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## **Ultras in Denmark. The new football thugs?**

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## Ultras in Denmark. The new football thugs?

### Abstract

It is no longer just the notorious ‘football hooligans’ who appear to behave in a problematic way in connection with football matches. Since the beginning of the 2000s, *ultras* have increasingly been playing the most acoustically and optically noticeable role in the Danish stadiums. This article looks in more detail at the moderate Danish ultras, who proactively work for a positive, intense fan culture that rejects discrimination and violence and try to promote better conditions for supporters, and the consequences of the criminalization of fan behaviour. The article concludes that there is a lack of knowledge of the specific sub-cultural backgrounds of the various supporters' behaviour, but also of fan culture as a whole among the authorities and clubs.

Keywords: football; supporter culture; ultras

### Introduction

Football match days draw large numbers of fans to the stadium every week and do create a special atmosphere in the city where the game is being played. They also create special conditions for the police.<sup>1</sup> Violent incidents and confrontations with the police and stewards involving football fans attract the attention of the public and these incidents are often mentioned in the media and discussed at a political level.

Apparently it is no longer just ‘football hooligans’ who appear to behave in a problematic way in relation to football matches. In recent years, the so-called *ultras* are to a greater extent attracting attention. Since the beginning of the 2000s, ultras have

increasingly been playing the most acoustically and optically noticeable role in the Danish stadiums. Ultras are particularly passionate and committed fans who have given themselves the task of providing atmosphere in the stadiums in an organised way, and this experience-orientated will to support the team non-stop for 90 minutes both acoustically and visually seems to form the denominator which many ultra groupings have in common.<sup>2</sup> The ultra subculture has an element of provocation, rivalry, self-profiling and differentiation from other ultras and other fan groups, but the predominant part of the Danish ultras are not violent. However, the police categorize the ultras as *category B fans* or *risk fans*, and conflicts between ultras and the police and stewards at the stadiums have become increasingly common.<sup>3</sup>

This article investigates the supporters who the police and clubs classify as potential risk fans. More specifically it deals with the so-called *moderate ultras*, who proactively work for a positive, lively and intense fan culture that rejects discrimination and violence and try to promote better conditions for supporters by protesting against high ticket prices, enforced seating and fight oppressive and arbitrary treatment by police and stewards. The majority of the Danish ultras are moderate and restrained, but some clubs have a minority of radical ultras who admit to violent behaviour. This article looks in more detail at the situation of how the basically progressive and creatively organized moderate ultra subculture has ended up being seen in a negative light when it comes to the authorities', the clubs' and the public's perception of the phenomenon and how the more radical elements have been able to find their way into the subculture.

## **Research methods**

This article is mainly based on ethnographic observations on match days conducted by the authors among the ultras associated with six Danish premier league clubs<sup>4</sup> between 2006 and 2016. A longitudinal study was carried out among supporters of Brøndby IF from 2007 to 2014. Participant observations were made during the preparations before the match and on match days.<sup>5</sup> Ultras of the five clubs were followed at both home and away matches as part of a multi-sited fieldwork strategy.<sup>6</sup> The observations sought to identify and explain patterns of behaviours taken for granted by experienced participants or cultural insiders.<sup>7</sup> In addition, informal interviews were undertaken as a means of understanding observed behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

At away matches we often met the supporters when they arrived in the host town. Once in the town, we stayed with them in the hours leading up to the match, during the match, and after the match. We also travelled with them on special “football trains” and in these cases the day’s observations ended when we got off the train at the station closest to where we lived.<sup>9</sup>

Gatekeepers who were ultras themselves, which was a decisive factor, facilitated our access to the ultras.<sup>10</sup> We were introduced to the leaders of the different ultra groups as part of our observation, and they were informed of and accepted our presence. This did not hinder supporters in suspecting that we were from the police or were journalists, and it was frequently necessary for us to explain, with the help of gatekeepers, that this was not the case.

The ethnographic observations are supplemented by textual analyses.<sup>11</sup> The included material has been gathered from both news sites and Internet forum

discussions with a sensitivity towards the authorship and his/hers agenda.<sup>12</sup>

Besides participant observations the article includes quotes from qualitative interview studies done with Danish ultras in other research projects.<sup>13</sup>

### **The ultra subculture**

The ultra fan scene is not homogeneous. Rather there are different groupings which each has different structures, norms and ideas about what it means to be “ultra”. It may be difficult to distinguish between the different denominations and groups within the part of the football fan culture that is largely classified as ‘risk fans’. To outsiders the values, forms of behaviour and appearance of the different groups may seem very similar. Although they may outwardly seem similar, there are significant differences in their approach to football fan culture. The difference lies most of all in where the groups set the boundaries for acceptable behaviour (such as whether it is legitimate to use pyrotechnics). However, it should not be understood that all ultras mutually agree on where that boundary is. The boundaries are being constantly challenged:

*Do you sometimes do things yourselves which you think aren't acceptable?*

Yes, as a group we do, and it would be strange if, as an experimental group, a group that is constantly seeking new boundaries and seeking new ways of doing things (...) we didn't make mistakes. On the other hand, I think that as a group we are very good at looking inwards and sorting things out.

Nor are they necessarily in agreement on what term they should use for themselves and their group. Thus, some may perceive their group as an ultra group, for example, while others prefer to describe it as an atmosphere-creating group. The disagreement is mainly

due to some people trying to avoid being boxed in by fixed terms that can accommodate a number of negative connotations, as is the case with the ultra concept. Ultra is a term used by many different groups. There are also self-confessed hooligan groups that use the name ultra and there are groups that define themselves as ultras, but who do not disassociate themselves from violence or discrimination.

So, what kind of football fans are the Danish ultras, who do not wear the club's official football shirts, but instead put together their own style and create their own design; who will not use any of the club's various offers to fans as these are often seen as controlling and patronizing (this applies for example to the club bus trips to away games that some of the fans consider to be like prisoner transports), and from time to time ignore the instructions and rules that come from the club and the authorities? Are they thugs or a new form of 'part-time hooligans' who eagerly participate in disorder if the opportunity presents itself? There is not much to suggest this.

Ultras are rather a subculture within fan culture that bears a resemblance to (although it should not be equated with) what in the English-language research literature is referred to as 'carnival fans'.<sup>14</sup> This concept is introduced to provide a more nuanced look at the subculture's values and behaviour than the concept 'category B' or 'risk fans' allows. Carnival fans are described as a

(...) loud and noisy subculture of wider football fandom who attend matches home and away, who spend a huge amount of their time and money following their team, who help to create the chants that form the 'atmosphere' at matches but who provide a constant challenge to the football authorities and police through their attendance and modes of expression.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to specific songs and chants the ultras also contribute with colourful choreographies, at least in stadiums where it is permitted to bring the necessary equipment for this in the form of banners and flags, for example. The supporters who were formerly referred to as category B and now are considered simply as risk fans cover a very wide field of mainly unofficial supporter groups, which include the ultras who are the most prominent ones. They use different terms about themselves as for instance *ultras*, *critical fans* or *active fans*. What they have in common is their passion for the team and their creative way of expressing this passion in both a visual and audible way throughout the game, depending on whether things go well or badly for the team, as well as the time and resources that they put into it. Furthermore, these fans have a critical attitude to 'modern' football, which is an expression for the commercialization and maximization of profits being put above all other interests in football, which in particular goes against the idea of football being the people's game. For most of them it is not only the result of the match that counts, but just as much (and perhaps even more so) the dedicated support for the team and the activities and the community that is involved before, during and after the game. From time to time this tendency leads to conflicts between the fans and the security officers (police and stewards). As a result of these conflicts, supporters from these groups have in recent years attracted focus from the police, the clubs and the media.

It may be useful to look at what the Danish ultras are mainly inspired by in order to understand their characteristics and behaviour. The main inspiration comes largely from the Italian ultras and the English critical fan movement.

The ultra subculture has its roots in Italy and originated in the late 1960s.<sup>16</sup> In Italy, as in so many other countries at the time, protest movements arose among workers

and students in the late 1960s. What was special for Italy was that the workers and students joined both left- and right-wing groupings. The political protests were also brought into the country's football stadiums. Some of the young people who came to the stadiums were active in the political protest movement. On the basis of friendly relations and common political orientation, many young people found themselves in groups that formed the seeds of the ultras. Many of the tools that the ultras still use today were originally something that the first groups took with them into the stadium from political protests in the street. This is the case for banners with different messages, flags, drums and the megaphones used to direct the fans. Many of the songs that were sung at the stadium were political chants that fans wrote new lyrics for. Therefore the forms of expression used by the supporters were very similar to the ones used by the political protest movement. The ultra groups were also very similar to the political groups with regard to their organization. It required a lot of planning to prepare the actions that took place in the stadium, so a clear division of labour was needed. Also the larger the groups became, the more hierarchical they became too. In Italy, the ultra groups were among the first who began to organize support for the team. In addition to the songs and drums, they use above all else visual devices such as flags, banners and various kinds of pyrotechnics. Altogether this is a constitutive element of the ultra groups, the so-called "tifo". The quality of the tifo determines the group's reputation and is a part of the competition between groups, which is often encouraged by different political and ideological attitudes. They regard the curve as theirs, where they can do whatever they like. They often act outside the law, but they have their own private rules and regulations. In Italy, it has not been uncommon to have violent clashes between rival ultras groups and between the ultras and the police. In fact there have been several violent conflicts between ultras and police.<sup>17</sup>

The 'critical' fan movement has its roots in England. The disasters of Heysel and Hillsborough in the 1980s had a decisive influence on the formation of the critical fan movement. They led to a desire among many supporters to actively do something to create a more positive atmosphere. In 1985, the Football Supporters Association was founded, and a wide range of *fanzines* appeared in the late 1980s, dealing with police misconduct, racism among fans and officials, lack of safety at stadiums, an in-depth discussion of 'hooliganism' and the supporters' right to influence club policy. The approach of the critical supporters is summarized by their motto: *reclaim the game*. The critical fan movement is a form of protest movement against what, in their view, is an increased commercialization and mediatisation of football, as well as a protest against racism, which became more and more visible, plus the increasing criminalization of fan behaviour and subsequent legislation against it. The novelty of this movement was not so much its critical approach to issues around football, but the fact that the supporters organized themselves and actively attempted to influence developments. There are three main characteristics of the critical fans. They combine the passion for the team with a critical attitude towards the club's policy and developments in football in general. In addition to the actual game, the time before and after the game started to have more importance and increasingly became an essential part of the football experience as a whole. As their motto *reclaim the game* emphasizes, the critical fans try to influence developments in football and the supporter environment. The critical supporter movement arose in the wake of the sport's commercialization and increased regulation of fan behaviour and is characterized by the supporters' involvement and interest in the sport's and the club's policies.<sup>18</sup>

The Danish ultras have taken on both the visual and acoustic elements, as well

as the critical element. The aim of this is to create a positive fan culture, partly through spectacular choreographies to create a great atmosphere in the stadium, and partly by working for good conditions for fans. With the exception of sports policy issues, the moderate ultras regard themselves as ‘apolitical’ that is, in a football-related context they try to avoid expressing definite political views, within the left-right political spectrum, that do not concern the sport. Many of the official fan groups are considered by the ultras to be too passive, both in terms of support for the team and the atmosphere in the stadium, but also in relation to the struggle for supporters’ rights and resistance against the commercialization of football. Furthermore, there has been a desire to demarcate themselves from so-called category C fans (hooligans), who see violence as a legitimate activity, which is something the moderate ultras reject. Nevertheless, they have increasingly fallen into the searchlight of the authorities and the clubs and been linked to violent and aggressive behaviour. Ultras see themselves as the heart and the voice of the curve. They fight for more right to co-determination, against too much regulation and too much police deployment. They carry the sports competition on into the curves against rival ultras. They are original and creative in the support to their own team, but they can also be provocative against rival fans, the club owners and sponsors, and they question problems in the club and in the sport critically. The curve is regarded by the ultras as their terrain where their own rules and codes apply. The rules are often simple, the emphasis being on solidarity. For the predominant part of the ultras it is not about the enjoyment of actual violence. They carry out their ritualised battles against rival fans in the curves or during the march to the match verbally and optically. It is more about provocation. They rarely get involved in physically violence: *“I don’t go to matches with the intention of becoming involved in disorder, but when my friends or I get attacked, I will fight back. I think that goes for the most of us”*. Violent incidents do

occasionally occur, but the moderate ultras motives for the use of violence are different from the hooligans' motives. While hooligan violence first and foremost is expressive and affective, violence among ultras is more reactive and instrumental. Correspondingly hooligans and ultras have a different perception of police and react very differently to police presence and intervention.

### **Ultras and violence**

Public discussions about football-related violence and disorder offer a very broad framework for interpretation. An example of a debate on violence is the on-going discussion about the use of pyrotechnics. This debate is characterized by different views and definitions of violent behaviour among football supporters. While many of the groups, especially the ultra groups perceive flares as a legitimate visual part of the support for the team, many other fans, as well as the clubs' and the authorities' safety representatives, see the pyrotechnics as harmful to health and potential violence towards other stadium visitors. When it comes to media coverage, the positions switch from drawing a picture of a euphoric atmosphere to a horrible rampage. There seems to be a vast array of types of football-related violence including both actions and words. However, it is important not to focus on the 'football thugs' but to put the interaction in the centre of the analysis and look for the characteristics and dynamics of violent situations.

While football hooligans see violence as a legitimate part of their fan behaviour<sup>19</sup>, the attitudes towards violence are more complex in the case of the ultras. Does the violence from these fans arise because the opportunity presents itself, that is,

because some others start it and the ultras choose to take part in the ‘fun’? On the basis of the collected empirical data, the answer is clearly no. It cannot be denied that there are radical ultras that exhibit this kind of behaviour. But for the majority of the ultras this is not the case. This must especially be seen in the light of these supporters' attitude to violence. Violence is not seen as a form of expressive action, but as a stylized, ritualized and at times also instrumentalized action. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that the otherwise peaceful ultras end up in violent confrontations with predominantly the stewards and the police:

[our] *capo* was quite brutally brought down [by a steward], he fell and hit his head and was lying there with a knee on his neck. He was completely blue in the face. The people in [the group] stood together. People, members and non-members of [the group], I think just anyone who knew him, tried to stop the steward, who was being violent against the person concerned.

The case here is an example of reactive violence that occurs because of a situation that is perceived as threatening.

As for verbal or visual threats, these have long been an element of football supporters' behaviour. For many years, football stadiums have been an area where some degree of ritualized threatening behaviour and hostility has been tolerated. Here there may be emotional exclamations following the events in the match, but such behaviour is not always the result of frustration with the course of the game. Ritualized conflict with opponents is an elementary part of football fan activities that serves as a display of power and strength between rival groups. For ultras this is done partly through the visual and verbal support during the match, where the goal is to carry out the most spectacular choreography. Another way to demonstrate strength is related to the march to the stadium. Despite the fact that only very few people want real physical

confrontations with opponents it is about showing superiority. However, there is a form of direct engagement mainly between ultra-groups, which occurs frequently. Here the aim is to capture rival fan articles such as flags, scarves, banners and other club related belongings, which can be more or less aggressive, but nevertheless is part of the ritualized violence.

To attack opponents physically with an intention of starting a fight is something that most Danish ultras reject. So despite the fact that the demonstrations of power and superiority to the opposing groups of fans and, in particular, to other ultra groups may appear to be aggressive, they seldom result in actual violent confrontations. The stigmatising and cliché-ridden image of 'violent thugs', as some would view it, is based on old stereotypes. In most cases it is about stylized 'violence' between the supporters as part of the measurement of competitive strength.

It is quite a different and more serious matter when the violence is directed at outsiders. Often when ultras are involved this type of violence is directed against the police or the stadium stewards. This is partly because the police and stewards invariably come into contact with the ultras and according to the latter's conceptions are thus interfering massively in their sphere. For the ultras, it becomes a question of defending what they perceive as some basic values. They are thus, for example, advocates of "freedom for the fans", that is, the right to self-determination (or at least co-determination) in the stadium and respect for their forms of expression. The state security bodies and the clubs complicate this endeavour through their many regulations and laws, keeping an eye especially on the ultras, which increasingly are subject to extensive regulations and restrictions on match days. This applies, for example, to a prohibition on carrying flags and banners or censorship of the messages written on the

banners. This could be a protest against Monday matches or against *modern football*, which is one of the causes of the ultras. It could also be a protest against one of the TV companies, who, according to the fans, greatly contribute to the whole focus being on profit maximization at the expense of supporters' interests. Such messages are being increasingly censored by the clubs, which they may justify by saying that they do not want attacks against the sponsors and partners and nor do they want the negative atmosphere coming from a protest *against* anything:

We made a banner where we protested against Monday matches. We had informed the club and they approved it. So we worked on it the whole week. But on the match day they told us 'You can't use that. We don't want negative messages on the stadium, it's not good for the atmosphere'. That was completely ridiculous.

For the ultras, it amounts to a prohibition and censorship of their most basic and essential components and values. Despite the fact that ultras do not necessarily perceive all aspects of their behaviour as lawful and orderly (for example the use of flares), they still perceive it as legitimate, which is one of the reasons why conflicts occur when the clubs and authorities attempt to control a specific behaviour. The supporters perceive this intervention as an unnecessary attack on what they stand for. A significant part of the actions and conditions that are currently sanctioned in a football-related context have not always been prohibited or been regarded as a problem, but on the contrary have previously been lawful and acceptable behaviour among football supporters. The supporters feel that it increasingly has become a crime just to be a football supporter in itself and they feel that they are denied the recognition they deserve. The experience of the denial of social recognition can provide the motivational and justificatory basis for resistance and conflicts.<sup>20</sup>

## **Labelling and criminalization of fan behaviour**

Looking at the developments that have taken place in football and football spectatorship, it can be seen that the range of the behaviours that are tolerated and found acceptable has become increasingly narrow [reference deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]. In line with the commercialization of football and its value as a market product, one can observe a growing number of attempts to control the behaviour of football spectators. It seems almost as if an attempt is being made to make football a 'better world', where social problems such as violence and racism, along with many other unwanted behaviours, simply do not exist. This effort to 'puritanize' football should be seen in light of the enormous public interest in the sport and the associated exposure, as well as the importance of football's image with regard to the potential for successful marketing. Increased focus on football's image and marketability has undoubtedly led to the criminalization of fan behaviour. Criminologist Nils Christie perceives crime as a social construct. This means that what is considered to be criminal is not based on universal values, but is determined by changing attitudes and priorities.<sup>21</sup> Criminalization is thus taken to be the process under which former non-punishable actions are assigned a punishment. In this view, crime should be seen first and foremost as a societal response to unwanted actions and not as a *factum sui generis*. As a result of the criminalization of football fan behaviour even small and quite harmless and non-dangerous deviations from accepted behaviour receive huge attention which is not commensurate with that given to more serious norm and rule-breaking behaviour in other areas outside the sporting context. The media's tendency to favour the negative angles of the stories also means that there is primarily focus on football supporters'

mistakes rather than focus on the many positive aspects that the fan culture contributes.<sup>22</sup> For ultras, it means that their public image is dominated by media headlines, which present a one-sided view that potentially stigmatizes being a football fan. Ultras are associated, for the main part, with vandalism, violence and illegal pyrotechnics.

Labelling and criminalization are concepts that characterize the discussion of ultras undesirable and deviant behaviour and the reactions it generates among fans.<sup>23</sup> It has been pointed out that the labelling, stigmatizing and criminalization of fan behaviour, which in many cases perhaps may appear deviant but which is allowed in many other places outside of sport, has led to fans increasingly beginning to perceive themselves and behave as criminals:

You could say on the whole again that they have been criminalized in advance. Especially if like myself, and maybe the rest of my group, you are a little more active and take care of the drum, the flag, the tifo etc., then you start to also be thought of as one of those who's a bit abnormal.

*How do you feel about that?*

(...) Of course it's extremely dampening to your motivation and desire. Once in a while, or more often, you ask yourself why you bother to continue to put time and effort into something that we... Well, we don't expect to get any credit, but neither do we expect to be depicted as criminals or thugs to that degree.

Howard S. Becker launched an interactionist perspective on social deviance that has left a clear mark on subsequent understanding of the causes of various social problems. Becker's book *Outsiders* has become synonymous with what has been called labelling theory, as its basic idea is that behaviour and actions only become deviant when they are defined as such by the social environment.<sup>24</sup> Becker's premise is that research into

social deviation has generally not questioned the label 'deviant', but rather taken it for granted. In doing so, Becker claims, people have intentionally or unintentionally accepted the values of the social group that has used the label in the first instance. Becker points out that the labelling of behaviour or persons as deviant is based on certain values and that the actual experience of being labelled or taken to be deviant may be the first critical step in the development of a deviant career. The crucial and critical variable is thus the social audience and its reaction, and Becker observes that the labelling process is far from predictable or mechanical, as some rule breaches may go unnoticed, while others result in public prosecution and labelling. The interactionist nature of the labelling theory lies in the fact that it is in the very interaction between the deviant behaviour and the responses of the surrounding community that one must seek the causes for the development of deviants in society. The labelling is to be seen as one of the reasons why the otherwise creative and progressive fan movement undergoes a negative trend and results in violent confrontations.

Labelling has undoubtedly a number of negative consequences. There are a number of otherwise peaceful supporters who feel discriminated against and misunderstood to such a degree that they take the stigmatization on them and deliberately start breaking the rules based on the idea that this may just as well amount to the same thing. When the ultras image turns in a negative direction because they are labelled as troublemakers, it may also have implications for the development of the subculture in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Football fans that have often seen, but have not yet had direct contact with these supporters, may indeed have the impression that violence and vandalism is a core value of the ultras, which may mean that they try to mimic exactly this behaviour. The representation of ultras as

troublemakers has an effect on people who enjoy violating these particular limits and now see an opportunity to do this by engaging in ultra groups. This has led to a turn in some ultra groups, where particularly the ultra subculture has seen a growing influx of people who actively seek unrest. In a few cases radical ultras have had success in taking over a specific ultra group and evict the moderate ultras from the group. This is for example the case for one of the most prominent ultra groups in Denmark. The linking of ultras with violence and vandalism has meant that the positive aspects of fan culture have been put into the background. The violent elements have also led to a discrediting of the peaceful supporters' otherwise quite legitimate protest against the arbitrary treatment and criminalization of football supporters.

In rare cases it has been seen that in view of the many restrictions and the increasing criminalization, supporter groups have chosen to resign and simply give up and become more passive or devise alternative, law-abiding ways and forms of expressing themselves. But in most cases the ultras defend themselves against such treatment and refuse to accept the labelling and the restrictions. This can happen by means of posts on various web forums, by rejecting to contribute to the visual and verbal support for the team for a while, a so-called 'atmosphere boycott', or other forms of protest such as the launch of the pan-European campaign *Watching Football is not a Crime*<sup>25</sup>, or by simply ignoring the rules and restrictions and instead giving extra resistance. In the latter case, this may develop into confrontations between the ultras on one side and police or stewards on the other. If the supporters' motivation is not taken into consideration, it can be quite difficult to distinguish proactive from reactive violence. However the most common reaction to prohibitions, restrictions, criminalization and arbitrary treatment is some form of resistance, which is not

surprising given the ultras critical approach to the sport.

The ultras consider flares, flags and banners to be an essential part of their expression at the stadium. The wide-ranging regulations and restrictions on match days and specially the prohibition on pyrotechnics, on carrying flags and banners and the censorship of the messages written on the banners is considered to be a restriction of independence. In most cases attempts will be made to restore independence. This can happen in various ways. There may be a direct restoration of the self-determination because rules are simply ignored and flares, flags and banners are smuggled into the stadium. Another possibility is that the fans will instead try to use their objects outside the stadium, for example in the march or in front of the entrance to the stadium. In this way they can still use their fireworks and display their flags and banners and get their message out, although it is under slightly different conditions than they wanted. It also happens that the prohibitions and restrictions are answered by aggressive behaviour, especially against those trying to enforce the prohibitions. When the stewards, for example, try to confiscate pyrotechnics or flags and banners, it happens that fans exhibit aggressive behaviour and on occasion it comes to a fight between fans and stewards. The danger of such a reaction from the supporters' side is especially present when the stewards try to enforce the prohibitions in the stadium where they have to go into the supporters' curve to remove flags and banners or confront the users of pyrotechnics. In such situations, the supporters feel that this is an even greater attack on their freedom.

The theory of psychological reactance is one of the best-known frameworks for understanding this kind of resistance.<sup>26</sup> The concept stems from social psychology, where it was originally defined as a motivational state created by a threat to a person's behavioural freedom (that is to say, a form of compulsion to oppose the influence of

others). The theory claims that a person who has his or her freedom restricted in vital areas will strive to regain that freedom. The more pressure put on the person, or the more freedom that is denied, the more resistance the person will make. The basic assumption of the theory is that people who feel their freedom curtailed will exhibit reactive behaviour directed at the 'deprivation of liberty' and not least at the agent that causes this deprivation.<sup>27</sup> As the slogan 'freedom for fans' indicates, the right to self-government is a core value of the ultras, which is why the theory of resistance may help to shed light on one of the most significant reasons why moderate ultras, despite their rejection of violence, can act aggressively and violently. The reaction from the fans' side does not necessarily come immediately following the event where the freedom has been felt to be restricted. It can be accumulated and released at a later date<sup>28</sup>, which gives additional challenges in terms of dealing with the fans. These challenges notwithstanding, this resistance and protest culture is one way for the supporters to avoid the labelling and its negative consequences. They take up the defence in different ways. One of the most common forms of protest is the use of banners and suchlike in the stadium, both for situation-specific conditions and also for recurring themes such as the protest against modern football, which is why a ban on these is also considered to be a serious interference.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the fact that the goal of the Danish ultras is a positive and constructive fan culture, one could well argue that regardless of what the reason may be, the disturbances and unwanted behaviour cannot be tolerated and therefore a call for a

tougher line against these supporters is justified. However, the problem with a repressive approach to football supporters from both clubs as well as the authorities is that despite the fact that fan behaviour has evolved, insufficient account has been taken of this evolution. The general direction has always been that supporters' undesirable behaviour is viewed as a problem that is to be suppressed with increased control and more restrictions. One of the consequences of this is that an unnecessarily large number of football fans are seen as potential criminals regardless of the reasons for their behaviour. For away games, this can even apply to category A or non-risk supporters, so that all away team supporters are regarded as a potential risk. Rather than have a preventive effect, such treatment may on the contrary result in even the most peaceful supporters feeling provoked to such an extent that it ends in confrontations.<sup>29</sup> Part of the problem, which seems to be inherent in the repressive approach, is a lack of knowledge of the specific sub-cultural backgrounds of the various supporters' behaviour, but also of fan culture as a whole. This leads to peaceful supporters often feeling misunderstood and unfairly treated and such situations may very well end up escalating.

Now one might argue that such an approach by clubs and the authorities can be justified, as numerous infractions and criminal practices are found in relation to football matches. However, there are other events that also include this danger, but where the introduction of similar preventive bans is not considered and where the same repressive approach is not used. When disturbances and unwanted behaviour at football matches is given so much attention, this may be due to lack of understanding or fear of a tarnished reputation and thus fewer opportunities of successful marketing.

The use of pyrotechnics at the stadium has been the subject of extensive debate. Especially ultra groups, who see them as an essential component of their

choreographies, use flares and smoke bombs on a large scale. Despite the ban on the use of pyrotechnics at times other than around New Year's Eve, many stadiums have tolerated their use for years. They are not without danger, but initially it was mainly the smoke nuisance, making it difficult not only for the crowd but also the players and referees to see what was happening on the pitch, that their use was made taboo and increasingly fought against. It has not been uncommon for the media and even football clubs to use pictures of the many flares in the stadium to illustrate the intense, yet fantastic, atmosphere inside a football stadium. Nowadays reports are more ambivalent and mostly negative. Now there is talk of thugs who use violence and vandalism when they light flares. The attempt to remove pyrotechnics from the stadium seems to have served to justify a number of other prohibitions. Flags and banners are thus banned in some stadiums with the argument that they can be used to smuggle fireworks into the stadium and also as cover for those who light them, so that it is not possible to identify a perpetrator. As a result, in several places there are extensive restrictions on the options for visual support to the team. But this is one of the core elements for the ultras.

Therefore, several groups have made agreements with their clubs, referred to as the FC St. Pauli model, where the scheme was created. The model states that as a rule all visual effects except pyrotechnics are allowed. If fireworks are set off, however, the supporters are deprived of this right for a certain number of matches. Although many fans would like to see such a model implemented, it does contain some problems. For a start, there are supporters who refuse to give up their pyrotechnics, and an unfair collective punishment can be made for a single individual's actions. Although many groups are quite good at dealing with such problems through self-regulation, it may be then already too late. In some cases, there are no groups or individuals who have enough influence to prevent this kind of occurrence. Nevertheless, the majority would prefer such a scheme

over the prohibitions and censorship that they are subject to at present. When supporters protest against these conditions in various ways, they are quickly labelled troublemakers, which in turn is used as an argument for more restrictions.

Although most stadiums in Denmark are owned by the public and rented by the football clubs, the clubs set the rules and decide what should get into the stadium and what should not. But this right does not always mean that the decision is correct and sensible<sup>30</sup>. Trying to set certain limits and for example not tolerating banners with racist or discriminatory messages is quite understandable to most people, but trying at the same time to put a lid on fans' protests against abuses and arbitrary treatment is bordering on an undemocratic attitude violating civil rights.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Reicher et. al., "An Integrated"

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher, *Overview*; Kennedy, "A Contextual"; Guschwan, "Performance"

<sup>3</sup> The police used to divide football supporters into three categories: A, B and C. Category A are those supporters who pose no danger to public order. Category B are those who might participate in unrest under certain conditions and category C consists of the supporters who actively seek out trouble and go to matches looking to fight. These categories are extremely simplistic in comparison to the very high complexity of football fan culture. Nevertheless, the police categories have become even more simplistic with the introduction of the categorization into risk supporters (B and C) and non-risk supporters (A). Here categories B and C have been merged into one category. In practice, such categorizations mean that supporters who have vastly different values and views on legitimate fan behaviour are seen as one and thus subject to the same treatment, often consisting of counter-hooliganism strategies, and this undifferentiated view on supporters increases the risk of contributing to the problems (Stott and Pearson, *Football Hooliganism*; Friedmann, *Polizei und Fans*; Linkelmann, "Feindbild Polizei").

<sup>4</sup> Brøndby IF, F.C. København, Aarhus GF, Odense Boldklub, Viborg FF and AaB Fodbold

<sup>5</sup> see Robson, Real World Research

<sup>6</sup> Marcus, Ethnography through

<sup>7</sup> Bernard, Research methods in anthropology

<sup>8</sup> Sands, Sport Ethnography

<sup>9</sup> For an introduction to the football trains, see [reference deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]

<sup>10</sup> Waddington, “Participant observation”

<sup>11</sup> Frey, Botan and Kreps, Investigating communication

<sup>12</sup> Brinkmann, Qualitative Inquiry

<sup>13</sup> [Reference deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]

<sup>14</sup> Pearson, An Ethnography

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed review of the Italian ultras, see Testa and Armstrong, *Football Fascism and Fandom*; Guschwan, “Football Fandom in Italy”

<sup>17</sup> Francesio, *Tifare Contro*

<sup>18</sup> King, The End; Ziesche, Reclaiming the Game

<sup>19</sup> [Reference deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]

<sup>20</sup> Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition

<sup>21</sup> Christie, *En passende*

<sup>22</sup> Carnibella et al., Football Violence in Europe

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Gabler, *Die Ultras*

<sup>24</sup> Becker, *Outsiders*

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/watching-football-is-not-a-crime/> (last accessed 27 November 2016)

<sup>26</sup> See Langer, *Kriminalisierung*

<sup>27</sup> Brehm, *A Theory*; Brehm & Brehm, *Psychological Reactance*; Dillard & Shen, “On the Nature of Reactance”

<sup>28</sup> Langer, *Kriminalisierung*

<sup>29</sup> Stott and Pearson, Football Hooliganism; Pearson, An Ethnography

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. cf. Guschwan, “Stadium as public sphere”; Guschwan, “Performance in the stands”.