2009). The *tessera del tifosi* is a membership scheme that is similar to the UK version that was aborted in 1989. The Italian scheme, planned for introduction in 2010, requires all spectators to

obtain club-issued identity cards in order to buy tickets; it has generated widespread fan protests, including a major demonstration in Rome, critical stadium banners and social website campaigns.

Political Economic Transformations and the Securitisation of Stadia

The legislative, disciplinary and rationalised socio-spatial control measures, already discussed, served to establish a stable, regulated environment for the political-economic transformation of UK football and for the development of the EPL into a fully diffuse sport mega event. A basic index of that commercial expansion is reflected in the fact that EPL annual revenues multiplied by around 12 times from 1991 to 2009 (Deloitte, 2009). Key forms of broadcasting and market deregulation drove this commodification. The entry of subscription-based satellite television in the late 1980s enabled the EPL and Sky TV to build a long-term partnership, while the football authorities also removed regulations which had prevented profit-seeking shareholder practices (Conn, 1997). The league's television revenues ballooned, from £2.5 million from free-to-air stations in 1984, to over £6.5 billion (largely via Sky TV) across an 18-year period (1992–2010) (see Banks, 2002, pp. 110–118; Dobson and Goddard, 2001, pp. 81–84; Smart, 2005, pp. 93–94).⁹ Many leading club shareholders netted vast capital gains: for example, the property developer John Hall made an estimated £95 million from his £3 million investment in Newcastle United (*The Guardian*, 11 February 2009).

A strong catalyst for this commercial growth has been football's urban spatial transformation. Since 1990, of the 20 largest English stadia, eight were newly built in 1995 or afterwards and the others underwent major redevelopment, notably

Wembley's £1 billion overhaul and Old Trafford's expansion from 44 000 to 76 000 seats. As I write, a further five EPL clubs (Chelsea, Everton, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham United) have plans to boost revenue through stadium relocation. EPL stadia are heavily commodified urban arenas, housing retail outlets, conference suits and marquee-name events. Some, like Chelsea's Stamford Bridge, are embedded within urban consumer 'fantasy spaces', amidst luxury hotels, health clubs, bars and restaurants (see Hannigan, 1998). The 'brandscaping' of English stadia is mirrored in ubiquitous trackside advertising and, more symbolically, the selling of 'naming rights': for example, at the Emirates (Arsenal), Ricoh (Coventry), Walkers (Leicester), Reebok (Bolton) and Britannia (Stoke) stadia (see Klingmann, 2007). Meanwhile, through financial securitisation methods, some club owners have borrowed against their future stadium income in order to pay for construction (successfully, Arsenal), acquisition of players (disastrously, Leeds United) and, increasingly, the very purchase of clubs (Liverpool and Manchester United).

The 1990 Taylor Report had sought to retain the urban accessibility of football, protecting supporters from redevelopment costs through "a price structure which suits the cheapest seats to the pockets of those presently paying to stand" (Taylor, 1990, p. 13). However, there are recurring concerns that stadia have become exclusive spaces, as many—particularly young adult and working-class supporters—have been 'priced out' of attendance. Surveys suggest that the average match-going supporter is typically male, over 40 and earning over £40 000 (*The Guardian*, 7 March 2007; Premier League, 2007, p. 12). In 1990, Taylor had pointed to £6 as an accessible price for the cheapest seat. The equivalent rise in inflation since then is 90 per cent,

although the lowest price seat at many EPL clubs is at least 400 per cent higher than Taylor's recommendation. Moreover, tickets for elite fixtures undergo hypercommodification. For example, at major Wembley fixtures, members of the corporate-orientated 'Club Wembley' have first access to premium seating, while club sponsors, executive box-holders and match-day package-holders also jump ticket queues. Thus, as English football's SMEs have become more commodified, so socio-spatial divisions and inequalities have become more evident.

Neo-liberal Governmentalisation and Revanchism

UK football's socio-spatial divisions are underpinned by processes of neo-liberal governmentalisation and urban revanchism. Neo-liberal governmentality features the "conducting of conduct" "at a distance", the harnessing of individual subjectivities through moralising techniques of "responsibilisation" and self-government (Hay, 2003, p. 166; Hunt, 2003; Shamir, 2008). These apparatuses of urban governance are most potent in shaping agency, so that social actors are integrated "into a moral nexus of identifications and allegiances in the very process in which they appear to act out their most personal choices" (Rose, 1996, p. 58).

It is argued here that EPL stadia provide one further socio-cultural space for the manifestation of more widespread forms of neo-liberal governmentalisation. Diverse social apparatuses and techniques—such as government initiatives, club marketing campaigns, the advertising images of football-related sponsors, media columns and news reports—promote a particular range of authorised, morally defensible 'true fan' identities and practices, which emphasise the routine consumption of football-related products, 'inoffensive' expressions

of team support and the willingness to produce 'atmosphere' by responding to a top-down orchestration of singing and chanting. Forms of responsabilisation are nurtured through the diffusion of norms and authorised practices among supporters in regard to 'self-policing' and 'ambassadorial' conduct.¹⁰

More specifically, there are significant signs of neo-liberal revanchism within UK football. Conceptually, neo-liberal revanchism describes the politico-ideological, urban backlash (or revenge) of right-wing bourgeois élites and their followers against progressive social policies and weaker groups such as the working classes, new immigrants and the homeless (Smith, 1996). Neo-liberal urban revanchism in 1990s New York was marked by social polarisation, 'scapegoating' of marginalised communities and media-amplified bourgeois anxieties over crime and personal security (see Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008). In passing, we might note the strong continuities between neo-liberal revanchist theories and earlier, neo-Marxist studies of urban policing, New Right ideologies, free-market policies and 'law and order' moral panics (see Hall *et al.*, 1978).

In UK football, neo-liberal revanchism had fertile social ground in the late 1980s: attendances were low, clubs struggled financially and amplificatory media coverage of hooliganism intensified fears over fan security (although actual violence was largely endogenous, in being restricted to self-identifying hooligan groups). According to the *Sunday Times*, the 'people's game' was a "slum sport, played in slum stadiums, watched by slum people" (Taylor, 1987). In revanchist style, English football's social and political-economic transformation featured the scapegoating and expunging of young working-class male supporters, with stadia 'reclaimed' as 'safe' urban spaces for 'respectable' fans (witness 'family stands')

who were willing to pay inflated admission prices to watch the newly spectacularised soccer ‘product’.¹¹ Similar policies of commercial spectator engineering have been instituted in some parts of mainland Europe and Latin America. In Brazil, for example, directors at top-division clubs elected in 2003 to more than double admission prices, in order to advance the game’s commercialisation and new social profile. One club president explained

Poor people cannot afford to take the bus or pay for food or clothes. They live in misery. We have to work with people who can afford to go to the stadiums (*Reuters*, 20 December 2003).

In England, neo-liberal revanchism was heightened by football’s growing urban fashionability among new middle-class audiences, who were narrated by Nick Hornby’s narcissistic novel, *Fever Pitch* and magnetised by the sudden ‘cosmopolitanism’ of the English game (notably through more foreign players and the return of EPL clubs to European competitions in 1990). These audiences pursued a kind of ‘repro-tertising’ strategy within this urban cultural field: football became a key cultural resource in the ‘self-making’ techniques of these new fans, a process that involved a sanitised and more commercialised version of the game’s popular carnivalesque being absorbed into the fantasy lives of this growing social group (see Skeggs, 2005, pp. 972–973).

A particularly explicit repro-tertising strategy centred on the England national football team. In 2001, a Home Office report recommended that the official supporters’ club, the ‘England Members Club’ (with 30 000 members), should be overhauled to be “more socially and culturally representative of modern society” and no longer “too dominated by White males”

(Home Office, 2001, pp. 5–6; *The Guardian*, 30 June 2001). Thus, the new supporters’ club—rebranded as englandfans—now includes more middle-class, female and ethnically diverse members. This authorised pluralism is given strong prominence in media coverage of fan ‘carnivals’ inside stadia and across large urban thoroughfares at major tournaments. In this way, the governmentalist mechanisms that shape supporter identities and practices within a diffuse SME (the EPL) have also penetrated English participation in more traditional, specific forms of SME (international tournaments).

Problematic Aspects: Disquiet, Transgression and Resistance

While the EPL in recent years has become an exceptionally commodified and regulated network of urban fun-zones, particular kinds of disquiet, transgression and resistance have been evidenced towards these processes.

First, there is recurring unease that UK football is less of a public spectacle and social experience, as the corporatised regulation of the soccer ‘fun house’ undermines the play of carnival ‘fantasy lives’ in and around the stadium. At the renovated Wembley, critics have highlighted the vast sections of prominent seating that are left half-empty by corporate spectators after half-time (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 2007). At Old Trafford, the EPL’s largest ground, Manchester United’s captain, Roy Keane, criticised the poor atmosphere generated by ‘prawn sandwich’ supporters. When his manager Alex Ferguson commented that one home fixture was ‘like a funeral’, some supporters complained that, “It’s almost like a police state inside a football ground now”, explaining that any participatory fandom might lead to ejection by

enthusiastic stewards and the confiscation of £1000 season tickets (*The Times*, 2 January 2008).

The problem of an atmosphere-free football spectacle—a marketing oxymoron—has been directly identified by club officials and spectators, leading to the pursuit of systemic (top-down) and grassroots (bottom-up) solutions. To conduct supporter conduct, some clubs (for example, Arsenal, Bolton, Celtic, Newcastle United and Rangers) have established special ‘singing sections’ that are allocated to fans who agree to sing and chant during games (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 2007). Chelsea have an ‘Atmosphere Committee’ to monitor crowd performances at home fixtures. Some of these measures are the outcome of initial approaches that were made by supporters towards club officials.

Stronger bottom-up initiatives have included the foundation of UK *ultras* supporter movements, which borrow and adapt the name and spectacular choreographies of Italian fan sub-cultures in a bid to enliven football’s urban spaces. As the founder of one early UK *ultras* group, at Aberdeen, stated

The stadiums were becoming soulless. I wanted to add as much colour as possible and try and bring back some of the passions that we used to have in the ‘70s and ‘80s.¹²

However, club–*ultras* relationships are not always smooth, particularly when clubs are too explicit in seeking to ‘conduct the conduct’ of these supporters, or when the *ultras* carnivalesque spills over into practices deemed offensive to bourgeois propriety.

Secondly, social tensions and conflicts frequently arise over the juridico-political control of supporters, in regard to behavioural boundaries and the scope for transgression. Recurring grumbles arise among supporters that police and stewards are

overzealous in sanitising stadia, in removing the cathartic and liminal possibilities of these urban spaces, and ‘cracking down’ on forms of affective interaction that were tolerated and valued in the past.

There are also significant contextual differences on how these regulations are implemented. Different levels of pre-match alcohol consumption or vocal abuse of opposing players are permitted by police and stewards. In most stadia, many fans in the ends will stand rather than sit during fixtures. However, this practice contravenes ground regulations within this ‘private space’ and constitutes a ‘breach of contract’ under civil law.¹³ Inevitable inconsistencies occur in how different police forces respond to this transgressive practice in different stadia.

The increasingly securitised environment of football stadia has reinforced the more generalised, urban culture of fear regarding ‘strangers’ (such as opposing fans or boisterous spectators), that intensifies the social barricades between different supporter groups (see Furedi, 1997). Old informal and dialogical techniques within football crowds, that might have prevented incidents from escalating, have largely become redundant or forgotten. Moreover, quite ironically, the intensive social control measures that are imposed upon publics within stadia stand in diametrical opposition to the social logic of play in the EPL. Indeed, the EPL’s transurban popularity is underpinned by the relatively unregulated and relaxed ways in which football matches are policed by referees, wherein interventions are minimised, the game is allowed to flow freely and aggressive play is not in itself penalised.

Thirdly, revanchist socio-spatial and neo-liberal strategies in the UK’s new urban football settings have met with significant forms of direct resistance and protest. Fan movements such as the Football Supporters’

Federation and the 'Stand Up Sit Down' group have challenged the disenchanting, heavily commodified stadium experience, pressing for lower admission prices and, with the backing of strong surveyed support, the return of standing sections.¹⁴ While neo-liberalists overseas may view the EPL as a highly profitable 'business' to be emulated, UK fan movements point at German football's Bundesliga as offering inclusive, informal social models that should be followed. German stadia, for example, have retained large standing areas and controlled seat prices (ranging from €8.50 to the highest price €40), thereby increasing crowd sizes, social diversity and atmosphere. Thus, German clubs average 7000 more fans at games than the EPL and feature more women and young supporters.¹⁵ Moreover, the urban community ties of German clubs are deeper: *pace* the EPL neo-liberal model, they are majority-owned by member-supporters rather than by individual investors.

English stadia and their environs facilitate pop-up supporter protests, particularly in recent years against the perceived profiteering and mismanagement of club owners and directors. At Newcastle United, these protests forced the owner Mike Ashley to put the club up for sale. Moreover, in a perceived assault on the tophobic qualities of grounds, Ashley's attempts to sell the naming rights to St James's Park to a corporate sponsor sparked widespread condemnation and a House of Commons motion in protest. In 1999, the proposed sale of Manchester United to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation was successfully blocked by fan protests. However, the subsequent 'leveraged' takeover by the Glazer family in 2005 saddled the club with £700 million in high-interest debts. In protest, one large supporter grouping abandoned United to form their own club, FC United, which has risen steadily through the lower leagues. Alternatively, throughout

the 2009/10 season, the vast majority of remaining fans participated in a highly visual, anti-Glazer protest on match-days, by swapping the established red and white colours of Manchester United for the bright green and gold colours of the original founding club Newton Heath.

Outside football stadia, the increasingly constrictive urban policing of supporters has led to formal opposition and resistance. For example, in 2008, police implemented the *Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006* to remove around 80 Stoke City fans from a public house before a football fixture and to return them forcibly to Stoke. Following campaigns by the supporters, Football Supporters' Federation, Liberty and Stoke City, the police accepted that this action had been illegitimate, apologised to some fans and paid £2750 in compensation. In August 2009, four Sunderland fans received hospital treatment for injuries (including serious head wounds) caused by police batons and dogs during a confrontation at Newcastle station. Showing edited CCTV footage of the incident, the police claimed that they were preventing pre-arranged violence between 'risk' Sunderland and Newcastle fans—a claim vigorously disputed by the Sunderland supporters. The police refused requests to release all CCTV footage and many supporters involved in the *mêlée* were banned from Sunderland's stadium. The Independent Police Complaints Commissioner considered the case but did not interview any witnesses, stating instead that the edited CCTV footage showed that officers were "subjected to a high level of violence by people intent on causing disorder" (*The Guardian*, 26 August 2009). The head of the UK Football Supporters' Federation, Dr Malcolm Clarke, rejected this assessment, insisted that a dossier of evidence had demonstrated 'disproportionate use of force' by police and called for the Commissioner's

resignation (*Sunderland Echo*, 20 August 2009). While these forms of criticism and resistance are not always successful, they do reflect underlying concerns regarding the impact of security-focused social policies on the popular urban cultures and social freedoms of supporter formations.

Concluding Comments

This paper has advanced four broad arguments. First, my main contention is that the socio-spatial and urban condition of English football has been sharply defined by integrated policies of intensified securitisation and commodification. Advanced forms of socio-spatial control—facilitated by post-1990 social policies and increasingly sophisticated policing systems—have reinforced hierarchical or panoptical forms of surveillance. These socio-spatial controls have provided the ideal conditions for the long-running financial boom within English football, as manifested further by neo-liberal governmentalisation and revanchism in and around stadia.

My subsidiary arguments have been that, secondly, researchers need to explore diffuse (as well as specific) sport mega events, such as the EPL. This focus reflects both the empirical changes that have occurred to the format and scope of SMEs and the impact that transurban and transnational processes now exert upon these events. Thirdly, we need to examine how policies of heightened securitisation and commodification have impinged upon English football's urban popular cultures, as characterised by potent supporter sociability, carnivalesque practices and club–fan solidarities. Fourthly, in turn, these popular cultures are often apparent, and referenced, during eruptions of disquiet and opposition by supporters towards security-focused policies and commercial processes within the EPL.

All of these arguments have relevance to social scientific analysis beyond the domain of 'SME studies'. First, researchers may explore the interplay between urban security policies and neo-liberal or other political-economic forces within relevant research fields, such as in sport, health, transport, education, media and other domains. This approach would also enable middle-range, comparative work to be undertaken, exploring the continuities and differences between the various fields. Secondly, the discussion prompts us to examine diffuse mega events that occur across diverse urban settings over lengthy periods, as well as more traditional events that have more restricted time–space characteristics. Thirdly, we need to explore how commercial and security strategies impact upon established popular cultures within each field, and how forms of disquiet, transgression and resistance are manifested. A final point here is that SMEs such as the EPL continue to provide outstanding case studies of the contemporary intersections of security and political economy in modern urban settings, as reflected particularly by the pervasive influence of neo-liberal governmentality and revanchism in reshaping diverse cultural fields.

Notes

1. It is argued here that, although they have been evident since the 1960s, securitisation and commodification intensified significantly in UK stadia from the 1980s onwards.
2. Hosting a specific SME may provide the springboard for the establishment of a diffuse SME, as occurred when the Major League Soccer tournament was launched in the US after staging the 1994 World Cup finals.
3. See <http://www.premierleague.com/page/InternationalDevelopment/MagicBus>; <http://premierkills.britishcouncil.org/premier-league/beginners-guide>.

4. For example, the 2009 Indian Premier League cricket tournament was played in South Africa, the North American baseball team the Montreal Expos played 22 'home' fixtures in Puerto Rico in 2003 and Italian football's Super Cup has been contested in the US, Libya and China.
5. See: <http://soccernet.espn.go.com/stats/attendance?league=eng.1andyear=2008andcc=5739>.
6. A post-modern blurring of boundaries between real and fantasy occurred after spectator violence at a West Ham–Millwall fixture in 2009. Police issued an appeal through national media for information, with photographs of those 'wanted' for questioning, which mistakenly included images of actors from the hooligan movie, *The Firm* (*Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 2009).
7. See: [http://www.ipsosfactoj.com/international/2002/Part13/int2002\(13\)-010.htm](http://www.ipsosfactoj.com/international/2002/Part13/int2002(13)-010.htm).
8. See: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmbills/059/en/2008059en.pdf>.
9. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6273617.stm>.
10. The top–down promotion of 'self-policing' often emphasises punitive rather than dialogical methods. For example, many match-day programmes at English stadia feature club contact details for fans who wish to inform on fellow match-goers that are deemed to be involved in anti-social behaviour.
11. According to one former England manager, Terry Venables, market forces have socially cleansing benefits

Without wishing to sound snobbish or be disloyal to my own working-class background, the increase in admission prices is likely to exclude the sort of people who were giving English football a bad name (Venables, 1996, p. 136).

12. See: <http://www.ultrasuk.co.uk/about>.
13. See: the statement by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, at: <http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/FinalanneXFSF.pdf>.

14. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/6444083.stm>.

15. See: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,4931180,00.html>.

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