

‘The Wogs are at it Again’: The Media Reportage of Australian Soccer ‘Riots’

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Abstract

The paper presents a case study of the media reportage (press and television) on crowd disorder at a premier league Australian soccer match in Melbourne in 1994. The match between the Croatian community supported Melbourne Knights and the Greek community supported South Melbourne occurred at a time of heightened tensions between the Greek and Macedonia communities in Australia. The paper looks at how the soccer match became associated with these tensions and with how the crowd disorder that occurred at the match was linked in media reports to other acts of vandalism that were unrelated to soccer. Cohen’s notion of ‘moral panic’ is used to explain how media reportage on crowd disorder at Australian soccer matches over time has been embellished into the stereotype of the ‘riot’. Specifically, Australian soccer matches have been portrayed as a battleground where warring ethnic groups fight out grievances imported into Australia from their homelands. This image has served the interests of those who have campaigned to ‘de-ethnicise’ Australian soccer and there is indication that ethnic supporter groups currently associated with rugby league in Sydney might be subjected to similar forms of media reportage.

Introduction

The following media case study was written at a key moment in the turbulent history of Australian soccer. During the mid-1990s the administrative imperative to ‘de-ethnicise’ Australian soccer was accelerated with the implementation of a number of measures to sever the symbolic connection between national league clubs and their support bases located within particular ethnic communities. Although peak soccer officialdom, in the form of Soccer Australia and its organisational precursor the Australian Soccer Federation, has kept a careful distance from hyperbolic reports about soccer providing a battleground for warring ethnic groups, the ‘de-ethnicising’ agenda has benefited from the stereotypical image of the soccer ‘riot’ promoted by the mass media. The ‘de-ethnicising’ case has always hinged on the perception that soccer will only move into the mainstream of Australian sport once it has freed itself from controversies associated with ethnic identity. The ‘de-ethnicising’ of the national league in terms of competing teams, although not complete, has now been largely fulfilled. Most teams currently in the league maintain a corporate and or civic identity rather than an identity located in ethnicity. Interestingly, ethnicity as a basis of support has recently arisen in rugby league, a sport noted for its Anglo roots and traditions. As rugby league clubs vacate traditional district associations identifying themselves primarily through nebulous emblems such as Sharks, Roosters, and Bulldogs a space is created

for new forms of collective supporter identities. Accordingly, a group called the 'Bulldog Army', a youth supporter alliance, which apparently expresses ethnic identity through rugby league support, has recently appeared. Early media reportage has depicted the group as an alarming portent for the future of support in rugby league. It will be interesting to monitor the ongoing media reception of expressions of ethnicity in rugby league support, perhaps the case study of a media 'moral panic' about ethnically inspired 'riots' at Australian soccer matches presented in this paper may have more than a historical interest.

The title of this paper was originally taken from a quote made by the President of the Marconi Fairfield club Tony Labbozzetta during an interview he granted me in 1991. Labbozzetta was recalling a television appearance he had made in 1989 in his then capacity as a commissioner on the Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) board. This appearance, on a morning news/chat show, followed a 'crowd disturbance' at a weekend National Soccer League (NSL) fixture that had received considerable coverage on commercial television. Before Mr. Labbozzetta was afforded opportunity to comment on the incident, his interview was prefaced by film footage of a physical confrontation between rival fans with a voiceover noting the affiliation of the combatants with particular ethnic communities. Recalling the episode with exasperation, Mr. Labbozzetta saw it as typical of commercial television's treatment of Australian soccer. The point of his anecdote was that all commercial television coverage of crowd misbehaviour at soccer matches is reducible to the aphoristic assumption that 'the wogs are at it again'.

The same phrase was to be reheard, some time later, from a different quarter, but with similar contextual relevance. Following a scuffle between Sydney United and Sydney Olympic fans at half-time during a match in February 1994, a Sydney United supporter commented, 'wait for tomorrow's *Daily Telegraph* . . . they'll be saying the wogs are at it again'. That a tabloid newspaper was named at this instant merely indicates that the 'tabloid' media, generally, are regarded as responsible for 'giving soccer a bad reputation'. That the same comment was made by two people closely, but so differently, associated with the sport, gives indication of the widespread feeling within the soccer community that an entrenched bias is at work in the media representation of soccer.

A further heartfelt comment from a letter contributor to the *Australian and British Soccer Weekly* (ABSW) (15/3/94, 7) elaborates the point:

So the mainstream news journalists have done it again! A minor scuffle at the CCSL match between South Melbourne and Melbourne Knights has had the mainstream media salivating at the chance to show soccer in a negative light. If people are looking for a reason why soccer is still in the Australian sporting backwaters, this is definitely one.

This paper focuses on the media creation of a public image for soccer. To the extent that there is a pervasive public image of soccer it is one of deviance. My own thorough, if unsystematic, probing of the question, 'why don't you go to the soccer?' has revealed an image of the Australian soccer stadium as an arena of contestation, not for rival football teams, but for warring ethnic groups, who use the terraces and playing field as a 'battleground' to settle 'long standing political grievances'.¹ I argue that the commercial media is largely responsible for this perception. Indeed, I further argue that the media treatment of soccer has constituted a form of institutional discrimination that serves to reinforce attitudes hostile to the broader acceptance of multiculturalism.

This suggests that the media is not a passive reproducer of social attitude, but, rather, is a producer or co-producer. A more general consideration of the media's role in the 'production of racism' is made with reference to the theoretical work of van Dijk (1988, 1991). How this might tie up with a media representation of soccer is discussed with reference to Stanley Cohen's (1980) model of a 'moral panic'. A modification of the 'moral panic' is developed to describe the process of deviance amplification in relation to Australian soccer.

A Sporting Chance

A major process through which the discriminatory treatment of soccer works is by dislocating soccer reportage from the sports desk to the news desk. The prevailing image of soccer as deviance is created not by the coverage of soccer as sport but by a perennial concentration on the sporadic crowd disorders that have occurred at NSL matches. In this way the NSL has proven 'newsworthy' but in so doing its credentials as a national sporting competition have been invalidated. The giving over of the soccer field to 'warring ethnics' is similarly accompanied by a surrender of sporting pretension in the public mind. The contrariness of soccer to Australian national character is not merely implied by media reportage but, at times, is clearly stated with reference to the 'un-Australian' behaviour of its followers. This will be seen in this paper by way of examining the content on 'news' reportage of crowd 'riots' which have occurred at NSL matches. The depiction of soccer followers as un-Australian constitutes a significant statement of racism because it at once establishes that Australian cultural customs are superior to those of other ethnicities and suggests that some members of non-English speaking ethnic groups are unable to claim the goodness of life that Australian society can offer, because they refuse to relinquish the inferior customs of their ethnic backgrounds.

In giving this picture of Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds, the media both produce and reproduce an image for audience consumption. While the media is creating an image anew with each textual presentation, it necessarily builds on a framework already constructed (cf. Hall 1980: 130). For this reason van Dijk (1988: 156) has referred to the 'semi-autonomous role' of the media in the 'production of racism'. By this van Dijk

(1991: x) means that the media continues to work within an 'interpretative framework' of its own prior creation. While the 'interpretative framework' relates to 'underlying cognitive structures . . . and models in memory' it remains a 'primary definer' of the framework it continually augments. For van Dijk, the media role in the formation of ethnocentrism and a correspondent racism cannot be understated. As he argues, 'the ideologically framed system of ethnic prejudices . . . must be learned . . . it is communicated by talk and text . . . [rather than] simply . . . imitated from discriminatory actions by other ingroup members' (van Dijk, 1988: 153).

Van Dijk (1988) identifies three distinct, yet related, prejudicial views that make up an ethnocentric 'interpretative framework'. One or more of these views, which might be named the authoritarian view, the repressive view, or the exclusivist view, are likely to receive simultaneous expression in news reportage on 'ethnic' groups. Van Dijk (1988: 134) identifies an authoritarian view in the media that holds that ethnic groups with grievances related to a former homeland should 'either conform or be expelled'. To the extent that such groups, or individuals within groups, exist, they are regarded as a public menace. This view rests on a notion of cultural homogeneity and denies the social reality of cultural diversity. It connects with a repressive view that assumes the existence of a cultural consensus. From here, despite facile semblances of a pluralistic outlook, the media actually promotes an intolerance towards views and behaviours contravening of the artificial consensus it fosters (van Dijk, 1988: 134). From the exclusionary view, the 'ethnic' person is presented as other. This has much to do with journalists producing news from an 'ingroup' perspective identifying with the viewer or reader as 'us' while depicting the ethnic subject as 'them' (van Dijk, 1988: 156). This assigned status carries the usual negative connotations associated with otherness.

To explain how these views work in news representations of ethnic groups van Dijk employs a methodology that combines a structural analysis of media text with a contextual analysis of the social circumstance on which the text is imposed. While his method bears the hallmarks of a discourse analytical approach, he refers to his work as an 'informal discourse analysis' that avoids the more 'technical aspects of discourse analysis' (Van Dijk 1991: 10). Van Dijk's methodological approach is viewed favourably by a recent Australian project on racism and the media (Jakubowicz, Goodall, Martin, Mitchell, Randall, & Senevirante, 1994: 42-44). According to the authors of the report:

structural analysis offers an account of both the surface and underlying levels of meaning . . . [while] contextual analysis requires an understanding of the political and social relationships, as part of an exploration of how specific readers/consumers may interpret, decode, and remember the communication (Jakubowicz et al., 1994: 44).

This local report goes beyond the scope of van Dijk's work by extending the analysis of racist presentation to areas of media other than news such as television comedy and drama. It does not, though, deal with the area of sport. It remains important that this work is taken up elsewhere because, as Jim McKay (1991: 109-13) has indicated, there is a considerable 'articulation' of 'eurocentric racism' within reportage on Australian sport. In relation to Australian soccer we would go further to speak of a reportage that is 'anglocentric'. The unifying theme in the reportage of crowd violence at Australian soccer matches is the deviance of 'ethnicity'. Although ethnicity will not always be specifically referred to in each stage of the reportage process it remains the underlying cause to which the problem of soccer violence can be attributed. Furthermore, the 'interpretative framework' will provide that the media consumer is able to recognise the culprit from past reportage on soccer violence even if no reference at all is made to ethnic background.

A Footballing Folk Devil

The emphasis here on process and sequence of deviance reportage is reminiscent of Cohen's (1980) work on moral panics in relation to British youth sub-cultures. While the relevance of the 'moral panic' concept clearly holds for a discussion of football hooliganism in Britain it requires some modification to have Antipodean applicability. Whereas the mod and rocker provided an identifiable 'folk devil' in Cohen's original formulation of the 'moral panic', no such readily recognisable figure exists in relation to Australian soccer violence. In the football context, the British 'football hooligan', so labelled in the 1970s, became a significant 'folk devil' around which a 'moral panic' was constructed. As with the mod and rocker, much was made of the appearance of the 'football hooligan' in Britain (Giulianotti, 1994: 12-14). Typically the football hooligan would be related to the skinhead sub-culture to provide an image of deviance with which the public could readily identify (Clarke, 1973). Cropped hair-cuts, braces and boots, and bomber jackets are the stylised characteristics around which the image is formed.

In the Australian context there has been no personification of this kind, but that does not mean that a 'moral panic' has not been constructed. Rather than looking for folk devils and, in turn, individualising the 'problem', the emphasis has remained at a more general level creating a moral panic about the game of soccer itself rather than a folk devil within. To the extent that there is a folk devil it would be the 'warring ethnics' who are responsible for sporadic crowd disturbances at Australian soccer matches. However, this amorphous category has not been personified by the media or other moral entrepreneurs. No identity has been given to the Australian soccer hooligan. The result of the reportage has been quite different from the British experience. While we are left with a view of the soccer stadia as a place of combat and, therefore, an arena one would enter at considerable personal risk, it remains rather unclear as

to who actually poses the threat of violence. This type of image has perhaps affected NSL attendance rates more adversely than soccer attendance in Britain. In the latter setting we know who the folk devil is, what he looks like, and where he is likely to be located within the stadia. In short, the 'genuine' soccer fan in Britain can take precaution to avoid the hooligan menace. Prior to the most recent changes seating could be found, albeit at a higher cost, which would reasonably assure the spectator of protection from violence. No such assurance can be given on the Australian scene. As the folk devil remains unidentified he cannot be located within the stadia. Every 'ethnic' face in the crowd is a potential threat to personal safety. The willingness of the commercial media to report soccer 'riots' with virtually no attendant analysis has done a disservice to the sport in this country which goes beyond the media impact in Britain. By not being able to identify the folk devil the moral panic lacks focus and the sport, generally, becomes the subject of criticism. The mythologies that attend the moral panic are expressed about the game itself rather than about a folk devil.

Another important modification to note is that the 'moral panic' does not go through a developmental sequence as in Cohen's depiction of the mods and rockers. In Cohen's example the 'moral panic' commences with the media exaggeration that greets the emergent 'folk devil' and ends with the 'co-optation' of the same into mainstream culture. In essence, the folk devil loses deviant appeal and the media inspired moral panic subsides. While a similar type of moral panic might arise in response to the emergence of a comparable folk devil, as has occurred with subsequent sub-cultural developments such as punk, the moral panic is created anew. Conversely, the moral panic that accompanies Australian soccer is not of a transient kind. The media reaction to the crowd disturbance at Middle Park, Melbourne, in March 1994 is another episode in the moral panic that followed 'crowd violence' at NSL matches in the mid-1980s. This is to suggest that, rather than subsiding, the Australian soccer 'moral panic' lies dormant, being conveniently recalled when a crowd disturbance comes under the media spotlight. Jon Stratton's (1992) adaptation of the moral panic notion in his socio-historical study of the bodge and widgie youth sub-culture in Australia is insightful here. Stratton (1992: 24) argues that the construction of a bodge and widgie 'folk devil', 'enabled an elision to occur whereby more general working class practices could be separated from their context and criticised as the practices of a small and amorphous section of young people'. Although it has been argued here that a folk devil cannot be identified, Stratton's (1992) observation has relevance to the soccer moral panic. The view of soccer field as battlefield, which is central to the soccer moral panic, involves a decontextualisation of ethnic cultural practices through an association with deviant activity. That this deviant activity is not seen as aberrant but as ongoing and symptomatic of problems within ethnic communities is of particular concern. While, ostensibly at least, it is a few

'ethnic hotheads' rather than 'ethnic' communities at large that are blamed for socially disruptive behaviour, the broader association is made. Stratton (1992: 24) argues that the moral panic of which he writes serves to 'reproduce middle-class hegemony' by imagining a homogeneous society under threat from a group of deviants. The soccer moral panic functions similarly. However, whereas the moral panic discussed by Stratton (1992: 24) 'moralise[s] the working class' the soccer moral panic casts its moralistic gaze on non-English speaking communities living in the Australian metropolis.

A Universal Problem

A basic content analysis procedure was developed during my case study of media reportage of the soccer 'riot' at Pratten Park, Ashfield (Sydney) on 7 July 1985 (Hughson, 1996). The Pratten Park 'riot' can be described as the most notorious of the crowd disturbances that have occurred at NSL matches. Press coverage and editorialising were widespread, as was television reportage. Indeed, film footage of the Pratten Park 'riot' has at times been dredged up to preface subsequent reportage of 'crowd disturbances' at NSL matches (Hughson & Butler, 1993). If we can speak of an 'interpretative framework' existing in relation to media representations of soccer 'riots' then it could reasonably be assumed that images of events at Pratten Park on 7 July 1985 were built into that framework. It is unlikely that any regular viewer of television news in Sydney over the last ten years has not been exposed to the reportage.² The reportage of the Middle Park 'riot', which occurred in March 1994, differed from that of the Pratten Park 'riot' because it provided an opportunity for soccer 'riot' to be conflated with 'ethnic tensions' that were occurring simultaneously in various Australian cities between particular ethnic communities that could be associated with the soccer match. The methods for studying the two examples of media reportage, however, are similar. Both involved a content analysis of television and press reportage. Reports for each medium have been broken down into what has been called scenes in relation to television and segments in relation to newspaper reports. An intention here is to reveal the themes used in reportage. Interestingly, a pattern of reportage has developed over time particularly in relation to television. While the study of the Pratten Park 'riot' focussed on newspaper reportage and editorialising, coverage of the Middle Park 'riot' is focussed on television reportage with a less detailed analysis of press reportage.

What's This Got To Do With Australia?

As seen in the work of Philip Mosely (1994), the particular 'ethnic rivalry' that has most often resulted in crowd confrontations is that between the Serbians and the Croatians, however, the promotion of the Sydney and Melbourne Croatian teams into the national league meant the end of this site for 'ethnic' conflict at top level soccer competition. The more recent site for 'ethnic'

conflict has been at matches involving supporters of Greek and Macedonian background. Accordingly, a number of crowd disorders were reported in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Receiving scrutiny were incidents at matches between Sydney Olympic and Preston Macedonia at St George Stadium Sydney, 19 February 1989; Sydney Olympic and Preston Macedonia also at the St George Stadium, 8 April 1990; and Heidelberg Alexandria and Preston Macedonia at the Connor Reserve, Melbourne, 23 February 1992. Prior to the relegation of the Melbourne club Preston from the NSL at the commencement of the 1993 season, the only obvious site of potential conflict based on traditional ethnic rivalry was between that team and those teams receiving following from the Greek communities in Sydney and Melbourne. It would not be unreasonable to assume that conflicts that did occur at these matches were inspired by political disputation relating to use of the name Macedonia.

Press coverage of these crowd disturbances make clear reference to the ethnicities of supporters involved. One report in the *Daily Telegraph* (21/2/89: 7) refers to a 'riot' occurring at a match between a Sydney Greek soccer team and a visiting Macedonian team from Melbourne. Indeed, it is not until halfway through the article that reference is made to the actual team names. The same paper's report on the crowd disturbance at the corresponding match in the following year refers to 'century old rivalry between Macedonians and Greeks over land rights as the cause of the trouble' (*Daily Telegraph*, 9/4/90: 5). Similarly, the commercial television coverage of the 1990 'riot' at St. George Stadium refers to a 'battle between Greeks and Macedonians in another bloodletting over an age old battle'. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (24/2/92: 8) report describes the 'riot' at Connor Reserve as occasioning 'renewed political tension between Greeks and Macedonians' and makes brief reference to the nature of the dispute over Macedonian independence. Editorials in the *Daily Telegraph* (21/2/89: 10; 9/4/90: 10) use the crowd disturbances at soccer as an opportunity for a broader criticism referring respectively to 'fanatical national rivalries . . . [which] have nothing to do with Australian society' and unwelcomed 'ancient ethnic grudges' in modern Australia. It is unlikely that such ethnocentric propaganda could be made without the vehicle for chauvinism that soccer 'riot' provides.

Pyromaniacs Out of the Box

A most timely crowd disturbance occurred at/after the match between the Melbourne Knights and South Melbourne at Middle Park on 6 March 1994. This incident coincided with other stories appearing in the media about raised tensions between the Greek and Macedonian communities following the decision taken by the Federal Government to recognise the independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Inevitably, this issue was conflated with events at Middle Park in both press and television reportage. A focus on reportage in the Sydney media is made here.³ A detailed content

analysis of television news reportage on 7 March 1994 was undertaken. All but one of the networks covered events at Middle Park. Two reports, those on Network Ten and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) are discussed in full. This provides a contrast of the reportage on commercial and publicly owned networks. The reportage on Channel Ten evening news ran for one minute and eighteen seconds and can be broken down into seven discrete scenes. Following the introduction from the newsreader, scene one, running for twenty seconds, shows elevated but closely focussed camera footage of the crowd. The section of the crowd filmed is tightly gathered on a terraced section of the stadium. Much jostling seems to be occurring until the crowd push forward with those at the front appearing to fall as they go out of picture. We then witness the brandishing of a Macedonian flag followed by the igniting of a flare behind the goal. Through this scene the voice over announced, 'the latest bout of ethnic unrest followed a fiery match between Croatian backed Melbourne Knights and Greek backed South Melbourne'. We are told that ten arrests have been made and that one man is being treated for concussion. We are also alerted to the involvement of prominent politicians in the surrounding debate with mention that 'Federal Ethnic Affairs Minister Mr Bolkus blames Victorian Premier Kennett for promoting conflict'.

Scene two running for nine seconds, shows Bolkus talking to the press. We hear him remark, 'the Premier has acted like a social pyromaniac and has made difficulties that shouldn't be there'. This is followed by scene three, running for twelve seconds, which focuses on Kennett. Footage is shown of Kennett addressing a rally held by the 'Greek community' the previous month. The voice over paraphrases Bolkus' suggestion that Kennett has irresponsibly aligned himself with the 'Greek community' since recognition was given to FYROM. Scene four (thirteen seconds) features a reporter speaking to camera announcing that 'tensions have spread Australia wide with organisers of a rally in Adelaide withdrawing invitations to Mr. Bolkus and Prime Minister Keating because they cannot ensure their safety'. Scene five (seven seconds) shows footage of churches that had reportedly been vandalised 'overnight'. According to the voiceover, 'two Greek orthodox churches were vandalised and racist slogans were sprayed across entrances'. Scene six (twelve seconds) returns to the soccer showing the throwing of objects and repeating the crowd push footage from scene one. The voiceover concludes, 'the Ethnic Affairs Commissioner is expected to set up talks between rival groups with Premier Kennett to be involved'. The final scene (five seconds) again features Bolkus speaking to the press. Presumably with reference to Kennett he remarks, 'put a lid on it, it's about time little Lucifer was put back in his box'.

The reportage on rival station Seven's morning news bulletin differed by not emphasising the developing political rivalry between Bolkus and Kennett. While a linkage was made to the 'Macedonia issue' and footage shown of vandalism to churches, more concentration was placed on events at the soccer.

The longest scene in this report, running for 32 seconds, shows the police interaction with the crowd during the disturbance. Inter alia, the apparent arrests of three men are shown with the voiceover reporting, 'a big contingent of police moved in, making ten arrests on charges of resisting arrest, obstructing police and riotous behaviour'. The linkage of supporters to the Greek and Croatian communities was stated while elsewhere in the report 'some fans' were accused of 'chanting pro-Serbian slogans at Macedonian supporters' (the chant of S-E-R-B-I-A could actually be heard at one point in the footage of crowd confrontations).

The report on ABC television prime evening news ran for a duration of one minute and fifty six seconds and can be divided into eight discrete scenes. Scene one following the news desk introduction runs for fifteen seconds and shows footage of the crowd confrontation. After a glimpse of the match, a ground level camera shot (presumably from a mobile camera) shows some members of the crowd jostling in the carpark and others waving a Macedonian flag while chanting M-A-C-E-D-O-N-I-A. The voice over reports that, 'while the match was relatively peaceful, trouble came when supporters mingled as they left the ground and supporters raised Serbian and Macedonian flags'. Scene two (eleven seconds) shows footage of the police in action, apparently arresting one man and stopping another from bringing a flag into the ground. The voice over continues: 'racial taunts were chanted, bricks and bottles thrown. Ten people were arrested and police are now considering enforcing the no flags at match rule.' Scene three (five seconds) shows the Victorian Deputy Commissioner of Police speaking from what would appear to be a media room at the headquarters building. He reiterates the need to ban flags from NSL grounds 'if they are provocative'. Scene four (fourteen seconds) shows footage of buildings which have been fire bombed and a Greek church in Canberra which had (overnight) been daubed with paint. The voiceover reports, 'in the past two weeks churches and meeting places on both sides of the Macedonian conflict have been the subject of arson attacks'. Scene five (eighteen seconds) shows similar footage of Bolkus and Kennett to that shown on Channel Ten. The voiceover announces that, 'Mr. Bolkus had harsh words for Mr. Kennett' before giving over to direct remarks from Bolkus. A final piece of live footage shows Kennett embarking a car while remarking on Bolkus, 'he's obviously not well'. Scene six (thirteen seconds) features a reporter attempting to unite the political response by declaring 'whatever their differences leaders on both sides today expressed similar views'. This is explained by Kennett's and Bolkus' mutual condemnation of violence and an appeal for calm.

The final two scenes feature responses from 'ethnic leaders' at the community and the state level. Scene seven (seventeen seconds) features an interview with a representative of the 'Macedonian community' in Melbourne who claims that there 'might be other groups who are hijacking and using the debate for whatever their motives may be'. This is followed by an interview

with the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commissioner warning against 'people who are anti-multicultural us[ing] this as evidence to show that there should not be any further immigration'. A voiceover advises that the Commissioner is planning to meet with community leaders during the week.

The report featured in the primetime news on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) (a publicly owned network with a special interest in multicultural issues) was similar in form and content to that on the ABC. The key difference was that SBS featured comments by both an executive of the ASF and the president of the South Melbourne club distancing soccer and soccer clubs from the violence at the match. According to Mr. Holmes of the ASF, the violence was to be blamed on 'fringe groups unconnected to the game'. Another point of difference to note is that the SBS report featured remarks from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, which go beyond those shown on the ABC coverage. Here, Mr. Falconer is heard to remark, 'if it is two communities that are getting very excited about the issues, we will be seeking their assistance to down play the issues and try to keep a lid on things'.

Of the three major daily papers on circulation in Sydney only the tabloid *Daily Telegraph Mirror* featured a story on the Middle Park crowd disturbance as news on Monday, 7 March 1994. The broadsheets, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian* did, however, refer to 'crowd violence' and 'trouble in derby' at the head of round ups of weekend NSL matches in their respective sports sections. The *Australian* also included a thirteen word piece headed 'soccer arrests' on page five under a news in brief column as the last of four items. The *Daily Telegraph* news report appeared on page fifteen under the heading 'Police injured in soccer violence'. This is the main story and totals around five hundred words. It is accompanied by a fifteen by nine centimetre photograph of an 'injured man' being cradled by his 'son'. A smaller photograph shows the same man being dragged to safety by a police officer.

Segment one of the report describes the 'violence' between 'Croatian and Greek fans' who threw objects such as bottles and bricks at each other after the match. 'About one hundred spectators' were reportedly involved in such activities. Segment two refers to the injury of two policemen and two spectators one of whom was taken to hospital. The report differs from television reportage hereby declaring that police made twelve arrests rather than ten. Segment three attempts to locate the 'violence' in relation to ethnic allegiances. It is advised that 'Greek fans held up Serbian flags and Croatian spectators displayed the Republic of Macedonia national flag'. From here the ethnic affiliations of the respective clubs are accurately stated. Segment four makes an explicit conflation of the 'soccer violence' with other events. It is asserted that 'the racial tension between the Greeks and the Croatians follows recent violence between the Greeks and Yugoslav Macedonians in which fires were lit and bombs planted'. Segment five refers to impending talks between 'community leaders' and Premier Kennett in an attempt to 'resolve escalating tensions'.

Segment five describes the bombing of a cafe in a Melbourne western suburb, while segment six relates 'a series of violent attacks' to the Federal Government's decision to recognise FYROM. Segment seven mentions the objection of 'Greek Australians' to the decision and links Kennett to this view. The concluding segment eight returns to the soccer, reporting that some fans 'threatened to kill each other'. The final word is left to a police spokesman who advised that 'further arrests could be made' pending the viewing of the video.

Whereas the crowd disturbance at Pratten Park in 1985 stood in its own right as a media story, the events at Middle Park are reported as 'the latest bout of ethnic unrest'. The conflation of soccer with ethnic civil disobedience is made complete here. As such, the report on what occurred at Middle Park is merely supplementary to a current media depiction of hostilities between the Macedonian and Greek communities in Australian cities. However, the juxtaposition of bottle throwing 'ethnics' at a soccer match with bomb throwing 'ethnics' in a Melbourne suburb leaves the public perception of soccer ground as battleground firmly in place. The publicly owned television stations were just as responsible for the purveyance of this image as the commercial stations. While there was some concentration by the ABC and SBS networks on attempts by ethnic communities and non-coercive arms of the state bureaucracy to quell the disorder, this did little to dispel the riotous image of soccer matches, which the overall reports aroused. The inclusion of an appeal by the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commissioner against an 'anti-multicultural' backlash loses both focus and impact in the context of the ABC report. Whether the Commissioner is even making reference to the events at Middle Park is left entirely unclear, and the 'scenes' which precede that in which she features present an image of ethnic groups hardly conducive to the encouragement of a 'multicultural' spirit.

Putting Lucifer Back in the Box

Although the media reportage of crowd conflict at Middle Park was linked to a particular hostility between particular ethnic communities it is arguable that the signification in terms of 'soccer violence' was of a more general image of 'warring ethnics'. This is to suggest that a reading of both television and newspaper texts, occurring within the established 'interpretative framework' will conclude that the conflict at Middle Park is but another example of the familiar soccer riot. Indeed, the reference to the 'latest bout of ethnic unrest' takes on an interesting ambiguity in its reportage context. While just criticism might be made of the media's conflation of stories it would, however, be unfair to suggest that no attempt was made to identify the particular ethnic groups primarily involved in soccer support at Middle Park, that is Melbourne Knights (Croatian), South Melbourne (Greek). But confusion arises in the attempted linkage to other 'ethnic unrest'. One television report refers to 'some fans' chanting 'pro-Serbian slogans at Macedonian supporters'. Who, it might be

asked, were these 'fans' (in terms of their ethnic background) and where do the 'Macedonian supporters' fit into the soccer support configuration given the affiliations of the teams engaged in play? The clearest account in this regard appears in the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* report. As seen, 'Greek fans' are blamed for waving 'Serbian flags' and 'Croatian supporters' for displaying a FYROM national flag. This particular 'racial tension' is seen to follow other exchanges between Greeks and Macedonians. However, while providing an identification of those involved in conflict at Middle Park, little light is shed on motivations or secondary alliances. Do the 'Greek fans' who follow South Melbourne hold sympathies for Serbian nationalism? Similarly, do the 'Croatian supporters' who follow the Melbourne Knights hold fort with Macedonian nationalists? Alternatively, were the 'Greek fans' of South Melbourne merely waving a Serbian flag to goad the fans of the Melbourne Knights? The reverse question could apply to the 'Croatian supporters' of the Melbourne Knights in relation to their displaying a Macedonian flag.

Even these conclusions overlook the further possibility that the Serbian flags were waved by people of Serbian background interested in confronting the 'Croatian supporters' of the Melbourne Knights and/or the FYROM flag was displayed by people of Macedonian background wanting to confront the 'Greek fans' of South Melbourne. This latter possibility would sit most comfortably with those who would argue that the soccer was merely used as a stage for political protest. Indeed, Holme's 'fringe groups' would find their identity in this conclusion.

Ultimately, the complexities that see the intersection of team and ethnic rivalries are too deep for media analysis given the format of news bulletins. Without such analysis, though, a facile and uncomplicated presentation is offered to the viewer and reader which rekindles the moral panic discussed earlier in relation to Australian soccer. Whether the flag wavers and bottle throwers are Croatian, Greek or Macedonian becomes relatively unimportant because the perceived deviant is once again the anonymous ethnic 'hot head' who attends the soccer. However, the conflated reportage in this case sees the riotous behaviour extend beyond Middle Park. The rioting ethnic at the soccer game is at once responsible for the cancellation of invitations to the Prime Minister and his Minister for Immigration to an ethnic gathering in Adelaide. The soccer riot becomes an index of possibility for civil unrest. If violence can occur at the soccer it can surely occur at an ethnic rally to the extent of putting the Prime Minister's safety at risk.⁴

It has been argued that the Australian nation-state is alive and well at the ideological level. Jakubowicz et al.'s (1994: 32) study on the Australian media postulates the existence of an 'Australian community' bound by what Balibar refers to as a 'fictive ethnicity'. A fictive ethnic identity of this kind is supported by media representations of other ethnic identities that are excluded from the prescribed community. While the media actually tells stories about

'ethnicities' – in one case here 'Greeks' and 'Macedonians' – the emphasis seems to be always on the 'ethnic' represented in a vaguer collective sense as they who cannot conform to the accepted cultural practice of the imagined nation. The applicability of van Dijk's theoretical model would not, then, appear fanciful. From the evidence presented there is a media promotion of prejudicial views of ethnicity, which, according to van Dijk, are racist. This is best seen in the implicit (sometimes explicit) depiction of an 'Australian race' in contrast to those of another race who (despite the fact that they might be Australian citizens) engage in forms of social practice deemed un-Australian.

The media reportage of soccer riots has provided a stark image of 'ethnicity' against which 'Australianness' might be celebrated. One or more of van Dijk's three 'views' are promoted in the process. An authoritarian view was clearly adopted in relation to the editorialising on the Pratten Park 'riot' with demands for stringent social control measures to be taken against the 'rioters'. Van Dijk's comment on 'expulsion' is interesting in the light of the call for 'kick the thugs' out. In relation to Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds this surely carries sinister connotations. A repressive view was exhibited in the reportage of the crowd violence at Middle Park. This was enabled by the conflation in the reportage of events at the soccer with other events of 'ethnic unrest'. The impression given was that actions witnessed in the report were illegitimate and beyond the pale of tolerance. By extension the conducting of protests by ethnic groups with regard to issues concerning former homeland are called into question. Overwhelmingly, the reportage of soccer 'riots' constructs an image of 'ethnic' person as other. As Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 35) put it, 'the boundary of difference, of being named "Other"' is always there for the person assuming or given immigrant identity. At times this will be carried in the media by 'silences and absences', at others by 'cruder statements and narratives'. The media account of soccer 'riots' is perhaps the crudest narrative of all in this regard. In terms of van Dijk's model this results in an exclusionary view that precludes 'ethnic' soccer supporter from claim to Australian cultural identity.

I argued earlier that Cohen's notion of 'moral panic' has application to the media construction of the Australian soccer 'riot', albeit in a modified way. The summary of the reportage of 'crowd violence' at Middle Park supports the proposed application of the model. In the broadest terms, this is to suggest, firstly, that the media reportage of the sporadic crowd disturbances which have occurred at NSL matches have been constructed within an established frame of news making which gives effect to an 'interpretative framework' (in the sense discussed by van Dijk) through which the media consumer can make sense of the message. Secondly, and indicating the need to depart from Cohen's model, the moral panic is constructed not around a recognisable folk devil but the 'ethnic other' who inhabits the Australian soccer stadium. Despite the opportunity at times afforded the media by supporters of particular ethnic

backgrounds to provide a focus on ethnic related 'hostilities' such as those between the Macedonian and Greek communities, the soccer moral panic seems to remain broad in scope. The 'riots' are caused primarily by the 'hot-headed' attitudes of the 'ethnic' with grudges between the Greek and Macedonian Australians providing example rather than exemplar. Attendantly, an impression is given that the threat remains even if a particular dispute between groups such as the Greeks and Macedonians was eased. One editorial (*Daily Telegraph* 9/4/90: 10) claimed that 'soccer riots have become a regular feature on the sporting calendar' and that 'crowd violence has a vicious habit of feeding on itself. This would indicate the persistence of a general menace which must be guarded against at all times.

A particular function of the soccer moral panic is to create an air of uncertainty and unease about the threat posed by 'ethnic hot-heads' to the social order. The soccer hill or terrace becomes a virtual 'trouble spot' like others around the world featured on any given television news program showing police or militia struggling to contain hostile crowds. The typical reference to 'police [being] hopelessly outnumbered' in the reportage of Australian soccer 'riots' can be understood in this context. Through this blurring of images a clear picture of the soccer 'rioter' cannot be gained. The 'ethnic' face in the soccer crowd is ultimately indistinguishable from that of a political recalcitrant in some other part of the world.

Notes

1. This is a question I have asked people, who indicate a general interest in sport but who do not attend NSL fixtures, in a number of social contexts over the last five years. Those who declared an interest in soccer sometimes criticised the playing standard in the NSL but most often reference would also be made to a concern about crowd behaviour. Those who declared an interest in sport but no interest in soccer were also likely to mention that a concern over crowd violence would preclude their attendance anyway. An 'awareness' of soccer violence has also been expressed in numerous conversations with people who might not have an interest in sport at all. Overwhelmingly, crowd violence was seen to be motivated by grievances between rival ethnic groups. Statements of this kind, however, were rarely supported with specific reference to the particular ethnic groups that might be involved.
2. During my informal research, many references were made to images that clearly resemble specific aspects of media footage of the 'Pratten Park' riot.
3. This choice was dictated by my residential location at the time of the research. The focus throughout the paper, then, is on Sydney media outlets. This includes the national daily newspaper the *Australian*.
4. Despite highlighting the trading of insults between the prominent political figures, Bolkus and Kennett, there is evidence in some reports to place them above the dispute by emphasising their mutual concern for an abatement of the conflict.

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