

What's the Crowd Got to Do with It?

On Fandom and Antifascist Action at Eis Hockey Club Dynamo Berlin

Max Jack



Heading to a series of counterdemonstrations in east Berlin against the radical right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), I meet Matze at the train station. We are among several hundred antifascist counterprotesters following members of the NPD around the city. The NPD has contested the official borders of Germany and the legitimacy of the EU, claiming it to be a reanimation of the Soviet Union. In neighborhoods like Weißensee, outside the center of Berlin, the NPD displays banners of cartoonish and fear-inducing graphics villainizing Muslims. In sharp ideological opposition, antifa is a communo-anarchist philosophy of political intervention marked by collective action aimed at claiming public space as a means of removing right-wing extremism from the public sphere.¹ Whenever a right-wing

1. Originating in the 1920s in opposition to fascism and spreading across Europe, antifa has developed into a movement influenced by Marxist philosophy and ideologically opposed to the neoliberal state. Antifa recently gained

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Figure 2. The ultras lighting off pyrotechnics on the Oberbaum Bridge outside the Mercedes Benz Arena before a playoff game. Berlin, 2016. (Photo by Jay Smith)

political rally or protest is held in Berlin nowadays, protesters mobilize and organize counterdemonstrations.

At our first stop in Weißensee, we join Jay, Ecki, Mäx, and Marco.² The atmosphere at the counterprotest oscillates between carnivalesque revelry and anxious tension. On the one hand the group of protesters welcomes newcomers and those militantly opposed to the NPD. The crowd around us is primarily young, ranging

from teenagers to young adults. Speckled among the crowd are “Kein Mensch Ist Illegal” (No One is Illegal) and “Refugees Welcome” T-shirts. The leaders of the demonstration have rented a flatbed truck, rigged up a sound system, and are blaring antifascist punk rock. Unable to hear anything other than our own music and impassioned speeches calling out racism and xenophobia, the counterprotesters drown out the chants of the NPD across the square. Despite several skirmishes throughout the day with police and politically conservative residents, we sit around in the heat, drink cheap beer, and chat. Many members of the Black Corner fan group first met hanging out at protests and then began attending Eis Hockey Club Dynamo games.

In the arena at EHC Dynamo, the Black Corner Ultras saw their job as cultivating crowd action to influence the outcome of the game. Attending all matches home and away, “ultras” are the hardcore fans of their respective teams. They work to keep the *Stimmung* (atmosphere) high for the entirety of the game through their “participatory performance” (Turino 2008)—singing, clapping, and lighting (illegal) flares in and around the arena. Championing active attendance and crowd participation rather than TV spectatorship and merchandise consumption, “ultra” has been characterized as a transnational social movement against the commercialization of professional sports (Gabler 2010). In the arena, ultras are seen as culture bearers, an “affinity group” with the ability to boost the *Stimmung* (Cooley 2014; Slobin 1993). Ultra and antifa are not mutually exclusive ideologies. The lifestyle of members of the Black Corner Ultras, besides attendance at all matches,

Figure 1. (previous page) Members of Black Corner during a game at the Mercedes Benz Arena. Berlin, 2018. (Photo by Sören Kohlhuber)

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media attention in the US for confronting right-wing extremists, resulting in the scapegoating of antifascists as “thugs” by the far-right.

2. All quotes from Black Corner members are from my fieldwork, 2015 to 2017. Based on the degree to which my interlocutors wished to reveal their identities, some pseudonyms have been created while some first names have been left unaltered. All participants wanted their last names omitted.



Figure 3. Ultras spend hours designing and constructing large-scale crowd choreographies that are presented at the start of the game. Here Black Corner recreated the Oberbaum Bridge, the same bridge where they lit pyrotechnics outside the stadium. Berlin, 2016. (Photo by Jay Smith)

includes long drives to away games, and evenings painting banners and making flags. On days when there isn't a game, the ultras often participate in political protests or hang out at left-wing housing projects that link them to a broad network of antifascists across Berlin. At an epistemological intersection, protest and hockey are both sites of political intervention and potential social change where crowd action serves as a primary rhetorical device.

Over the course of two seasons in 2016 and 2017 I attended matches both home and away with Black Corner, spent many evenings at bars with the group, and helped make banners and flags that would be used at games—all aspects of fandom that make ultra an all-encompassing lifestyle extending outside the arena. Based on my participant observation, I recast hardcore sports fans—and ultras specifically—as politicized subjects who fashion, negotiate, accommodate, and contest their discrepant values and motivations by “learning to feel together” (Gill 2017) during their performances in the sports arena. Noting the prevalence of urban locales as sites of political critique (Abe 2018; Kunreuther 2014; Manabe 2015; Tausig 2019), increasingly scholars have focused on the affective dimensions of the public sphere, deconstructing liberal democratic idealizations of discourse as something that operates logically and with emotional restraint (Chakrabarty 2007; Kunreuther 2014, 2018; Weidman 2006). The crowd actions of ice hockey fans are geared not only toward imagining but aspiring to create the changes participants wish to see within their own social milieu (Cooper 2014). Underneath their overt goal of elevating the *Stimmung* to support the EHC Dynamo hockey players, Black Corner's investment in changing the crowd's collective aesthetic and the language of fan chants worked to fashion an antifascist style of performance in the arena. Rooted in memories of 20th-century authoritarianism, fascism had manifested for members of Black Corner in everyday acts of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, which were perceived as precursors to totalitarianism.

While the drive to elevate EHC Dynamo's play is at the heart of ultra as a global style of sports fandom ideologically opposed to TV viewership and merchandise consumption, Black Corner was



Figure 4. Black Corner at the old Wellblechpalast in the former East Berlin, 2015. (Photo by Jay Smith)

also reflexive about the politics of crowd action, grappling specifically with the ways the club was still affiliated in the German imaginary with East German authoritarianism and Nazism. In East Germany, Sport Club Dynamo was sponsored by the Stasi (secret police). After the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the club was supported by right-wing hooligan fans. While the right-wing presence has waned in the last decade, Germany's

authoritarian history continues to enflame public anxieties: hardcore Dynamo fans represent convergent memories of East German communism and right-wing extremism (Shoshan 2008:261). In dealing with such stigmas, a second ultra group, Fanatics Ost, attempted to circumvent these historical narratives in order to create a depoliticized and sanitized experience of EHC Dynamo and a communist East Berlin.

The club management, wanting to suppress the team's stigmatized political and historical affiliations, changed the team's name from EHC Dynamo Berlin to EHC Eisbären (polar bears) Berlin in 1993 after switching from a *Sportverein* (nonprofit sports club) to a *GmbH* (for-profit company). As a niche sport in Germany, the difference between competitive success and liquidation is razor thin for professional hockey teams, which is reflected in the league's adoption of the American franchise model of professional sports. These shifts have stylistically demarcated the German hockey experience from German football, which is not designed to procure as much of its revenue through matchday sponsorships and advertising. At EHC Dynamo, financial precarity required the club administration to promote a new team identity along with fiscal strategies that would attract sponsors and appeal to the broadest market possible. The team moved from its original arena built in 1963, the Wellblechpalast (The Corrugated Palace), to the larger-capacity Mercedes Benz Arena in the center of Berlin; they raised ticket prices, making consistent attendance for hardcore fans increasingly difficult. As more casual attendees with little interest in crowd participation filled up the expensive *Sitzplatz* (seated area) at what had become a mass spectacle that included a prematch light show, live commercials, mascots, and between-period entertainment, the hardcore fans that remained never stopped singing for Dynamo, holding onto the old team name as a source of pride and heritage. Opposition fans were eager to remind the former East Berlin team of the club's less praiseworthy history. Rather than work to erase the team's heritage, Black Corner, standing at the end of the arena, tested the limits of acceptable public behavior with their proud singing.

At hockey games, the radical changes made to the gameday experience and the subsequent fluctuation of the fan base opened up intense debate among the hardcore supporters over the most basic question: who are we? While Eduardo Herrera (2018) depicts the performative nature of sports fandom as granting degrees of anonymity enabling structurally violent forms of public expression, I take an analytic approach that foregrounds crowd action as a discursive process between participants—one that negotiates discrepant identities and ideologies through collective action. For Black Corner, current discourse regarding racist, sexist, and homophobic representation in performance brought to light the need to abstain from singing songs that they deemed offensive. In engaging with the East German/right-wing mythos, Black Corner performed a paradoxical scenario in which "Dynamo" became an acknowledged marker of both pride *and* shame. With this awareness in mind, the group utilized the visual and sonic aesthetics of crowd support to envision social and political alternatives. For Black Corner, performance was grounded in an effort to make supporting the club a political action. The ethos of street protest was appropriated and applied to crowd participation as an alternative vision of Dynamo that acknowledged the sport club's political

and historical stigma. With the goal of transforming the fan scene into a more politically and ethically minded community, crowd action was motivated by a need to rectify manifestations of Germany's past through a concerted engagement with Dynamo's specters. While many fans were publicly supportive of Black Corner's politicized approach to crowd support, others were ambivalent or outright against it. As a dynamic social and political actor, the crowd is not only defined by unity but is also shaped by participants' engagement with each other's discrepant ideologies.

The Aspirational Potentiality (and Constraints) of Crowd Support

While critical theorists have examined the ways in which assembly and public voicing reach out to broader publics and influence the momentum of political movements (Butler 2015; Hardt and Negri 2017; Kunreuther 2014, 2018; Tausig 2019), I am interested specifically in articulating the affective and experiential dynamics of crowd action that both drive and delimit its efficacy as a means of imagining and implementing alternative social and political formations in public space. My field research with ultras reveals that public space is a hotly contested ideological terrain even if at odds with the financial logic of the sporting event. The arena is a nexus where interpretations of community, history, and politics are negotiated and coordinated into collective forms of embodied expression. Taking into account prior theories of the crowd's contentious relationship with liberal democracy (Gaonkar 2014; Mazzarella 2010; Morris 2013), I suggest that an ethnographic examination of the crowd can help performance studies scholars better understand the affective relations that inform the crowd as a charismatic and anxiety-inducing presence. Exceeding its role as a rhetorical device or a visual object of representation (Chio 2019), the crowd is a dynamic social and political actor undergirded by an ethos of expansion—it reaches and incorporates broader publics by creating an environment in which emotional resonance can accommodate multiple interpretations of the performance itself. Operating on a continuum of specificity and opacity (Meintjes 2017), performative content can mediate discrepant values and motivations undergirding participation, establishing hegemonies of fan praxis over time that manifest in changes to the crowd's style of collective action. For Black Corner, this meant integrating an antifascist ethos into the arena in ways that would not alienate the broader fan base or inhibit their role as ultras who potentially alter the game results. While Rosalind Morris has argued pessimistically that the crowd functions as a “theatricalized muting” of individual voices (2013:104), I suggest that the political potential of the crowd is mediated by participation and refusal as affective types of discourse, tuning the crowd's expressive capacity.

For my interlocutors in the Dynamo Ultras, the *Stimmung* in the arena was a barometer of the crowd's capacity to act together, and further represented the fan scene's social cohesion in the face of rising ticket prices that threatened to eliminate them from the arena. In this context, I conceive of “*Stimmung*” as the experiential quality of a place and a metaphor for the *Verein* (the club) that the ultras cultivate to influence the game (Jack 2021). Participation within this affective milieu acts as a process of enculturation, enabling fans to learn to feel together, collectively respond to, and simultaneously influence the fluctuating dynamics of the game. Blurring the conceptual boundaries between emotion and affect (Anderson 2009), *Stimmung* in this context can be conceived as a malleable affective ecology—something that ultras work to modulate strategically in accordance with the politics of the moment in order to impact future events. As such, *Stimmung* hinges on the relation between actors (Clough 2007; Feld 1996; Massumi 2015) and the cogenerative event and milieu (Manning 2013:25). In an attempt to address the limits and the possibilities of the crowd's “vital potential” (Mazzarella 2010) and “material force” (Gaonkar 2014) within the capitalist logic of professional sports events and the changing styles of fandom, I write my ethnographic narratives with *Stimmung* in mind, showing ultras' capacity to collectively organize and express themselves in the arena.

In the Arena

Standing on a terrace behind the net that ultras call the *Fankurve* (fan curve), I am with Black Corner on one side while Fanatics Ost are at the other end. Wearing all-black “No Borders”

T-shirts in addition to other overtly political referents, the members of Black Corner stand out from the rest of the fans in the terrace. A group of around 20 men and 5 women in their 20s and 30s, the Black Corner ultras work as musicians, carpenters, kindergarten teachers, graduate students, firefighters, and grocery store clerks. Pop music ranging from techno to classic rock blares over the loudspeakers of the whole arena, which feels slightly off in relation to the tension hanging in the air among the hardcore fans. Eisbären, which used to be the league's dominant team, is playing Red Bull Munich, who has overtaken Eisbären's aging stars. These narratives around the competitive ins and outs of the team become especially charged when they intersect with issues facing the fan scene.

Vitriol among hockey fans for Red Bull Munich stems from the sponsoring company's global marketing strategy of buying professional sports teams and rebranding them with the colors and logo of the Red Bull company.³ A unifying point of hatred uniting Black Corner and Fanatics Ost, Red Bull Munich is a symbol for the confluence of capitalism and professional sport that the ultras perceive as a threat to their existence as hardcore fans. In addition to "power breaks" and loud advertisements that break up the continuity of the game, the rising ticket prices make consistent attendance and crowd organization increasingly difficult. As a symbol of these ongoing changes to the sporting event, Red Bull Munich is the target of abuse from fans across the league. During the game, a female member of the group slammed a banner she made against the glass as Red Bull Munich skated by: STOP THE BULLSHIT! For ultras, commerce poisoned the Stimmung.

As the Red Bull/Dynamo game starts, the two capos—leaders of chants—stand on beer crates in the first row facing the crowd. Burne, the vocal leader of Fanatics Ost, and Ecki, Black Corner's capo, look at each other, often mouthing a few words to coordinate the chants that everyone will sing together. The capos raise their fists and call upon everyone to do the same. As the players skate onto the ice, they pump their fists in tandem, shouting—*DYNAMO! DYNAMO! DYNAMO!* Ecki urges the crowd around us. "Come on, friends!" he shouts to the 2,000 fans standing around us in our block, waving his arms and leaning toward us so that we can see the whites of his eyes and the sweat on his brow. Normally quiet and reserved, Ecki's demeanor changes radically when he stands on the Berliner Pilsner crate to face the crowd. Elevated so that the rest of the fans can see him, his eyes are filled with fire and urgency.

Auf Dynamo
Zeige deine Gnade
Kämpfen bis Finale
Und lass uns wieder Deutschemeister sein!
(Go Dynamo!
Show your grace,
Fight until the end,
And let us be the German champions yet again!)

As both ultra groups sing together, the song progresses and merges seamlessly into the next. Sweat begins to creep down my back. My legs burn as we jump. Repetition forges an affective groove and the intensity slowly builds as the song continues with no determinable end. Songs in the Fankurve focus on Dynamo and rarely acknowledge their opponents, save for one chant that the fans sing at most games:

Alles außer Eisbären sind Scheiße!
(Everyone except for Eisbären is shit!)

3. Red Bull also purchased and rebranded a number of soccer teams, including Red Bull Salzburg in 2005 (Austria), RB Leipzig in 2009 (Germany), Red Bull Ghana in 2008, and Red Bull New York in 2006 (United States).

Tuning crowd action to respond to the ongoing events on the ice, Ecki looks over his shoulder at the players as the game extends into the third period. When the team is losing and the clock is winding down, he and Burne almost always reach for the same song—its melody is simple and loops indefinitely, its mantra-like repetition creating a state of heightened energy. Setting the rhythm for the chants, Matze plays a bass drum in the front row, which reverberates in my ears and chest cavity to the point of discomfort as the bodies around me exert themselves. But it's not enough for the capos. Ecki and Burne step down off their perches and begin walking toward the edges of the Fankurve where fans are chatting with one another instead of singing. "Come on, people!" he shouts, screaming into the crowd and throwing his arms into the air. "There's only three minutes left!" Ecki's face reveals his annoyance. In the arena, there is a distinction between those who are there to *watch* and those who are there to *support* the team. "I don't see much from the game because I'm supporting," said Thom about his frame of mind in the arena. "Some people just want to watch the game, but you're not only there to watch the game. You're there for the *Stimmung*, to keep it high."

Armed with six-foot flags that would ideally wave throughout the game, the ultras must limit their use to breaks in play so the fans 20 rows behind won't complain. The increasing numbers of part-time spectators who only come to a few games a year, rising ticket prices, expensive food, and between-period entertainment at the Mercedes Benz Arena have made hockey games a leisure event that relies less on loyal fans and more on occasional consumers, in line with the US American franchise model, which dedicated supporters feel hampers the intimacy of the event. The ultras' crowd action is a performative attempt at salvaging what they see as "traditional" spectator-based fandom. The ultras are fully aware that the problem of commercialization in sport is bigger than teams like Red Bull Munich—it also changes who comes to Eisbären games and what fandom is. The consumption of merchandise, televised spectatorship, and the commoditization of culture has created a tension between the most involved supporters in the Fankurve and the casual fans that the ultras called "eventies" (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001; Cho et al. 2012; Cho 2013; Giulianotti 2002; Kalman-Lamb 2018; Kennedy and Kennedy 2016; Wheaton 2004, 2013).

Though ultras conceive of *Stimmung* as a way of supporting the team, the sporting crowd can also be anxiety-inducing for unenculturated onlookers because it operates on a different logic of cooperation, one based on relationality and emotive feedback rather than an interiorized version of self (Taylor 1989). The ultras' goal to harness affect and modulate mood marks a radical deviation from normative ideals of discourse in public spaces. In contrast to the rational-critical discourse idealized as an essential component of liberal democracy (Warner 2002), mass affect and the rhetorical capabilities of the crowd allude to a type of public behavior that evokes both fascination and fear in the German cultural imaginary. Histories of East Germany and Nazi Germany amplify the state and the public's fear of the crowd as an illiberal entity that contributes to the dissolution of individual subjectivity and agency (Gaonkar 2014). In "Education After Auschwitz" ([1966] 1998), Theodor Adorno points specifically toward sports fans as a holdout of fascist behavior because they "epitomize the blind identification with the collective" and "are fashioned to manipulate masses [...] as Himmler, Höss, and Eichmann did" ([1966] 1998:5). These anxieties are relevant today in regard to the assumed traits of democratic citizenship. Dilip Gaonkar argues that the crowd threatens notions of individualism as the bedrock of liberal subjectivity (2014). The crowd is not only seen as illiberal, but also references Nazism through its mass coordination of affect and feeling.

In the German cultural imaginary, anxieties around the crowd and Dynamo's authoritarian past persist. Marco experienced that and felt the brunt of it: "When I had my first season ticket in the early '90s, there was a massive right-wing hooligan scene," said Marco. "Every second game I got punched in the face or a kick in the ass. The people would yell at me or spit at me."

"So they knew you were left-wing?" I asked.

"Yeah I couldn't really hide it much. I had a mohawk and looked like a little punk."

Even after Dynamo changed its name to Eisbären, it was difficult for another member of Black Corner, Dima, to tell friends that he went to ice hockey in Berlin. "Everyone knew, ok, it's a Nazi

club,” he said. “In my [antifa] friend circle, I told them otherwise, but for them initially it was a Nazi club and you [just] don’t go there.” Crowd support on one hand, and the fascist crowd on the other are refracted interpretations of participatory performance in the arena. Layers of stigma around crowds, hardcore sports fans, the authoritarian mythos of Dynamo, and the persisting whiteness of the fanbase make ice hockey games a space of historical reanimation. For the antifascist fans in the arena, hockey is a haunted space—and hauntings necessitate “a something-to-be-done” (Gordon 1997:xvi).

Fandom as Political Action

Such anxieties around crowds and hardcore sports fandom in Berlin and the European imaginary at large often overshadow the wide range of discourse around intersecting historical, social, and political issues that stadia as spaces enable its attendees to publicly address. Developing as a key component of the experiential commodity that is the professional sporting event (Kalman-Lamb 2018), fans play a key role in using the arena as an “auto-auditory apparatus” (Connor 2011:60) from which to address national and transnational audiences about issues that may relate to the aesthetics of athletic performance (Larham 2012) but also extend past sports (Brownell 2012; Besnier, Brownell, and Carter 2018). While the fringe subjectivities and lifestyles associated with hardcore fandom are often misrepresented by news media and caricatured in popular culture through the fetishization of violence (Armstrong 1998; Clarke 1973; Hall 1978; Poulton 2005), community work and political activism have also become common dimensions of fan praxis for ultras across Europe (Gabler 2010; Hodges 2019; Numerato 2018; Jack 2021). Fostering avenues for radical imagination, the performative aspects of hardcore sports fandom enculturate alternative identities and values in participants while serving as a collective means of expressing and communicating these alternatives (Jack 2019).

However, the varied alternative identities that hardcore fans have come to represent in the public sphere are often reworked by club administrators into a financial asset. Transnational movements like ultra and antifa are commercially exploited by professional sports teams like Eisbären (Kennedy and Kennedy 2016). By downplaying the anticapitalist and antipolice position of antifa, the antidiscriminatory element of the movement can be marketed to fit into the overarching values of fair play, intercultural exchange, and peace-making that broadly characterize the ethos of global sport (MacAloon [1981] 2008).⁴ In Berlin, the club administration saw Black Corner’s antifascist politics and punk aesthetic as ways to sell the team as gritty and “alternative,” appealing to a broader fanbase who, in consuming the team’s pay-per-view hockey games and merchandise, participate in the collective imaginary. Recognizing the value of identity-as-difference (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), Black Corner’s banners and choreographies against racism, sexism, and homophobia are stances that marketers at Eisbären Berlin have been more than willing to use to promote an edgy and politically progressive image of the team. In this way, Black Corner defied Eisbären’s traditional reputation as the “Nazi Club,” instead spotlighting its vehemently antifascist fans.

Contemporary political discourse in Europe and Germany also sheds a light on Black Corner’s motivations for establishing the arena as a site to confront issues of race, gender, and sexuality in Germany. Part of a broader political trend across Europe, racist and xenophobic political discourse from far-right political parties such as the AFD (Alternative for Deutschland) have begun asserting their mainstream legitimacy by seeking change from within democratic institutions (Teitelbaum 2017). Angela Merkel’s acceptance of almost 1,000,000 refugees from the Syrian civil war brought immigration and refugee policies to the attention of the voting public, making them politically significant. Seen as a civilizational threat to Europe (Asad 2003; Bunzl 2005), Muslims arouse anxiety in the right-wing political imaginary. Xenophobic tendencies are articulated by narratives in which refugees not only take away the jobs of the continent’s white lower class but also flaunt

4. FC St. Pauli Hamburg, a second-division German soccer team, is a prime example of a club that has branded and merchandized its identity based upon the antifascist politics of its core fan base.

their cultural difference rather than integrate (Holmes 2000; Shoshan 2016:32; Banks and Gingrich 2006). While the German government has adopted numerous approaches to mitigating right-wing extremism in the public sphere (Shoshan 2014; 2016), antifascists want a more drastic response to its manifestations: banishment.

Antifascism as a Moral Imperative

Responding to racism at Dynamo games and the normalization of right-wing discourse in the German public sphere deemed to be precursors to fascism, antifascism became the moral imperative that motivated Black Corner's performative style. Founded in 2007, Black Corner followed in the footsteps of left-wing fans who in the 1990s formed a group called Red Star to protect themselves in the hostile sociopolitical environment at EHC Dynamo games. Due in part to the rebranding of the team as the Eisbären, the team's relocation to the Mercedes Benz Arena, and the shifting political makeup of the fan base, Black Corner managed to carve out a fair share of influence within the contemporary fan scene. Relying on a visual aesthetic and embodied style that communicated a clear subcultural (punk and ultra) and ideological (antifa/left-wing) orientation, Black Corner merged crowd support with an activist ethos. If antifa is a fluid social and political movement "made and remade continually [...] not through a fixed structure, virtual networks, or institutions but through living social relationships" (Khasnabish 2013:83), then Black Corner was one such collective, constituted by action that adopted and adapted the logics of antifa into a form of fandom contingent upon public intervention and political engagement. "[In the arena], we do these political actions with the banners and the flags, standing up for a political side," said Marco. "That's what I like the most, that there's someone who keeps up a flag and says there are things we don't like and things that aren't OK, and we stand up for it."

Dima expanded on the group's philosophy and their potential impact: "When you're in an ultra group you can influence the politics in the arena," he said. "Rosa Luxemburg said once, 'to be apolitical means being political without realizing it,' and I think that's a smart sentence because there isn't anything that's not political." From this perspective, crowd support is viewed within a broader realm of a) political intervention and b) social impact, geared toward shifting the political subjectivities of its participants and winning participatory consent for more political content in the arena. Black Corner harnessed *Stimmung* with a similar political purpose to raise awareness of social issues. The group operated in the arena in a strategic tension between discourse with the broader fan base and an impetus to change racist, sexist, and discriminatory behaviors. In this way, collective action attempted to shift the outlook of the broader fan scene at EHC Dynamo Berlin, and if not, then to at least stake a claim to the public space, which, in any case, served as a way of "learning to live with ghosts" (Derrida 1994:xvii) in the German public sphere.

More specifically, Black Corner at their meetings discussed particular songs in the repertoire and rejected those they decided were racist, sexist, or homophobic. During EHC Dynamo's seven-game series against Adler Mannheim in the playoffs, we heard "Adler Mannheim, Hurensöhne!" (whore's sons) being led by Fanatics Ost. Black Corner stayed silent, often watching until the song ended, starting to sing only as the song faded into another. Over the years Dima, who originally stood with Fanatics Ost, slowly found himself relating more to Black Corner's style of support than he did with Fanatics Ost. "I know that can work because it did with me," he said in regard to the role of opting out of participation:

DIMA: I used to sing [the Adler Mannheim Hurensöhne song] as well. I didn't think about [white] supremacy and I never had a problem with homosexuality, but still sang along because I never thought about what it meant. And then when I stood with Black Corner, I realized what I was actually doing. And I believe it can work that way for everyone. When you're in an ultra group you can influence the politics in the arena.

In contrast to Fanatics Ost, members of Black Corner often treated aggressive hypermasculinity ironically. In a chant sung at the beginning of every game, Black Corner often replaced the typical pattern of low guttural *HOOs* with high-pitched *WHEEWWWs* as Mäx tossed glitter into the air.

Interventions in style such as these ironized hypermasculine representations of ultra fandom, which made me more comfortable and enthusiastic as a participant. The ethics undergirding participation, irony, and refusal were aimed at influencing other fans' opinions and decision-making by dampening the songs' affective and emotive impact. It also became an unspoken way of broadening inclusivity.

In addition to a sensitive and reflexive engagement with the fan scene's performative repertoire, community engagement was an equally relevant dimension of Black Corner's activities. The group's activities extended to various types of community outreach, many of which were aimed at working with refugees. Black Corner received free Eisbären tickets from the club administration in order to bring refugees to games and also took them ice skating on weekends. This community outreach was so important that there was a tension between members who prioritized the activist elements of group action and those who were more concerned with the *Stimmung* itself. In spite of the group's varied priorities, it was the members' years of attendance at hockey games and their crowd action in the arena that built their collective trust and capacity to develop and execute political plans outside the stadium.

"The *Stimmung* is the core theme that binds us," Matze emphasized. He switches to English as we're talking: "It's the daily work." Much like street protest, crowd support is the socializing element that binds the group, but further, it is also a performative medium used with the goal of normalizing Black Corner's ideological vision for the fan scene. "It's a free decision to sing along or not," said Matze. "But it's also our job to motivate people to sing or through support to come into contact with us and win people over, so that they see things from our side." By coordinating the affective disposition of the crowd, the ultras used participation to adjudicate discrepant visions of the fan scene and of Dynamo with the goal of achieving a more inclusive fan praxis.

While some members pointed out that Black Corner's political style of performance could awaken onlookers to the ways that violence can be perpetuated through performance, Marco and Ecki's mindsets toward crowd action also emphasized a dual role of asserting a collective, inclusive presence with the power to keep *out* right-wing extremism. This proactive mentality is a defensive social mechanism aimed at preempting dark potentialities just over the horizon. "What if we didn't intervene?"—a fear that racism is a slippery slope—also motivates action based in historical specters of fascism and authoritarianism. This mindset locates Black Corner (and antifa more generally) as actors within the contemporary social imaginary pushing against the burgeoning fascist reawakening.

Ecki expressed a fear about the growth and exacerbation of racism:

ECKI: It's a little step in the right direction when you stamp out these everyday acts of racism. Then you've really won a lot of ground. The gap between everyday racism and [right-wing political parties like] the AFD or the NPD is really small. I believe that we draw attention in large part because we're pretty approachable. We don't want to manipulate people, but we can talk sense into the older ones. We can say, "What you just said is total shit—think about it, what you just said was pretty racist, right?"

MAX: So you can talk with them?

ECKI: Most of them. That's the reason why I think politics are an important part of the [fan] curve. And because it's also a public representation of the club.

Black Corner's strategies toward addressing discrimination approaches right-wing extremism as something to be eliminated through various means, be it discursive engagement, claiming performative presence, or repressing overt expressions of racist sentiment. From this vantage point, racism haunts as a direct and ongoing manifestation of fascism. In this context, publicly confronting discriminatory practice is not only the ethical thing to do, but further, it is deemed a *necessity* to fend off the tide of fascism.

"You will [still] have Nazis in the block, but you don't see them and you don't hear them," Ecki said. "And I would also like to say that that's OK with me. I don't see them, I don't hear them, that's enough for me."



Figure 5. Black Corner's "Love is Love" choreography amidst Fanatics Ost's boycott, in alliance with Bündnis Gegen Homophobie (the Coalition Against Homophobia). Berlin, 2016. (Photo by Jay Smith)

Refusal

However, many within the broader fan scene are not convinced that German society suffers from racism or benefits from political activism. As a result, Black Corner's performances became a site of tension in which histories, identities, and style came under intense scrutiny and debate. Fanatics Ost vehemently avoided issues deemed "political" and was becoming increasingly wary of Black Corner's incorporation of left-wing political philosophy into the fan block. Reacting to the increasingly overt resistance to its politicized approach, Black Corner began to comment that Fanatics Ost—which was founded in 2002 by left-leaning Dynamo fans—had become increasingly conservative as old members began attending less and newer members joined. As tension increased and the divide between the groups widened, I became entrenched in the conflict, privy to only Black Corner's point of view. Outside the arena, the two groups had stopped socializing almost entirely (aside from several verbal confrontations that almost came to blows). The groups still lead chants together in the arena, but Fanatics Ost completely disengaged from social issues that could be polarizing for the fan base. Black Corner and Fanatics Ost were united in a shared wish to harness *Stimmung* as a form of support but had divergent and incommensurable philosophies around the social and political goals of crowd action. The fan curve had become unstable.

This was made evident past anyone's wildest expectations during a game against the Krefeld Penguins in the fall of 2016 when Black Corner organized a crowd choreography in tandem with the club's alliance with Bündnis Gegen Homophobie (the Coalition Against Homophobia). The group had been designing and constructing a crowd cover that blended Black Corner's logo with a rainbow flag, which would envelop the entire fan curve in conjunction with a banner that would extend the length of the plexiglass behind the net. With silhouettes of two men and two women in an embrace on the banner, the message between them read LOVE IS LOVE. But it was only minutes before the game that we found out Fanatics Ost would be protesting the choreography, waiting

outside until the *Aktion* was over. We read FO's protest on their web page from our phones, which Matze grumbled was riddled with typos.

Part of our community is utilizing the fan curve more and more as a utility to project [Projektionsfläche] their own [political] interests. One must ask the question, whether the club and the team are the main focus, or their own interests. We also don't tolerate racist or homophobic acts of any kind. Historically, there haven't been any known homophobic attacks [in the arena]. (FO'02 2016)

Choreographies require the consent and participation of the entire block of fans to maximize their evocative impact. Bodies and hands must lift the banners up uniformly to be seen well. But suddenly Black Corner had to fill the void normally occupied by Fanatics Ost. Needing to act and adapt, we fulfilled our roles in order to achieve the best possible outcome. The *Aktion* went off as planned, except one couldn't help but notice in the photos that the banner in the left-hand corner couldn't be raised properly, sinking downward in the spot where Fanatics Ost should have been. The crowd cover was taken down after several minutes and we all made our way back to our area of the block. Fanatics Ost returned afterward and began leading chants, but for the first and only time that I was with Black Corner, no one sang. We could only stare. I was completely depleted—in shock. The *Stimmung* was dead, the mood was now grim.

Always fluctuating in its affective capacities, collective action is characterized by interconnection across difference (Tsing 2005). As the crowd grows in size and the heterogeneity of its participants expands, the more interpretively flexible its aesthetics and content must become in order to accommodate varied and conflicting epistemological dispositions. While a larger crowd can harness more affective power through greater coordination of bodies and sound, its affective and emotive possibilities are also increasingly constrained by its size. Fundamental to the rift between the two ultras groups were the divergent views regarding the purpose of the fan curve as an expressive device, and also the morals and ideologies that motivated participation and collective coordination in the first place. Black Corner cultivated *Stimmung* so that crowd participation acted as a process of addressing historical specters with the goal of enabling political transformation, albeit with fraying and unpredictable results. The outcome—a dramatic act of refusal from Fanatics Ost—proved itself a powerful tactic in which to forcefully reorient the ideologies undergirding crowd action in the arena. In this way, refusal directs attention to an issue while exercising an ideological force upon those participating by creating a jagged affective void in the stadium space. By experiencing moments of encounter through “the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible” (Stewart 2007:3), the sublime feeling of affective attunement among participants appears as an ideal, a receding horizon, in contrast to the fluctuating affects that actually drive the crowd.

What Good Is the Crowd?

Black Corner attempted to integrate an ethos of antifascism into the social scene by reenvisioning crowd support as a type of political action. Details of the collective imaginary and Dynamo's historical stigma were up for debate as the fan community attempted to preserve a culture of collective crowd support within the growing capitalist professional hockey institution in Germany. Ultra as a transnational fan movement and antifa as a transnational political movement are both grounded in aspirational philosophies that strive to create “the change they wish to encounter” (Cooper 2014:1)—strategies that compete with and are simultaneously harnessed by the club towards its own financial interests. At EHC Dynamo, the intersecting and contradictory visions of the fan base and the club administration resulted in fluctuating moments of affective attunement, collective transcendence, friction, and disjuncture.

The arenas where professional ice hockey is played in Germany are sites of social heterogeneity in which alternative political and ideological positions are produced and adjudicated by means of crowd participation. The impact of Black Corner's intervention within the EHC Dynamo fan scene is evident in the gradual elimination of overt expressions of right-wing extremism on the one hand

and the broader fan base's ongoing resistance to discourse marked as "antifascist" or "political" on the other. The group's antiracist and antihomophobic stance suited the values of the Deutsche Eishockey Liga, while the group's behavior allowed the club administration to present the Eisbären as edgy and politically progressive. In other words, participatory performance in the context of sport does not seamlessly bridge the epistemological discrepancies among its participants, but instead is a competing process of enculturation *and* coalition-building from which the heterogeneous interests of its participants sometimes converge and at other times fall apart.

Crowd participation functions as a means of not only imagining but also creating the social milieu one wishes to see—a process that is both fashioned and constrained by the differences of its participants. In the case of Black Corner, "the daily work" of cultivating Stimmung has been a means of supporting the team as well as shifting the values of the participants in the arena. Within the antifascist social milieu, Germany's history is not relegated to the past, but occupies the present. As a result, Black Corner was ethically compelled to bring antifascism to the arena, making crowd support a political action aimed at accounting for the past in spite of conflict with Fanatics Ost. "Dynamo" was a totem that encapsulated the club's pedigree of competitive success while simultaneously bearing an ongoing stigma, which merged East German authoritarianism with Nazism as specters haunting the collective imaginary.

In contrast to anxieties around the German fascist crowd (Adorno [1966] 1998) and the broader liberal democratic imaginary (Gaonkar 2014; Herrera 2018; Mazzarella 2010), I suggest that crowd action can be an affective method to enact democratic principles—rife with new social possibilities, disjuncture, and hegemonic relations among participants. Crowd action is, in effect, a means of adjudicating the discrepant ideologies of parties who envision public space as an increasingly rare arena for fashioning one's vision of community. In spite of the social and political limitations of fandom and capital in professional sports, the political potential of the fans lies in their capacity to produce alternative cultural cues and a heightened expressive capacity for subjects disenchanting by representative democracy and the atrophy of public culture. The stadium is both a valuable and contested locale because addressing publics and fomenting collective participation are still possible.

For Black Corner, this investment in public space has bred a sociality of political persistence. The group's efforts at utilizing the stadium as a site of public address are characterized by a dissatisfying degree of stylistic and topical compromise, but also an ongoing obligation to incorporate the morality of antifascism into the fan scene. Around the time I was finishing my fieldwork in Berlin, the group members—frustrated by the commercialization of professional sports—considered boycotting the Senior Team's games altogether and instead attending the Youth Team's games at the Wellblechpalast. Away from the full fan base, they could enact a specific message—but they would also sing in a mostly empty venue. After holding a group meeting in the summer of 2017, Black Corner decided to continue attending the Senior Team matches at the Mercedes Benz Arena. While the group would continue this debate in the years to come, on this spring day as we sat in the grass Matze told me that it was not yet time to abandon professional hockey.

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