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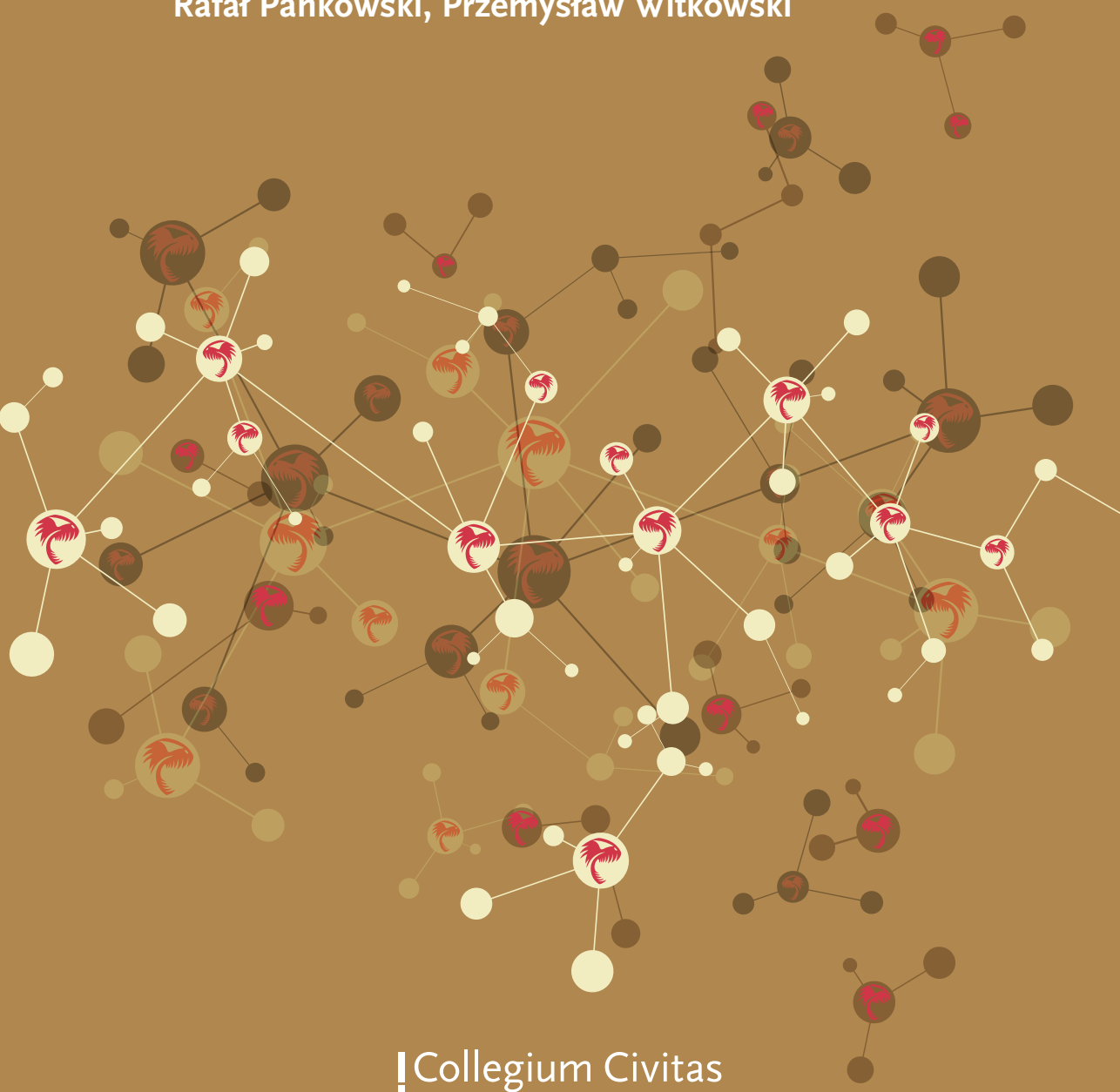

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C O L L E G I U M C I V I T A S

This is a chapter from ***The Virus of Radicalization***, edited by Paweł Kuczyński, pages 159-187. All book is available for download at the following Internet address: https://civitas.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Virus-of-Radicalization.pdf
DOI: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22331338.

Citation:
Pankowski, R., Witkowski, P. (2023). *"Death to enemies of the fatherland": Violent Right-Wing Extremism infiltration of the milieu of Polish football hooligans*. [In:] *The Virus of Radicalization*. (Ed.) Kuczyński, P. Warsaw: Collegium Civitas. pp. 159-187. [Online] https://civitas.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VoR-Pankowski-Witkowski-Violent-Right-Wing-Extremism-infiltration-07.pdf
DOI: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22151858.

Warsaw 2023

Publisher: Collegium Civitas
Palace of Culture and Science, 11th floor
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http://www.civitas.edu.pl

“Death to enemies of the fatherland”: Violent Right-Wing Extremism infiltration of the milieu of Polish football hooligans

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Abstract

Football hooligans are a group extremely prone to radicalization. Research and analyses from Western and, especially, Eastern European countries show a strong infiltration of this group of fans by Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE). This is aided by the cult of strength and violence as well as the violent actions of this category of football fans. The aim of this work is to investigate this phenomenon in the Polish context and to describe the relationship between right-wing extremists and the environment of football hooligans and “ultras.” Numerous incidents related to the VRWE ideology at stadiums will be listed, as well as direct relationships between the VRWE activists and football hooligans. This will make it possible to place the case of Poland in the international context of this phenomenon and to show the advancement of this process.

Keywords

Football, hooligans, ultras, VRWE, RWE, far right, Neo-Nazis, Neo-fascists, Poland

Introduction

Football culture is an important channel of political expression and socialization in both Western and Eastern European societies (Carr, Parnell, Widdop, Power, Millar (Eds.) 2021). Football stadiums can be viewed as binding sites for identity-formation processes. Expressions of ideological (e.g. national) symbolism in football culture constitute a significant element of the contemporary construction of national identities. Such expressions also serve as tools for constructing a vision of the enemy who is excluded from the ideal imagined community, and vilifying "the other" (Schmitt 2012). The performative repertoire of identity-formation rituals in football culture draws in many cases upon historical imagery.

This is why political groups based on nationalism, historical resentment, and hostility to foreigners and minorities find it particularly easy to operate in such an environment. Football hooligans in many countries are also particularly susceptible to radicalization. There are many examples of states where nationalistic and xenophobic tendencies (Wachter, Fanizadeh 2007) have led to transparent and easily traceable cooperation of these circles with Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE) groups (Carr, Parnell, Widdop, Power, Millar (Eds.) 2021). Such tendencies have been identified in the United Kingdom (Garland, Treadwell 2010), Germany (Claus 2017), and Italy (Testa, Armstrong 2008; *eosdem* 2010; Martin 2018). This is even more visible in Eastern Europe (Wilson 2006; Benedikter, Wojtaszyn 2017), especially in Serbia (Nielsen 2013), Croatia (Hodges 2018; Perasović, Mustapic 2017), and Russia (Glathe, Varga 2018; Glathe 2016; Arnold, Veth 2018).

This article aims to indicate similar connections in the case of Polish football hooligans, showing selected examples (mainly concerning the largest Polish cities: Warsaw, Gdańsk, Kraków, Wrocław, and Białystok) of the scope and depth of the relationship between VRWE and hooligan circles. It is an attempt to answer the question of whether the Polish

case is in line with the trends indicated above in other Central and Eastern European countries. The primary research material will be numerous press articles from the past decade reporting on this type of relationship, as well as reports collected by the association "Never Again," which has been monitoring hate speech, hate crimes, and extremist events in Poland for more than 25 years, publishing compilations in the form of the so-called *Brown Book* (Kornak 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Kornak, Tatar 2016; Tatar 2019).

In this study, we understand far-right radicalization as the process by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes or engage in actions that support violence in the pursuit of far-right extremist causes. We understand the concept of the milieu in a broad sense, as the people, the physical and social conditions, and the events among which someone acts or lives. A milieu of radicalization is a space where radical or extreme messages are encountered, either online or offline. In the context of this research, the milieu can be understood as the football stadium or club, but most importantly, as a social network and communicative space influenced by radical ideology.

In this work, we use Kossakowski's division of fans into three primary groups, namely activists, ultras, and hooligans ("hools" for short) (Kossakowski 2021). Activists are simply fans involved in their sports club, co-creating fan associations or organizing trips to matches. "Ultras" are fans who are exceptionally devoted to their club. They organize the scenery in the stadium, support the cheering, use flares, and create and display banners in the stadium. Political ideologies sometimes influence these groups. "Hools" are gangs of fanatical fans of the club who physically attack the supporters of another club, often engaging in regular "battles" with them and the police, causing physical damage and material losses to the opponents, the police, and residents of the area where such fights take place (*Ibidem*). In this work, we will mainly deal with the latter two groups, focusing on the "hools" as the most aggressive and most often infiltrated by Right-Wing Extremism (RWE).

Historical context

Sports – and football in particular – have long been associated with national (and nationalist) symbolism and ideology. The rise of mass-audience sports in the twentieth century accompanied the emergence of the modern nation-state as a unit of social organization. In the case of Poland, as with several other East European nations, the emergence of a modern national identity occurred in the absence of an independent nation-state and its array of national institutions. Therefore, arguably, the sports club had an additional function. It could, on occasion, serve as a substitute point of reference in national identity building. As the historical circumstances of Polish statehood and nationhood in the twentieth century changed, so too did the social function of football. Poland was not an independent state until 1918; the first clubs established in the early twentieth century often served as a focus of national identity without the nation-state (Gawkowski, Braciszewski 2012). In 1919, the Polish Football Association (PZPN) was formed as one of the symbols of the new Polish state.

Commemorations and celebrations of the legacy of ethnic diversity by fans have remained notably absent in contemporary Eastern European football. Numerous displays (such as large banners) in football stadiums extol ethnonationalist pride and commemorate national(ist) heroes. This seems to be a consequence of the current hegemony of an ethnonationalist perspective on the history of sports in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. Boff Whalley points to "football's traditional masculinity, conservatism, racism, homophobia and nationalism" (cited by Kuhn 2011: 7).

As shown by Ryszard Kapuściński (1992), the game can also serve as a pretext for war or at least one of the blocks in the build-up towards conflict between nations. Indeed, sport was commonly utilized as a way of raising new generations of physically fit and patriotically minded conscripts for the military forces of nation-states (Kuligowski 2012). The

historical role of football in the process of "nationalization" or "patriotic education" in Poland is stressed, for example, by the football historian Józef Hałys, who suggests that the goal was "through sports, through football, to mold people of diverse educational backgrounds, professions, even religions – into good Poles" (Hałys cited in Świąder 2006).

During World War II and the Nazi occupation of Poland, playing football was prohibited, but games continued as a form of resistance (*Ibidem*). After 1945, football was strongly controlled by the newly established Communist regime, and served its propaganda purposes. At the same time, the fans' movement and the stands were, or became as the system decayed, a place where resistance to the authorities was occasionally expressed. Eventually, with the economic and political transformation after 1989, accompanied by unemployment and a decline in living standards for some social groups during the transition period that generated much anger and frustration, stadiums became places of even more politicized expressions (Pankowski 2010). Aided further by the transfer to Poland of the trend already visible in Western Europe, especially in England – that is, the infiltration of the fan movement by RWE – Polish stadiums in the 1990s were full of racist and xenophobic symbolism and fierce clashes with the police or between groups of fans of different teams (*Ibidem*).

Contemporary context

The political usage of football is not limited to the history of openly non-democratic politics. Numerous contemporary mainstream political leaders have sought to associate themselves with the game, and the association has served their popularity; Polish ex-prime minister Donald Tusk, who is an active football player, and current Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán are but two well-known examples from the region of East-Central Europe. It has become impossible to imagine a crucial interna-

tional football game without the attendance of high-level figures wearing football fan scarves or other accessories of fan culture and expressing their "support" for the players.

However, even while the economic and political mainstream has been intensely involved in the game, fan culture has often grown increasingly alienated and oppositional towards liberal democracy. The radical subculture functioning in the context of football was imported to Eastern Europe from the West (especially, but not exclusively, Great Britain) in the 1980s and 90s (Garland, Treadwell 2010). Over the years, it has also gained a regional specificity. While the extreme expressions of the subculture, including hooligan violence during and around games, did not disappear entirely in many Western countries, such sights have become rare in the West as football culture in general has evolved since the 1980s. As spaces, stadiums underwent gentrification, ticket prices increased, and some of the most active hooligans were subject to stadium bans or police repression. The rules of FIFA, UEFA and national leagues, which are strict regarding the prohibition of violence in the stands and the symbolism of RWE, also had an effect.

As a result, in some of the biggest football clubs, it can be said that violence in stadiums has practically almost disappeared, as have racist symbolism and xenophobic cheers. A different process occurred in the countries of Eastern Europe, where RWE dominated the stadiums in the 1990s, and for a variety of reasons has remained strong ever since (Wilson 2006; Benedikter, Wojtaszyn 2017). Therefore, the atmosphere of an average league match in Eastern Europe can often be different from the West; instances of violence and xenophobic behavior, for example, are more likely to occur in the stadiums of Eastern rather than Western Europe. Polish fan culture has retained its violent edge, including significant strands related to xenophobia. Thus, the group identity constructed through the rituals of the football fan subculture in Poland tends to be a narrower, exclusivist community, emphasizing the boundaries of gender, race, and ethnicity.

The radicalization of football fans in Poland is the result of several processes. First, its formation was primarily influenced by reactions to policies of successive governments which realized that fans should be dealt with. The center-right government of 2007-2015 enforced a different policy on violent fans to that of the right-wing populist government that succeeded it. The organization of EURO 2012 by Poland, together with Ukraine, meant for the center-right liberals the need to ensure the safety of participants in this important event. This period is considered a turning point for football fans, as many of the government's actions were perceived as repressive (PAP 2013). From this time also comes a kind of founding myth, to which "hools" return, honoring their leaders and heroes who fought unequally with the police and security forces.

The post-2015 right-wing populist government used a different tactic: not only allowing annual nationalist marches on Independence Day, co-organized by the far-right nationalist leaders of the football fans' movement, but giving them open support (Witkowski 2021). The marches constitute a political resource that can be used in various ways. Although the mainstream media has pointed to threats to the security of citizens (Sewastianowicz, Rojek-Socha 2021), the state-controlled media does not condemn the xenophobic slogans and aggressive behavior directed against minorities during the marches.

The next factor that cannot be overestimated was the rapid development of social media in the 2010s. In the case of "hools," Internet 2.0 undoubtedly strengthened their movement, due to the wave of hate speech, a large part of which was directed not only at supporters of hostile clubs but at a new and generalized enemy: minorities. This is another symptom indicating the infiltration of the hooligan community by VRWE.

Infiltration

Extremist groups – especially those from the far right – have long attempted to infiltrate fan culture, promote their messages, and recruit new members. The National Front and the British Movement in the UK in the 1970s and 80s employed tactics of leafleting and initiating chants (Garland, Treadwell 2010), not dissimilar to the way Polish radical right groups acted in numerous stadiums in the 2000s and 2010s. The longest-existing Polish nationalist and neo-fascist groups looking for supporters among football fans are the National-Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) and the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW). These groups take their inspiration (and their names) from radical-nationalist groups that existed in Poland in the 1920s and 30s (Pankowski 2010). Together, they have organized a significant annual event, the Independence Day March in Warsaw on November 11, in which thousands of Polish football fans take part every year, and which has become a significant ritual as an expression of radical-nationalist political ideology by fans of different Polish clubs (Mazzini 2020).

The ONR and MW are political organizations with ambitious goals amounting to a radical reconstruction of society and a rejection of the democratic system. In line with their traditions, they seek to construct an ethnostate where liberal values are shunned, and minorities are excluded through the slogan "Poland for the Polish." Both groups have frequently utilized radical youth subcultures such as skinheads as a strategy to promote their ideological messages and recruit members. Although often extreme in their positions, the ONR and MW do not seem to be socially isolated. On the contrary, they seem to have numerous opportunities for access and interactions with the social mainstream, including through institutions such as the Catholic church (Pankowski 2010).

Other, still more extreme groups or their representatives operate in the fan community and often even play a central role in it. One of these is the National Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, NOP) – an extreme nationalist political party belonging to the international neo-fascist movement of the Third Position (Witkowski 2019). The NOP's leader is Adam Gmurczyk, and its official publication is the *Szczerbiec* magazine. It claims to reject both capitalism and socialism, proclaiming anti-Semitism, distributism, corporatism, and Catholic religious integralism of a sedevacantist current. It refers to the political thought of the Walloon Nazi collaborator Leon Degrelle, the leader of pre-war Romanian fascists Corneliu Codreanu Zelea, or directly to Benito Mussolini (*Ibidem*). The NOP has existed since the 1980s and has committed numerous acts of violence in Poland: attacks on ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities, political opponents, or lectures at universities (e.g., a lecture by Zygmunt Bauman in Wrocław in 2014) (Obirek 2014). Despite numerous accusations against the party and several convictions for its members and activists, the organization has not been banned (*Ibidem*).

The NOP has organized numerous demonstrations in Wrocław. In that city, a tram was rented and driven with carriages decorated with a large Celtic cross, the slogan "White Power," and an advertisement for the xenophobic portal Fuckpc.com (short for "fuck political correctness"). From time to time, a voice shouted "once with a sickle, sometimes with a hammer [hit] a red mob" through the loudspeaker. The group organized a walk to one of the islands on the Odra River in Wrocław, where a puppet depicting the Polish-Jewish historian Professor Jan Tomasz Gross was thrown into the water. The extreme nationalists also gathered in honor of the anti-communist partisans from the National Armed Forces, commemorating the anniversary of the creation of the pre-war ONR, the attack of the Third Reich on Poland, the 1981 Martial Law anniversary, or the anniversary of the date of occupation of eastern Poland by the USSR in 1939. They demanded "the final solution to the problem

of Gypsy nomads" in Wrocław and called Wrocław "the City of Nationalism." The NOP's flagship activity in the city was the celebration of November 11 (competing with the Warsaw Independence March), organized under the slogan "March of Patriots." All these events were attended by numerous fans of the Wrocław sports club WKS Śląsk Wrocław (Witkowski 2018) and fans of teams allied with WKS "hools" (Motor Lublin, Lechia Gdańsk, Wisła Kraków – all also dominated by REW fanatics).

Gaining the support of Roman Zieliński, the leader of the stadium hooligans of Śląsk Wrocław, turned out to be of crucial importance for the nationalists from NOP. This "hools" leader experienced a "national awakening," as he described in his book *How I Fell in Love with Adolf Hitler*, and declared himself to be a passionate nationalist, anti-Semite, and anti-communist (Rybak 2015). Thanks to his cooperation, fans appeared en masse at extreme-right demonstrations, and xenophobic slogans were raised at the city stadium, along with flags depicting crossed out sickles and hammers; fans also hooted at non-white players. On the stands, there were banners with the words "Skinheads" and a visible Celtic cross, a 10-meter banner with the slogan "White Power," and other nationalist symbols such as the "wolf hook" (Wolfsangel) or "phalanx" (a symbol of Polish fascists). The now-defunct website wroclawianie.info, formerly one of the most famous and biggest websites associated with fans of the Wrocław club, distributed dozens of sticker designs, some of which contained racist and anti-Semitic inscriptions and drawings: the figure of Hitler with a Roman salute against the background of the Silesian flag, the slogan "Skinheads Hooligans 88," or the figures of three men in boots kicking a black man and the caption "This is how the nobility from Wrocław have fun" ("Tak się zabawia szlachta z Wrocławia"). National Rebirth of Poland activists handed out nationalist leaflets to fans and urged them to visit the far-right websites nacjonalista.pl, Wrocławianie.info, and nop.org.pl; they also recruited new supporters at the stadium (Witkowski 2018).

Another RWE group, this time international, active among Polish fanatics is Blood and Honor. This is a Nazi "international" with a loose structure. It describes itself as a worldwide pan-Aryan organization dedicated to the struggle for the survival and prosperity of the White Race. Its name comes from the Hitler Youth motto (*Blut und Ehre*). It preaches "white nationalism," "white supremacy," and "white separatism"; that is, Nazism, racism, and apartheid, respectively. Blood and Honor activists believe that "whites" should remain the majority in Europe and the US, and dominate these regions politically, economically, and culturally. In their opinion, immigration of "colored" people and low birth rates threaten the "white race." They are accelerationists and insurrectionists. They consider themselves a pan-Aryan white resistance movement against the oppressive forces of the "Zionist Occupation Government" (ZOG); they maintain that the governments of Western countries are pawns in an international conspiracy led by Jews. They preach a nationalist revolution and praise violence. Different national Blood and Honor units use diverse symbols; however, common elements include the Gothic font, the colors of the Third Reich flag (black, white, and red), and Nazi symbolism, including the Totenkopf (skull and crossbones, symbol of the 3rd SS Panzer Division Totenkopf – concentration camp guards) and the triskelion (Forbes, Stampton 2015).

Groups and activists associated with Blood and Honor are visible in many groups of football fans in Poland; in several of them, they even have vital functions. One of the leaders of the Lechia Gdańsk "hools" is Grzegorz H., aka "Śledziu" ("Herring"). He is a close associate of the famous Gdańsk gangster, Olgierd L., and a neo-Nazi. Reportedly, he has five swastikas, the motto of the SS, Adolf Hitler's face, and a vast Celtic cross tattooed on his body, and he is a regular guest at Blood and Honor events in Poland, both sports events and music concerts. He also has been sentenced to several years of imprisonment due to numerous links with the criminal underworld. Olgierd L., the unofficial "employer" of

Grzegorz H., is a well-known gangster from Gdańsk who has served several years for pimping and has a record as a Nazi-skinhead; he is also a regular guest at Blood and Honor events (Superwizjer TVN 2019).

From 2005 to 2009, in Białystok, the largest city in north-eastern Poland, there were regular violent conflicts between VRWE "hools" and the so-called "Praetorians," politically non-radicalized Jagiellonia Białystok "hools." The former wanted to take control of the fanatics' section of the stadium at all costs. In December 2005, Adrian R., the head Praetorian, was killed in front of his home. During this period, VRWE took control of the stadium of the Jagiellonia Białystok. From there, they created a criminal organization headed by Adam S. aka "Staszyn," Herbert Ż. aka "Herbciak," Krzysztof G. aka "Litwin," and Tomasz P. aka "Dragon." In 2013, the Central Investigation Bureau of the Polish police managed to infiltrate two undercover policemen into the management of the Białystok VRWE "hools." In the summer of 2014, the first detentions were made. "Dragon" and "Staszyn" were charged by the prosecutor's office with managing an organized criminal group, dealing drugs, and benefiting from prostitution. "Litwin" has been charged with inciting racial hatred.

The case file shows that Białystok RWE created a complicated criminal organization closely connected with the "hools." They were involved in pimping and drug trafficking; for the latter, they needed a stadium. It was there that they recruited young people into the organization. Such initiates first dealt with painting swastikas; when they were good, they went into the so-called ultras – that is, the leading group at the Jagiellonia stadium. Above them were hooligans: militias taking part in hooligans' matches. All this was managed by the board of directors controlled by VRWE connected with Blood and Honor (Kowalewski 2014). During the brutal attacks on Pride in Białystok in 2019, one of the leaders attacking LGBT demonstrators was the aforementioned "Dragon" and his followers from the group of Jagiellonia Białystok "hools" (Zaremba 2019).

Another Polish network Blood and Honor participant, Krzysztof F. aka "Fornal," has played an essential role for the "hools" of the Odra Opole team since the 1990s. He is also the leader of the local Opole community of Nazi-skinheads, called the Aryan Hooligans ("Aryjscy chuligani"). "Fornal" also visits London, regularly attends Chelsea London matches, and supports the Chelsea Headhunters gang, bringing together neo-Nazi fans of the latter club. Fornal's son, Patryk F., is also an active RWE, and as a 16-year-old, he physically attacked a black footballer from Odra Opole for racist reasons (Seeb 2008). Both father and son are regular guests at Polish Blood and Honor events. Active participants of the Blood and Honor network can also be found as leaders of "hools" (or at least important figures in the stadium environment) in such Polish football clubs as Piast Gliwice, GKS Katowice, Stilon Gorzów, and Motor Lublin (Kornak 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Kornak, Tatar 2016).

Other groups of RWE penetrate the group of "hools" and "ultras" of Raków Częstochowa football club. One of the founders of ONR, Patryk Litwiniak, has been the press spokesman of the Wieczny Raków association, the fan organization of Raków Częstochowa (Kuczyński 2011). The famous football zine addressed to the fans of Legia Warszawa, *Droga Legionisty*, is edited by an editor of the neo-fascist magazine *Szturm*, using the pseudonym "Łukasz Grower." Also, the fan groups "White Legion" (Orłowski 2015) and "Teddy Boys 95" (Kornak 2009) of this football club are dominated by active VRWE.

An important hub for RWE communication with football fans is the *To My Kibice* magazine published in Bełchatów, which describes fights among supporters and stadium banners. It has a unique annual insert on the occasion of the November 11 Independence Day March, the most prominent nationalist demonstration in Poland (and probably throughout Europe).

International contacts are an essential element in penetrating the fan milieu of RWE activists. It is worth listing here some foreign groups of RWE fans with whom Polish clubs have alliances. Fanatics of the Ruch

Chorzów football club have regular contact with Frente Atletico, a group of neo-Nazi Atletico Madrid fans (TOK26 2019), who have the SS Totenkopf symbol in their logo and are closely related to the Spanish branch of Blood and Honor. Polonia Warszawa "hools" are aligned with another group of RWE fans: Ligallo Fondo Norte, supporting Real Zaragoza. A Wisła Kraków "hools" gang, the Wisła Sharks group, has a close alliance with neo-Nazi SS Lazio fans. "Hools" from Krakow take part in fights alongside Lazio fans; you can find photos of them carrying Nazi greetings (Maciejasz 2015).

Other important international alliances that facilitate contacts with foreign RWE involve fans of the following football clubs: Legia Warszawa – Den Haag, GKS Katowice – Banik Ostrava, WSK Śląsk – SFC Opava, Widzew Łódź – CSKA Moskwa, Górnik Zabrze – Hajduk Split, Cracovia – Ajax Amsterdam, Pogoń Szczecin – Ujpest Budapeszt and BFC Dynamo Berlin, Piast Gliwice – BATE Borysów (red 2017), Góral Żywiec – MSK Zilina, Orlęta Radzyń Podlaski – Dinamo Briest, Hutnik Kraków – 1. FC Magdeburg, and Odra Opole – FC Sopron. The effects of these alliances and infiltration of the football fan community by RWE are often visible in stadiums in the form of "spectacles" organized in the stands by fans or the banners they bring with them, as well as the participation of fans in RWE demonstrations and other public activities.

Outcomes of infiltration

Thanks to this infiltration, openly neo-Nazi references have become an element of the performative repertoire of Polish football "hools." Nazi symbolism partly mimics the antics of Western European hooligan groups such as the notorious Chelsea Headhunters, influenced by the neo-Nazi terrorist organization Combat 18 (Lowles 2014). Some of the most graphic examples include displays of Nazi swastika banners by fans of Legia Warsaw (Ostałowska, Podolska 2000).

In October 2002, during a game against Widzew Łódź, a club mocked as "Jewish" by its rivals, Legia fans displayed a large banner with the infamous slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei," which adorned the gates to Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz. It was accompanied by anti-Semitic chants and songs with references to Nazism and gas chambers. The club was subsequently fined by the PZPN, a historic first (and rare) case of punishment of a Polish club for its fans' racist and anti-Semitic behavior (Jk, jar *no date*). Other documented direct references to the imagery of the Nazi Third Reich include the notorious display of a portrait of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess in the stadium of Lechia Gdańsk, another large Polish club (Szadurski 2004).

There is also a correlation here – "hools" were directed by active VRWE and the symbols of VRWE visible at the stadium. During the 2010s, stadium displays of the swastika at major Polish clubs generally ceased. However, Nazi references still occurred, for example invoking the symbolism of Auschwitz; on March 16, 2019, during the Fourth Division match between Okocimski KS Brzesko and Tarnovia Tarnów, local hooligans along with their guests from Unia Tarnów chanted insults about the visiting team, including "Jews are burning" and "Barrack six, Zyklon B, F..ck Tarnovia." They also chanted the second slogan on their way to the stadium (Tatar 2019).

Such expressions of sympathy for the regime of Nazi Germany have never been commonplace, but they cannot be easily dismissed as isolated incidents. In fact, they are illustrations of a wider phenomenon of far-right cultural hegemony in East European stadiums. Much more common have been other neo-Nazi references and symbols which are less obvious to an observer not familiar with the codes of the neo-Nazi subculture. Among many examples, one can list banners bearing the symbolism of Blood and Honor. Many such banners – always in the red-white-black colors of the Third Reich and using the Gothic script – often with club names, have been displayed in football stadiums. In 2019, for example, such banners were displayed by fans of Jagiellonia Białystok, Odra Opole, and Śląsk

Wrocław (Tatar 2019). In all three cities, participants in the Blood and Honor network were leading "hools" during this period. On September 6, 2019, a similar banner was unfurled during a game between the Polish national team and Slovenia (Wawrzynowski 2019). The Celtic cross, adopted as an international racist symbol of "White Power," has often been displayed on banners and flags bearing direct resemblance in their design to the Third Reich flag (with only the swastika replaced by the "Celtic cross" sign). An example was flown by Lechia Gdańsk fans during their Poland Cup semi-final match against Raków Częstochowa on April 10, 2019 (Tatar 2019). These "hools" were directed by active RWE and the symbols of RWE were visible at the stadium.

Another example of clear Nazi symbolism is the Totenkopf (death's head) image, historically worn by SS concentration camp guards. Since the early 1990s, the Totenkopf – a version of the skull and crossbones – has become the symbol of Combat 18, another neo-Nazi organization (Lowles 2014). Such symbols have frequently been seen on banners in Polish stadiums; displayed, for example, by fans of Arka Gdynia for several years, including 2019. In the same year, fans of two other clubs, Widzew Łódź and Ruch Chorzów, were spotted displaying the Totenkopf during their games (Tatar 2019). Less openly provocative than the swastika, these symbols are nevertheless rooted in the historical tradition of the Nazi movement. In any case, the "fascist salute" has not disappeared entirely from football matches. At some clubs, such as Wisła Kraków, Stilon Gorzów, and Gryf Słupsk, fans have also displayed the flag of the Confederacy from the time of the US Civil War. In the context of contemporary European football, this symbolizes racist ideology (*Ibidem*).

Another example of quasi-fascist historical references at a football game occurred in Czestochowa on November 14, 2010, during a third-division match between Raków Częstochowa and Olimpia Grudziądz. Fans displayed a banner reading "Warszawa. Han pasado" ("Warsaw. They have passed," in Spanish). This was a reference to the words chanted by the soldiers of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War

(1936-1939), to mock the defeated Republican army's slogan "No pasaran!" ("They shall not pass!"). The slogan related to the Independence Day march three days previously, which had been organized by the extreme-right National-Radical Camp (ONR) (*Ibidem*).

The slogan "Our Honor is fidelity," based on the Nazi SS motto "Meine Ehre heißt Treue," has also appeared in football fan culture, for example on scarves worn by Lechia Gdańsk fans (*Ibidem*). On January 12, 2011, the Internet portal of the *Wprost* weekly published a photograph of an MP from the right-wing populist party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), Anna Zalewska, taken in a corridor of the Parliament, in which she wore a scarf of second-division club Górnik Wałbrzych which bore this motto (Kornak, Klymenko 2011). Zalewska at the time represented the Wałbrzych constituency; she went on to become Minister of Education and later a Member of the European Parliament.

Yet another type of historical reference in stadium displays in Poland is related to "indigenous" radical-nationalist traditions and symbols going back to the 1920s and 30s. These symbols can also be described as far right, but their enthusiasts tend to see them as separate from the German Nazi tradition. In the case of Poland, these include displays of symbols of the nationalist (National-Democratic) movement such as Mieczyk Chrobrego (Chrobry's Sword, a former symbol of the Greater Poland Camp, Obóz Wielkiej Polski), or "falanx," the symbols of the National-Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny), a violently anti-Semitic far-right organization established (and banned) in Poland in 1934 and revived in the 2000s. An example of a large-scale display of home-grown nationalist imagery is a gigantic banner (so-called "sector flag") with a portrait of right-wing nationalist politician Roman Dmowski (1864-1939) and his famous quote "I'm Polish, therefore I have Polish duties," displayed by Lech Poznań fans during an away match with Zagłębie Lubin on November 27, 2009 (Kornak, Klymenko 2011). Dmowski, who crafted modern Polish right-wing nationalism and anti-Semitism, is highly popular among some football fans who share his ideology.

Other displays by Polish football fans with references to historical events and figures almost invariably focus on military struggles and personalities, usually men and usually from the mid-twentieth century. Commemorations of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising are popular at football games, especially around the date of its anniversary (August 1). A popular motif is the glorification of the so-called Cursed Soldiers (Żołnierze Wyklęci): anti-communist nationalistic guerrillas active in Poland after 1945, many of them controversial figures charged with anti-Semitism and arbitrary killings. The cult of the Cursed Soldiers and the concept of honoring them comes from the circles of the extreme right and has been developing since the 1990s; it has achieved the status of an official state cult under the right-wing populist Law and Justice government, especially sustained by one of the main government institutions dealing with shaping the historical discourse – the Institute of National Remembrance. The soldiers' cult in Polish stadiums preceded their officially celebrated glorification at the highest state level by several years. According to a far-right "hools" leader, Roman Zielinski, the first such display (fan choreography) took place at the stadium of Śląsk Wrocław on May 7, 2011 (Zieliński 2019).

Janusz Waluś, the Polish-born racist killer of the South African anti-apartheid activist and Communist Party leader Chris Hani, is occasionally referred to as "the last of the Cursed Soldiers." Since the late 2010s, a growing number of displays in stadiums across Poland have celebrated him as a hero (Saintourens 2018; Davies 2018). Prayers for his well-being and release from jail are offered at the annual pilgrimage of Polish football fans to the Catholic shrine of Częstochowa, which is an important event in community and identity-building efforts and is loaded with far-right symbolism (Davies 2017). The cult of this character also comes from far-right circles. Waluś has been worshiped since the 1990s by neo-fascist skinheads, and to this day his main eulogists are former and present RWE. Some of them, for example Mariusz Bechta and Tomasz Szczepański, are employed today in public institutions; the former

at the Institute of National Remembrance, the latter at the Museum of Independence.

In some cases, historical references in stadiums focus on designating enemies. For example, references to the Warsaw Uprising often contain explicitly anti-German statements, as in the case of Legia Warsaw during the game with Astana FC on August 2, 2017 (Kilpatrick 2017). During the controversy over the Polish Act on the Institute of National Memory in 2018, in some stadiums banners appeared with the words "German Death Camps." In the opinion of Polish RWE, it is not the Nazis who were responsible for the death camps, but the Germans, the main geopolitical enemy of Poland according to nationalists for over a hundred years. Despite the fact that Polish RWE often share a hostile attitude towards Jews, liberalism, or the left wing with German RWE, historical resentments and past events mean that they are regularly in conflict with their German counterparts.

Another example of pointing to enemies was the large fan choreography at the Śląsk Wrocław stadium on May 3, 2012. This included a large banner with the caption "We know the murderers of the Polish nation," followed by a list of communist security service personnel with Jewish names (JW 2012). The display clearly alluded to the widespread negative (anti-Semitic) stereotype of Jews as supporters of communism (known in Polish as Żydokomuna – Judeo-communism). Anti-Semitism remains a significant problem in Polish football as evidenced by graffiti, murals, and chants. This continues despite the almost complete lack of Jews among either players or spectators at the games today; another example of so-called "anti-Semitism without Jews." Drawing on widespread anti-Jewish prejudices, fans of opposing teams often use the word "Jew" as a term of abuse. In many cases they point to a Jewish element in the history of the opposing club. Many clubs have such elements, providing much room for anti-Semitism. Again, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and anti-Semitism are a very common theme in RWE, transferred here directly to the football community.

Some observers are inclined to see anti-communist displays in Polish stadiums as a direct reaction to the decades of communist rule (Wąsowicz 2015). Tragic events from that period are commemorated by football fans both in stadiums and in other settings. While the communist period indeed provides a (negative) point of reference in these expressions, the above assumption needs to be questioned, because few such manifestations of anti-communism took place in stadiums during the 1990s. In fact, they did not become widespread until the 2010s, and the vast majority of participants have had no personal experience of living under communist rule. Thus, the phenomenon belongs to the realm of a "constructed memory" rather than "memory" per se. At the same time, open anti-communism and, more broadly, anti-leftism, is one of the basic elements of fascist and far-right ideology.

A more radical slogan with a historical genesis – also displayed in stadiums and chanted in Polish nationalist street demonstrations – is "Death to enemies of the fatherland" ("Śmierć wrogom ojczyzny"), which originated as a Cursed Soldiers motto. Today it symbolizes the idea of the violent exclusion of real or imagined enemies from the national community. Many of the Cursed Soldiers represented nationalist groups, and you can see here a clear reference to the ideological roots of the contemporary Polish extreme right.

It is important to mention the spillover effect of the community-building processes which take place within the stadium culture. The rituals, ideologies, and patterns of behavior are not limited to the confines of the stadium. On the contrary, they can be observed in numerous other public settings. The same banners and chants that originated in the stadium can be witnessed, for instance, during street demonstrations taking place on historical anniversaries such as the annual Polish Independence Day march in Warsaw. In this way, the ideological component that was brought into the fan culture from outside is amplified and channeled back into the broader social environment, well beyond the world of football. Other RWE demonstrations where delegations of "hools"

have appeared in club colors have included the Patriots' March in Wrocław, the marches on the anniversary of the introduction of martial law in Poland, the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, the National Day of Remembrance of the "Cursed Soldiers," and also commemorations organized by RWE in Silesia of the Silesian uprisings against Germany.

Conclusions

As this article indicates, football culture in Poland has been used as a cultural resource and political tool by nationalist movements promoting particular versions of national "memory" and "identity." It is also a form of symbolic propaganda theater (Kossakowski 2017; Kossakowski, Nosal, Woźniak 2021) where the ideals of the current Polish right-wing populist movement are supported and presented (Pankowski 2010). In turn, the prevalence of nationalist discourse at football events has influenced and reinforced the historical and political discourses outside of the setting of the stadium. This prevalence also derives from the increasingly visible ties between RWE organizations and the football fan community, with RWE taking control of "hools" groups, recruiting participants for RWE demonstrations and members for the organization, or organizing openly extreme-right-wing political demonstrations at stadiums.

Due to the processes described in this article, the impact of VRWE on "hools" can be assessed as similar to other cases in Eastern Europe, such as those of Serbia, Croatia, and Russia. Most of the main groups active in the "hools" environment are organizations belonging to the ideological trends of the Third Position, national radicalism, and neo-Nazism. The effect of these groups' influence on the environment of "hools" and "ultras" is a saturation with VRWE ideology, which is presented publicly at the stadium. There is also a noticeable spillover of VRWE content from the stadium into public discourse, and the penetration of slogans and

worldviews of VRWE groups into the demonstrations and protests of mainstream right-wing groups. In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the right-wing nationalist radicalism of "hools" has become a component of the political scene in Poland, and the long-lasting activity of RWE organizations and their infiltration of this environment have contributed to this. This illustrates another important characteristic of the Polish football fan community, namely the potential for its mobilization as a vehicle of far-right violence.

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About the book "The Virus of Radicalization":

"I regard this monograph as an example of high-quality academic craftsmanship. It is an important supplement to the literature on the phenomena and processes of radicalization and extremism (primarily those taking place in the Polish socio-political system, but not only). It will be interesting both for scientists, students and a wider audience interested in socio-political issues."

Associate Professor Mikołaj Cześnik, Ph.D., SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland

"The volume is a collection of chapters on the topic of mostly right-wing political radicalization in Poland, Europe, and the world. (...) Excellent empirical case studies of particular cases of political radicalization in Poland and Europe are the bulk and the highlight of the volume. (...) Overall, the volume is a useful, well-written and well-conceived contribution to literature on political radicalism and crisis of liberal democracy."

Jacek Lubecki, Ph.D., Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA, USA

ISBN 978-83-66386-33-4

WARSAW 2023

DOI: 10.6084/M9.figshare.22331338