FC United of Manchester: Community and Politics amongst English Football Fans

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities

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Abstract

FC United of Manchester: Community and Politics amongst English Football Fans
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PhD Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, 2012

This thesis is an ethnographic study of fans of FC United of Manchester, a new football club set up by supporters of Manchester United in the wake of the Glazer family takeover at Old Trafford in 2005. It focuses particularly on the importance of ideas of ‘community’ and ‘politics’ to understanding the club. In doing so the thesis sets out supporters’ motivations for supporting FC United and how these have impacted on the form the club takes and supporters’ relationships to FC United.

In this thesis I analyse FC United as both a significant development within English football and as an important form of contemporary collective action with wider social significance. I show how FC United was formed within a broader context of political and economic transformation, a ‘neo-liberal turn’, within football and more generally within England, and, indeed, across many parts of the world. My argument is that the formation and continuation of FC United has involved the thinking through, debating of and engagement with particular ideas and notions of ‘community’ and ‘place’ and of ‘politics’ and ‘political activism’ in the light of this shifting wider context. As such the thesis sheds light on contemporary articulations and manifestations of these phenomena and how they may become implicated in collective action within football fandom and beyond. In doing so, it also gives insight into the social implications of the wider political and economic changes in which FC United is enmeshed. Thus, the thesis makes an important contribution to social anthropological knowledge by showing how an ethnographic study of FC United can yield new understandings of how significant recent political and economic changes are both socially understood and contested through collective action. Furthermore, the thesis makes a significant contribution to social scientific understandings of English football fandom by giving a deep ethnographic insight into how some fans have understood and responded to recent changes in the political economy of the game and into the dynamics underpinning an important new form of protest and collective action amongst English supporters.

The thesis is structured in three parts. Part One sets out the contextual background of the research, first by discussing the methodological approach adopted and then by analysing the long-term historical context in which FC United emerged. Part Two focuses on the importance of ‘community’ and ‘place’ to understanding FC United’s current form and supporters’ motivations for supporting the club. Here ‘community’ is shown as having multiple meanings and manifestations with the context of FC United, while the significance of ‘place’ to FC United is analysed as lying in supporters symbolic and imaginative understandings of Manchester and what it is to be a Mancunian. Part Three presents an understanding of what is politically at stake for FC United fans beyond the immediate sphere of football fandom before assessing the chance that the club may become part of a larger movement within football aiming to bring about supporter ownership at all clubs.
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First and foremost I would like to thank all those FC United fans who gave up their time to talk to me or be interviewed by me for this research. I am grateful to FC United general manager Andy Walsh for generously giving of his time to be interviewed for this thesis. I would particularly like to extend my thanks to two people at FC United – Dr. Adam Brown and Robin Pye. Adam provided invaluable help and guidance throughout the research process, as well as giving of his own time, and without his help the research would have been a good deal more difficult to conduct and probably much less productive. I worked closely with Robin for much of the time I was carrying out my research and, alongside many valuable insights, his good humour and cheerful company made the time spent researching much more enjoyable than it may otherwise have been.

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Abbreviations

Centre of Research in Economic and Social Change – CRESC

Football Club United of Manchester – FC United

Football Association – FA

Football Club – FC

Football Supporters Federation - FSF

Independent Manchester United Supporters Association – IMUSA

Leeds United Football Club – Leeds United

Manchester City Football Club - Manchester City

Manchester United Football Club – Manchester United

Papua New Guinea – PNG

Shareholders United Against Murdoch – SUAM

Under The Boardwalk fanzine – UTB

United We Stand Fanzine – UWS

West Ham United Football Club – West Ham United
The 2004/05 season was a momentous one for Manchester United FC (hereafter Manchester United) off the pitch, with a battle for ownership of the club eventually leading to a boycott by some supporters of home fixtures and, most dramatically of all, the formation of an alternative supporter-owned club – Football Club United of Manchester (hereafter FC United). At the start of the 2004/05 season Manchester United was a publically limited company in which the largest share (28.9%) was owned by the investment company Cubic Expression, with the American businessmen and investor Malcolm Glazer and his family holding the second largest share (28.1%) (Brown 2007: 621). In the autumn of 2004, Malcolm Glazer launched a takeover bid for Manchester United which was to be financed through borrowing against Manchester United and then placing the ensuing debt upon the club – a practice known as a leveraged buyout. Fan resistance developed quickly as the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (hereafter IMUSA) immediately announced itself opposed to such a bid, while the Manchester United fanzine Red Issue also declared itself hostile to any such takeover (Veg, Red Issue: 2004). Furthermore, a secretive direct-action fan group known as the ‘Manchester Education Committee’ invaded the pitch at a reserve team game to protest against the proposed takeover (Brown 2007: 621). However Glazer’s takeover bid foundered when the board of Manchester United baulked at the £500 million debt to be placed upon the club and rejected the sale of further shares to Glazer (ibid). Nonetheless, undeterred, Glazer launched a second takeover bid in February 2005 (BBC: 2005). IMUSA re-iterated its opposition to the Glazer takeover, issuing in the pages of Red Issue a call for supporters to oppose the bid in an article entitled ‘ten reasons to oppose Glazer’ principally citing fears over the debt that would be placed upon Manchester United, the loss of the

1 FC is a common shorthand for football club and will be used as such throughout the thesis.

2 Cubic Expression was owned by the Irish race horse owners John Magnier and J.P. McManus. Originally friends of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson they had fallen out with the manager over money for a jointly owned horse. Prior to the Glazer takeover bid, fans had also protested at the possibility of Cubic Expression launching a takeover bid, primarily due to the belief that they would remove Sir Alex Ferguson as manager (See: Brown 2007: 620-621).

3 Millward (2011: 40-41) provides a useful wider overview of the practice of leveraged buy-outs.

4 Fanzines are fan written and produced magazines. I will discuss these in depth in Chapter Two
club’s independence and the potential for Glazer to either raise ticket prices or asset strip Manchester United to fund the debt interest payments required by a leveraged buy-out, and the article concluded by calling for a supporter march before the next home game to show opposition to the proposed takeover (IMUSA, *Red Issue*: 2005). However, perhaps the most intriguing response to the takeover was one that proposed that if the campaign against the buy-out was to prove unsuccessful then supporters should boycott a Glazer-owned Manchester United and instead set up an alternative fan-owned club:

What if you could give up supporting Glazer’s company without giving up [Manchester] United? After all [Manchester] United isn’t represented by the club, or the players or the manager or the directors or the shareholders. Glazer can gain the blessing of all of them but without the supporters what would he really have? He wouldn’t have Manchester United Football Club. The support is the club’s body, heart and soul and without the support the club is worthless in name and worthless on paper ... With a working name of ‘FC United’ the logistics of the operation to set up a new Manchester United for fans disillusioned and disenfranchised by Malcolm Glazer has been looked into (Anon, *Red Issue*: 2005).

The article went on to set out how the proposed club would be owned by a supporters’ trust and would be ‘untainted’ by the pursuit of profit by rejecting shirts’ sponsorship and offering discounted ticket prices to local youth – it concluded ‘FC United’s intention is to provide [Manchester] United fans with the community they’ve always enjoyed, but one untainted by the commercialisation and authoritarianism we currently suffer’ (Anon, *Red Issue*: 2005). In the remaining months of the season the Manchester United fan protests against the Glazer takeover increased, as supporters coalesced around the campaign slogan of ‘not for sale’ (Brown 2007: 621). However, this was to prove to be to no avail, as on May 12th 2005 Malcolm Glazer purchased Cubic Expression’s stake in the club giving him a controlling interest in Manchester United, and from there, he built his shareholding first above the 75% required to de-list the club from the stock market and then he reached the 90% shareholding which made Manchester United private property and allowed Glazer to compulsorily purchase the remaining shares (BBC: 2005; Brown 2007: 622). With the opposition campaign having failed to prevent the Glazer takeover, two emergency fan meetings were held, first at the Manchester Central Hall and then at the Manchester Apollo theatre, which had over 2,000 Manchester United fans in attendance (Brady 2006: 43). Following these meetings a steering committee was formed and the plan first mooted in
Red Issue for the creation of a supporter-owned club for those opposed to Glazer’s leveraged buyout was put into action.

FC United of Manchester was successfully entered into the North West Counties League for the 2005/06 season with a ground-share agreed with Bury FC to play fixtures at their Gigg Lane ground. The club was set up as an Industrial Provident Society, in which each member purchases a single share for a nominal fee and becomes a co-owner with an equal vote on all major issues within the club, and players were signed on a part-time semi-professional basis. The final steps in the formation of FC United were sealed at the club’s first extraordinary general meeting on July the 5th 2005. Here, the club’s first board were elected, the club’s constitution ratified by the membership and finally a set of core principles that the club would operate under were voted on. These agreed core principles were as follows:

1. The Board will be democratically elected by its members
2. Decisions taken by the membership will be decided on a one member, one vote basis
3. The club will develop strong links with the local community and strive to be accessible to all, discriminating against none
4. The club will endeavour to make admission prices as affordable as possible, to as wide a constituency as possible
5. The club will encourage young, local participation - playing and supporting - whenever possible
6. The Board will strive wherever possible to avoid outright commercialism
7. The club will remain a non-profit organisation

FC United of Manchester Founding Manifesto (FC United: Undated).

I began my research in the summer of 2009, by which point FC United had enjoyed sustained playing success, including three league promotions in four seasons, and continued to receive considerable off-field support with average attendances of around 2000 people. Furthermore, by summer 2009 the club was involved in advanced

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5 Bury is a town to the north-west of Manchester and Gigg Lane football ground is 8.5 miles from Manchester city centre.
negotiations with Manchester City Council to secure a site for a ground of their own, towards the building of which supporters had donated a significant sum of money.

**FC United as a Research Proposition**

This initial account of the FC United’s formation suggests the motivations and aims underpinning the formation of the club were complex and manifold. On one level FC United is a collective response to a very modern form of finance – the transnational debt-leveraged buy-out. However, this initial account also hints at a wider set of motivations and issues – a desire for a ‘community’ free of ‘commercialisation and authoritarianism’ and a set of principles around democratic control, community involvement, affordable ticket prices and opposition to commercialisation and profit making. The aim of this thesis is to utilise an in-depth ethnographic approach in order to understand supporters’ motivations for their involvement with FC United and how these have shaped and impacted upon the form FC United has taken (and continues to take) and supporters’ relationship to the club. In meeting this aim I also highlight the importance of the wider political and economic context, both within football and beyond, in which FC United was formed, and continues to exist, and assess the wider insight an understanding of the club gives to the issues and motivations that may underpin forms of contemporary collective action and the social effects of these broader political and economic processes. My argument will be principally structured around two key themes, that of ‘community’ and that of ‘politics’ and ‘political activism’, which emerged throughout the research and provide useful analytic frames through which the aim of the thesis can be met. A number of questions around these key themes will be addressed, primarily;

- How is community manifest within the context of FC United?
- In what ways are ideas of place mobilised by FC United supporters?
- Do FC United fans connect support for the club to wider political issues?
- To what extent do FC United fans wish to be part of a wider movement within football? What is the likelihood of any such wider movement emerging?

In answering such questions I show how a study of FC United can give anthropological insight into possible expressions and manifestations of ‘community’ and ‘politics’ that extends beyond the immediate sphere of football fandom. I will outline in greater detail in
this introduction how I will approach issues of ‘community’ and ‘politics’ in the thesis but first I wish to discuss FC United’s particular importance as a topic of academic research and to position my own study within previous social science studies of English football fandom.

FC United represents a particularly worthwhile site for academic investigation for a number of reasons. First, 2000 people regularly come together to watch FC United matches throughout a season, and furthermore the club’s membership for the most recent season stood at over 3,000 people while 300 supporters regularly volunteer for the club. Such figures suggest that both numerically and in terms of intensity of commitment the club represents a significant form of contemporary collective action. Second, the issue of supporter ownership more broadly within football is one that has recently attracted national political attention with both the Labour Party (2010: 50) and Conservative Party (2010: 75) manifestos for the 2010 election containing promises to look to reform football governance to encourage supporter ownership, and the 2010 Coalition agreement also including a pledge to reform the rules of football governance to encourage supporter ownership (Marshall and Tomlin 2011: 4). To this end a cross party ‘Football Governance’ inquiry was launched in 2011 by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee who invited written evidence submissions from 30 supporters’ groups across the country, including FC United. Third, the establishment of new football clubs by supporters is a new trend to have emerged within English football in recent years. As well as the formation of FC United in 2005, AFC Wimbledon was set up by fans of Wimbledon FC in 2002 following the latter’s move 70 miles north to Milton Keynes and change of name to MK Dons FC (see: Joyce 2006 for a non-academic account), AFC Liverpool was formed in 2008 by Liverpool FC fans who felt they could no longer afford tickets to Premiership matches (see: Millward 2011: 125-127) and, finally, the formation of Chester FC in 2010 by supporters following the financial liquidation of Chester City FC. Fourth, the setting up of a supporter-owned football club in opposition to the ownership structure of an existing one represents a novel and unique form of protest within the English game. As such an academic study of FC United is particularly important because it pertains to an understanding of collective action in the contemporary moment, it is relevant to issues of current political significance and it directly addresses new developments within English football fandom.

Given this context it is perhaps unsurprising that I am not the first academic to have written about FC United and I now describe those previous studies as well as discussing how my study extends and goes beyond these works. Previous academic works which have
discussed FC United include two journal articles by Adam Brown (2007, 2008), a journal article by Sam Dubal (2010) and a book chapter by Peter Millward (2011). Brown’s 2007 article was particularly concerned with the immediate circumstances of FC United’s formation (620-624) and I have drawn on this work in my own account of the club’s formation in this introduction. The 2007 article (626-629) also highlighted the importance of notions of community in relation to FC United and this focus was further extended in the 2008 article, with particular reference to the FC United match-day (350-353). Brown’s focus on community in these journal articles is built on within this thesis where I unpack the notions of community and place amongst FC United fans across four chapters of the thesis. The community policies carried out by FC United, which are analysed in Chapter Five, receive only a brief mention in his articles (2008: 353). Furthermore, the perception of the changing relationship between Manchester United and Manchester as a place, and the influence this had on FC United, is only briefly touched upon (2007: 619-620; 2008: 347,353) by Brown, and the significance of this is developed fully in Chapter Four, while the importance of notions of Manchester as a ‘radical city’, analysed in Chapter Six, are not discussed at all in Brown’s article. As noted above, Brown’s discussion of community is most developed in relation to the FC United match-day and this is something that I take-up and extend in Chapter Three of the thesis both in terms of the depth of my description and analysis and, also, in relation to the methodology utilised. Brown’s articles are chiefly based around his own observations from his position as an FC United board member whereas my own analysis is based on in-depth ethnographic method through which I give voice to a significant number of different FC United fans. Sam Dubal (2010) presented comparative research looking at the impact of neo-liberal reforms within Brazilian and English football based on short-term ethnographic research over three months with fans of Brazilian football club Corinthians and fans of FC United. Dubal’s ethnographic analysis of FC United is relatively brief (2010: 134-138, 142) and his analysis is most developed on the relationship between FC United fans’ wider political views and their views on the governance of football (2010: 137-138). In Chapter Seven of this thesis I also take up this issue and analyse the relationship in greater depth, and in doing so I argue against Dubal’s understanding as presented in his article. Finally, Millward (2011) offers a chapter which looks at FC United alongside a more general account of Manchester United fans’ response to the Glazer takeover as part of his book looking at the transnationalisation of the English Premier League and fan responses to these processes. His chapter utilises internet fan forum comments and is particularly useful for its analysis (2011: 109-113) of FC United
fans’ reaction to the recent ‘Green and Gold’ protest amongst Manchester United fans, and Millward’s findings will be discussed in Chapter Eight. In summary, this thesis presents a more in-depth and complete account of FC United than these previous works, drawing out issues of community and politics that are touched upon in those pieces and analysing them to a fuller extent. Furthermore, the long-term ethnographic method utilised for this thesis allows me to address a more complex picture of the club than these previous studies. Finally, while these accounts all briefly address the importance of recent protests groups amongst Manchester United fans and of historical changes in the English game to understanding FC United, this thesis fully embeds its analysis of FC United in a wider historical, political and economic context.

Within the broader social science of English football fandom this thesis both fits within and pushes forward distinct trends in this area of study. In particular, this thesis is a continuation of a long-term move away from studies of fan violence and football hooliganism, which dominated social science studies of English football in the 1970s and 1980s (see: Giulianotti 1994 and Taylor 2008: 309-319 for detailed overviews of this literature), towards studies of fans as part of consumer culture within a rapidly shifting political economy of the game. Dominic Malcolm’s (2011) recent reflection on the history of the Sociology of Sport suggests that the work of Anthony King (1997, 2002) was paradigmatic to this change. King’s (2002) work presented an analysis of the responses of different groups of Manchester United fans in the early 1990s to the transformation of the political economy of football occurring at the time. Furthermore, he linked this transformation to both long term changes within the governance and regulatory structure of football and to changes in the wider political and economic governance arrangements within England. In this thesis I also link my analysis of FC United to the on-going changes in the political economy of football, while following King (2002) in relating this transformation

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6 Fan forums are discussed in depth in Chapter One.

7 Other works that can be considered part of this shift include Duke’s (1991) piece proposing a post-hooligan studies agenda for academics researching football fandom, Redhead’s (1997) work on new forms of fandom emerging in the 1990s and Giulianotti’s (2002) attempt to create a taxonomy of football supporter identities. Further to these works, Armstrong and Young’s (1999) and Robson’s (2000,2001) ethnographic work on changing fan practices and identities, King (2003) and Millward (2009) on the Europeanisation of spectator identities and the studies of fan protest and resistance (discussed in this section) contributed to this change in focus within academic studies of English football fandom.
to a wider set of historical processes within and outside of football. Furthermore, this thesis follows a series of studies which have looked at different forms of fan protest and resistance to these changes in the game. For instance, Haynes (1995) and Jary et al (1991) have addressed fanzines as mediums of resistance amongst supporters, while Brown (1998), King (2002: 162-166, 188-190; 2003: 169-189) and Nash (2000, 2001) have all addressed the setting up of Independent Supporters Associations as a form of fan protest. As suggested above this interest in protest and resistance within football has begun to be extended to FC United and most recently Millward (2011) has looked at contemporary protest movements amongst Liverpool FC and Manchester United fans in the light of the increasing transnationalisation and commercialisation of English football. The works of King (2002, 2003), Dubal (2010) and Millward (2011) are particularly noteworthy here for attempting to utilise their studies of particular protest groups within football to shed light on wider social processes beyond the game and this thesis also works within this vein. However this thesis is also novel in its approach. While there have been a number of studies of forms of protest and resistance within English football none have provided an in-depth ethnographic account of such processes. King (2002, 2003) made use of ethnographic methods but the analysis of his ethnographic material formed one part of monographs concerned with documenting and understanding broad historical changes in the game and, as noted previously, Dubal’s (2010) study only provided brief ethnographic analysis. This thesis fills this gap and, in so doing, advances understandings of protest and resistance amongst English football fans and its relationship to changes in the political and economic context of the game and society at large.

In the remainder of the introduction I set out how my argument will proceed in more substantive detail, first by setting out the scope of the two opening chapters of the thesis, which address in detail the study’s methodological and historical context.

**Contextual Background**

Chapter One describes how I came to conduct research about FC United and how I arrived at particular methodological choices for the research. I focus especially on how the problem of locating a clear ‘field’ in which my ethnographic research would take place led me to employ a particular methodology in order to ‘construct the field’ (Amit 2000). I lay emphasis upon my methodological choices because these affected the knowledge I came to have of FC United and therefore the arguments presented within this thesis. Chapter
Two sets out the longer term historical context in which FC United emerged. I outline how from the beginnings of professional football in England fans have not had formal control of the clubs they support and argue that this has carried the possibility for generating supporter mobilisations to challenge the ownership structure of these clubs long before the formation of FC United. I then look at how a shift in the regulatory system surrounding English football in the 1980s, towards a free-market de-regulated system of football governance, led onto a rapid commercialisation of the game in the 1990s. I argue, following the work of Anthony King (2002), that such a regulatory shift within football reflected a broader shift toward a free-market socio-economic system within England at large (which in turn was part of a ‘neo-liberal’ turn across much of the world). I show how this shift towards a more commercialised model of English football led onto the emergence of a series of protest groups at Manchester United aimed at challenging the direction of the club. I argue that these protest groups amongst Manchester United fans shaped, and reflected, the issues which would mobilise FC United fans in 2005. This chapter then makes clear that FC United needs to be understood in both the context of these particular protest movements but also the context of a shift to a neo-liberal free-market model within football which reflected a wider change within the economy at large. Such a historical context reinforces the potential that a study of FC United has for giving a wider insight into the issues and motivations that may lead to contemporary collective action and the social implications of recent political and economic change.

I now outline the section of the thesis focused on issues of ‘community’ and look to develop how this concept will be used analytically within the thesis, before doing the same for the final section of the thesis which will be focussed on issues of ‘politics’.

**Community and Football**

As Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing (2000: 60) have noted, community is one of the most widely and frequently used concepts in the social sciences. Within social anthropology, and the social sciences more generally, the way in which community has been conceptualised has shifted over time. Both Rapport and Overing (2000: 62) and Delanty (2010: 22) identify a traditional view within anthropology of communities as holistic things-in-themselves, territorially bounded and functioning to produce social integration. This view of community impacted on the way in which anthropologists viewed the field sites in which they conducted research, such that ‘the field was [understood as] the community and the study
of communities, read as the convergence of place, people, identity and culture, was construed as the proper subject matter of anthropology’ (Amit 2002: 15). In other words, it was taken as axiomatic that communities and the field-sites in which research was conducted were one and the same and both could be apprehended as holistic entities. However such understandings of community have been fundamentally reshaped in recent decades, particularly as a result of the ‘cultural turn’ (Delanty 2010: xi) within the social sciences in the 1980s. In particular, there was a shift away from functionalist and structuralist understandings of community, and understandings of community as singular, holistic and bounded, towards approaches which looked at how community is elicited as a feature of social life and how notions of community are given meaning (Rapport and Overing 2000: 62). This had the important consequence of de-stabilizing any assumed straightforward link between place and community, as community became understood more as a quality of sociality than actualized social form (Amit 2002: 3, Rogaly and Taylor 2009: 19).

Paradigmatic to such a shift were Anthony Cohen’s *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). Cohen’s argument was that community was a relational concept, the need to express an affiliation to a given community was only occasioned by a desire or need to express a difference from another given community, and as such the boundary becomes the essential feature of a community (1985: 12). However such boundaries were not primarily structural; rather, they were symbolic. Cohen argued that ‘the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings people attach to them, not in their structural forms. As we have seen, this reality of community is expressed and embellished symbolically’ (1985: 98). However, for Cohen, while the symbolic expression of community allowed members of one community to express difference from another, to express a boundary, the imprecision of symbolic discourse allowed members of communities to impute different meanings to shared symbols and therefore express difference and individuality (1985: 21). Cohen moved beyond functional, structural and geographically determinstic accounts of community and called instead for a focus upon symbolism, meaning and individuality. Benedict Anderson’s work provided a means through which community could be understood as not necessitating face-to-face social relations. Anderson (1983) sought to explain the affective loyalties between citizens of a nation state. Anderson (1983) located the rise of such nationalism and national sentiment
in the rise of print capitalism in the sixteenth century, where books and newsheets became widely disseminated leading people to see themselves as sharing lifestyles in common and therefore facilitated a sense of commonality and mutual identification between people who would never share face-to-face relations.

Within the sphere of academic accounts of football, Brown et al (2008) have recently called for a shift away from functionalist and geographically deterministic accounts of the relationship between football clubs, supporters and community. They argue ‘few distinctions have been drawn between ‘geographical’ and ‘supporter communities’ around football clubs ... As sociologists and social historians worked with the assumption that football clubs’ emerged functionally to satisfy geographical communities’ needs for new or traditional forms of social and emotional bonding, so it followed ipso facto that football clubs’ supporters must also be their geographical neighbours’ (Brown et al 2008: 305, emphasis original). As Brown et al (2008: 305-306) argue, such assumptions about the relationship between football clubs, supporters and communities are problematic because football clubs’ supporters have long been drawn from beyond the confines of the football clubs’ immediate geographical neighbourhoods. In Chapter Four I describe the growth of Manchester United’s support on a national and international scale during the 1950s and 1960s. Further to this, I demonstrate across the thesis that FC United supporters are also drawn from beyond the city of Manchester and some of my informants were not born or raised in Manchester. This is not to say that notions of locality and place are unimportant to ideas of community amongst football supporters generally and FC United supporters specifically. However, a purely functional and geographically deterministic account of supporter communities is insufficient and what is needed is to account for the complex and diverse ways in which football fans imagine, elicit and give meaning to ideas of community, in which notions of place and locality may be one important feature. To this end, in Chapter Three I set out how one important way in which community is elicited by FC United supporters is in relation to a shared set of anti-Glazer politics and look at how particular ideas of social class have been employed to express commonality with other FC United supporters and difference from a ‘new’ support at Old Trafford. On the other hand, Chapter Four focuses on how community is also elicited as a particular kind of political claim amongst FC United fans. Across Chapters Three, Four and, in particular, Six I look at how Manchester as a place is invoked, defined and imagined by FC United fans in relation
to particular forms of practice and perceived appropriate modes of behaviour and how this is both enacted in relation to and by supporters from outside of Manchester.

In the above statements I have described a shift in the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of community within the social sciences, but alongside such a theoretical shift there has been a change in the way in which social scientists have understood the relationship between community and the shifting socio-economic context. Vered Amit has described how ‘social analysts have repeatedly used the concept of community as a vehicle for interrogating the dialectic between social transformation and social cohesion’ (2002: 2). Following from this, Amit (2002: 2) suggests analysts have tried to understand the implications of processes of capitalist transformation, urbanization, industrialisation and globalisation for social affiliation through the notion of community. For many analysts such processes have often been understood as undermining social affiliation and therefore community, such that Rogaly and Taylor have noted ‘in Europe ... ‘the death of community’ has been an ongoing argument throughout the last century’ (2009: 15). Further to this, Rapport and Overing have argued:

For many social scientists, the problem of defining community is to be explained not by its situational qualities, however, but its anachronistic ones. Community is said to characterise a stage in social evolution which has now been superseded, and the problems of definition arise from the fact that what is seen as ‘community’ now is a residue or throwback to a mode of relating and interacting which was once the norm but has now all but been eclipsed by more modern notions of contractual relationships in complex societies (2000: 63-64).

However, Rapport and Overing suggest that despite such a gloomy prognosis on the continuing relevance of ‘community’ as an analytical concept ‘recent decades have seen an upsurge in ‘community consciousness’” (2000: 64). Indeed, for other anthropologists concerned with community, the concept itself continues to have relevance to many people because it provides a resource through which social transformation can be understood and responded to and through which new and continuing forms of social affiliation can be expressed (Amit 2002: 14; Dawson 2002: 21). Delanty has also argued along similar lines: ‘The persistence of community consists in its ability to communicate ways of belonging, especially in the context of an increasingly insecure world’ (2009: 152). Such debates over the continuing salience of community within processes of social transformation have a
particular relevance to English football. As will be discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four in more depth, English football has undergone considerable transformation in recent decades with a shift towards a free-market de-regulated system of club governance and an increasing transnationalisation of elite level English football clubs and, therefore, it is an interesting question as to whether and how community is employed by English football fans to express continued social affiliation and to respond to such changes. Chapter Four will particularly focus on how FC United fans have utilised the notion of community in response to the processes of social and economic transformation which have been manifest within football.

However, community is not just a debated term within the social sciences; it has also become an increasing feature of political discourse over recent decades. For instance Anthony Giddens reflected in the early 1990s that ‘on each side of the political spectrum today we see fear of social disintegration and a call for the revival of community’ (1994: 124). Calls for the ‘revival of community’ were influential in both the British New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton’s Democratic governments in the USA. In the United States Robert Putnam’s ‘Bowling Alone’ (2000) was particularly influential to this, as he argued that the social problems which afflicted American society were due to a decline in civic networks and trust and therefore what was necessary was to re-invent community through deliberate political action. In the British context, the attempt to re-invent community was central in New Labour’s Third Way governmental philosophy, through such schemes as the ‘New Deal for Communities’ where there was an attempt to hand power to the ‘community’ to solve their own social problems (Rogaly and Taylor 2009: 21). Nikolas Rose, from a Foucauldian perspective, has argued that such governmental communitarianism led to new technologies of social management – in an oft-cited passage he argued:

In the institution of community, a sector is brought into existence whose vectors and forces can be mobilised, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances. (Rose 1999: 176).

One area identified as having the power to ‘re-invent community’ by the New Labour government was football, through the use of ‘football in the community’ schemes aiming
to tackle social problems such as poor health, drug use and crime, carried out by professional football clubs (Tacon 2007: 1-3; Brown et al 2007: 12). These schemes then provide one area in which the impact of recent political discourses around community can be evaluated and understood. Chapter Five will look at the ‘football in the community’ initiatives carried out by FC United and their relationship to recent governmental discourses on community and the need for the ‘revival of community’.

I will now set out the outline of each of the chapters within the community section of the thesis to show how my analysis will proceed in more detail:

Chapter Three will look at the changing experience of attending football matches for FC United fans, from an increasing dissatisfaction with the experience of watching Manchester United during the 1990s to the much more positive experiences of watching FC United. First, I will explain the differing experience for FC United fans through changes in the social relationships they could have around watching football – where both family and friendship relationships were disrupted by increasingly expensive ticket prices, a scarcity of tickets and new restrictive security arrangements. Second, I will explain the fluctuating experience of match going for FC United fans through narratives describing a perceived lack of commonality with others in the crowd at Manchester United, with such a lack of commonality expressed through perceived differences of social class in particular. I then show how many of these fans experienced a sense of commonality, and indeed community, around watching FC United matches – a sense of community and commonality which was strongly rooted around a shared set of politics about the rightful ownership of Manchester United.

Chapter Four discusses how a moral claim emerged amongst locally based Manchester United fans during the 1990s that the club had a duty to the community in which it was based and the influence this had on the form FC United takes. I argue this moral claim was a response to the increased precariousness of the relationship that many Manchester United fans felt the club had to its locality. Such a sense of precariousness, I suggest, was the result of the exclusion of Mancunian support through the increased price and scarcity of tickets, a local and national discourse which questioned Manchester United fans’ legitimacy as Mancunians, and the Manchester United club hierarchy’s increased attempts to build the club into a ‘global brand’ within the ever more globalised and commercialised English Premier League and socio-economic system at large. I argue that the increasing
sense of Manchester United’s precarious relationship to its locale led on to FC United having a specifically localist agenda in terms of seeking to be of benefit to the ‘local community’.

Chapter Five analyses one of the principal ways in which FC United’s attempts to be of benefit to the local community is manifested – through the ‘football in the community’ initiatives carried out by the club. I explore the history of such initiatives, suggesting they have their genesis in attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to tackle problems specific to football but were transformed in scale and scope under New Labour’s ‘third-way’ governments which saw football as a fertile site for tackling social problems and, in so doing, rebuilding ‘community’. I describe how those in charge of the ‘football in the community’ initiatives at FC United share the belief that football can tackle particular social problems. Furthermore, I also look at how the ‘football in the community’ initiatives carried out by FC United interact with, and are part of, new de-regulatory forms of public sector governance. In relation to this, I discuss how FC United’s community football programme has become implicated in Manchester City Council’s economic and social regeneration plans.

Chapter Six focuses on the significance of ideas of place amongst FC United fans. In particular, I look at how an ‘imagination’ of Manchester as a city of radical protest and political action is mobilised by many FC United fans to make sense of, and provide justification for, the political action they have taken by setting up FC United. Further to this, I show how for some FC United fans the notion of Manchester as a ‘radical city’ is related to political action beyond the sphere of football. The chapter also discusses how the understanding of Manchester as a city of protest is related to fans of Manchester City FC (hereafter Manchester City) and Liverpool FC and their recent responses to changes of ownership at their respective clubs.

In the next section of this introduction I explore the final two chapters of the thesis, those focussing upon ‘politics’ and ‘activism’, and the particular debates that frame them, to further outline my argument within the thesis.
Politics and Football

In looking to explore the relationship between FC United and wider political ideas it is worth noting that amongst many social theorists, particularly those within a socialist or Marxist tradition, there has often been hostility towards the ideological messages communicated by sport and particularly football. These critiques tend to draw their inspiration from Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1997 [1944]) work on mass culture. Adorno and Horkheimer’s discussion focused on the then emerging mass-media forms of television, radio and cinema which they saw as part of a ‘culture industry’ which was central to the ideology of wage labour in capitalist society: ‘Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanised work process and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again’ (1997 [1944]: 137).

Furthermore, Adorno and Horkheimer saw mass-culture as ensuring compliance to the ruling capitalist ideology by ‘taming revolutionary and barbaric instincts’ (1997 [1944]: 152) amongst the proletariat. While this piece did not touch upon the role of sport within mass culture, Adorno later applied the same line of critique to sport as he had earlier to mass culture: ‘Modern sports, one will perhaps say, seek to restore to the body some of the functions of which the machine has deprived it. But they do so only in order to train men all the more inexorably to serve the machine. Hence sports belong to the realm of unfreedom, no matter where they are organized’ (1981 [1967]: 81). Vinnai (1973) applied the arguments of Adorno and Horkheimer directly to football. In doing so, Vinnai (1973: 36) argued that capitalist rationality permeated professional football, with players individuality sucked of them by technocratic managers whose sole goal was the achievement of success within a competitive market-place. Furthermore, he argued that football spectating was a fundamentally mystifying phenomenon which reinforces the ideology of wage labour, ‘The spectator offers no resistance, but allows himself to be overwhelmed. Since he has learnt at work to comply automatically with business rationality, to acquiesce passively in the demands of his superiors, he retreats in his leisure time likewise from any independent performance’ (Vinnai 1973: 39). Vinnai (1973: 95) suggested that football playing and spectating acted to prevent the overthrow of bourgeois society by providing a release from the alienating conditions of capitalism and was therefore a counter-revolutionary and de-politicising activity. Umberto Eco makes a similar claim about the de-politicising effects of sport fandom, suggesting people put their intellectual energies into talking about sport and in so doing vitiate their ability to bring about political change, ‘the person who chatters
about sport, if he didn’t do this, would at least realize he has possibilities of judgement, verbal aggressiveness, political competiveness to employ somehow. But sports chatter convinces him that this energy is expended to conclude something. Having allayed his doubt, sports fulfils its role of fake conscience’ (Eco 1986: 163). While Noam Chomsky argues that, within a political system that, he suggests, the mass of people have no ability to influence, sport fandom serves as a trivial space in which people invest their intellectual energies:

They might as well live in a fantasy world, and that’s in fact what they [sports fans] do. I’m sure they are using their common sense and intellectual skills, but in an area [sport fandom] which has no meaning and probably thrives because it has no meaning, as a displacement from the serious problems which one cannot influence and affect because the power happens to lie elsewhere. Now it seems to me that the same intellectual skill and capacity for understanding and for accumulating evidence and gaining information and thinking through problems could be used - would be used - under different systems of governance which involve popular participation in important decision-making, in areas that really matter to human life (Chomsky 1983: 23).

We see through these writers discussed above a common view of sport and sport fandom as an activity which helps to maintain the wage-labour and capitalist system by producing a false consciousness amongst the working class that, in turn, acts to de-politicise them and ensure their acceptance of the status-quo. However, the arguments made by these theorists about the relationship between sport, fandom and wider politics are largely assumed and made without recourse to primary evidence (Millward 2009: 16). FC United provides an interesting site for investigating empirically the relationship between football and wider politics and whether football fandom does indeed lead to de-politicisation or whether, in fact, football fandom could be a site in which political consciousness is raised. This is because FC United was formed in conscious political challenge to the effects of the current system of ownership and regulation within football, a system which, as will be argued in Chapter Two, reflects the wider realities of the contemporary capitalist system. Within Chapter Seven, I explore whether fans of FC United link support of the club to a wider critique of the contemporary capitalist system.
The time of my fieldwork, during 2009 and 2010, was a particularly interesting period in which to be asking questions about the relationship between football and matters of political consciousness and action. This period was one of global financial uncertainty and upheaval, shocks from the global banking crisis which emanated in 2007 continued to be felt and fears lingered over sovereign debt crises, and a mirror of these upheavals emerged within the sphere of football (King 2010: 880). During 2009/10 high profile crises of ownership and potential bankruptcy emerged at West Ham United and Portsmouth FC and fears over unsustainable debt dogged Manchester United and Liverpool FC and these dominated the back pages of national newspapers in much the way that global financial crisis dominated the front pages. Furthermore, these crises emerging within football could be directly linked to the wider crisis in the financial system. For example, West Ham United was majority owned via a holding company by Icelandic bank Straumaur, which collapsed in 2009 during the global banking crisis (Scott 2009). Manchester United’s already high level of debt was exposed by the failure of their main sponsor AiG, a financial security company which collapsed during 2009 (King 2010: 880-881). Anthony King, in his recent provocation on the impact of the financial crisis on football (King 2010), asks whether the recent credit crunch will lead to a regulatory shift within football away from the present neo-liberal, transnational model and back towards a Keynesian regulatory paradigm, concluding that a shift back to Keynesianism in football was unlikely but rather a system of ‘regulated transnationalism’ may emerge. My concern in this thesis is not the possible regulatory changes that the financial crisis may bring about in football per se, but rather the kind of supporter campaigning bought about by this moment of crisis within the game, and that will be the focus of Chapter Eight. In looking at the supporter campaigning that has arisen from this moment of perceived crisis within the game I assess what this may tell us about wider popular responses to the financial crisis. I now wish to set out how my argument in this section will be structured across its two chapters.

Chapter Seven considers the relationship between FC United and wider politics and political activism in depth. I begin by showing how a number of former radical leftist and socialist activists are involved at FC United and suggests reasons for this, before looking at competing understandings of the political value of FC United amongst its fans. I show how for some of these people FC United is an explicitly ‘left wing’ or ‘socialist’ football club and is seen as demonstrating a wider point about how things should be run and owned in society. However the chapter also demonstrates how other fans dispute such an
interpretation of FC United, arguing that FC United’s political value is restricted to the sphere of football. I will relate these disputes over the political value of FC United to the arguments I have described in this introduction regarding the relationship between football and political consciousness.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter in the thesis, looks at how senior figures at FC United, and others heavily involved in supporter campaigning, have, in response to financial uncertainty and crises of ownership within football, advocated supporters putting aside inter-club rivalries to attempt to change what they see as a mutually inequitable system of club ownership and governance. I argue that what is being advocated here is a form of ‘football consciousness’ analogous to Marxist understandings of class consciousness. However, I show that such a collective consciousness amongst fans of different clubs is difficult to achieve within football, given the uneven outcomes generated by the current de-regulated system of club ownership. I suggest that the difficulty of achieving such a collective consciousness within football has implications for the kind of collective political response which may be mobilised by the present financial crisis.
Chapter One: Methodological Context: Fanzines, Fieldwork and Anthropology

Introduction

The writing culture debates of the 1980s and early 1990s called into question the ways in which anthropologists *come* to know what they *claim* to know about the groups they study and the ways in which they represent this knowledge textually. In particular, it was deemed vital for anthropologists to become reflexive, to recognise themselves as positioned subjects within a particular cultural context and then to explore how this shaped the kind of knowledge their research generated, as well as the way in which this knowledge came to be inscribed as text. For example, Paul Rabinow argued that ‘the conditions of production of anthropology should be moved from the domain of gossip to that of knowledge’ (1986: 253). The debates also called into question the totalizing fantasies of anthropologists, questioning the idea that they could come to know and represent textually, whole, fully-bound cultures. As a result, anthropologists had to become reflexive about the limits of the claims they could make about the particular group(s) they worked with; as Clifford and Marcus (1986) argued, culture is never finite and therefore two anthropologists studying with the same group(s) could come to write about quite different things. Some twenty years on from their first airing, most of these debates continue to have resonance for many anthropologists, to which I am no exception. Therefore, in order to understand the arguments I wish to make with regards to FC United, it is important to first explore the ‘conditions of production of anthropology’ to borrow Rabinow’s phrase. In particular, I look within this chapter at how the way in which I came to research FC United and my personal characteristics affected the methodological choices I made, which in turn affect the kind of knowledge I came to have of the club. Furthermore, I wish to explore how the messy, non-geographically bound nature of FC United as a research ‘field’ led to the adoption of a particular methodological standpoint - one which does not privilege the face to face interactions of conventional ethnographic research over the multiple forms of textual representation, which quickly became key elements of my research. This is a methodological standpoint which, by definition, simultaneously both restricted and made possible the knowledge I came to have of FC United and in turn directs the way in which this knowledge has come to be inscribed as text.
I start this chapter by outlining how I came to begin a research project about FC United. In particular I look at the short-term research project (Poulton 2009) I carried out for the Centre of Research in Economic and Social Change (hereafter CRESC) which marked my first research involvement with FC United and which had a profound impact on shaping the methodological tools I utilised in the research. I suggest there were two methodological challenges that emerged out of this initial research. First, there was the problem of how to locate a concrete ‘field’ within which to carry out my research. I argue this is a general problem of applying the anthropological approach to football but a problem that is also amplified in the case of research about FC United. Second, I argue that my position as an outsider to those I carried out research with, as a non-supporter of FC United and as considerably younger in age than many of my initial contacts, presented a further challenge to the research. I then discuss a twin methodological strategy I adopted in response to these challenges. First I look at the strategy of being a volunteer which I adopted in response to the above mentioned concerns and discuss its strengths and limitations as an approach to anthropological research. I then look at my research of textual sources – fanzines and ‘e-zines’— and suggest that such textual sources are an intrinsic feature of the ‘field’ and should not be treated as ‘secondary’, but also, I argue, to treat these texts as primary to the endeavour of fieldwork creates a sense of dissonance with the way in which the anthropological project has historically been conceived.

Research Conception and Beginnings

My initial motivation for undertaking from September 2008 an anthropological PhD research project about English football fans was my experience as an undergraduate social anthropology student at the University of Manchester. Sport – my lifelong passion and interest – was conspicuous only by its absence within the degree programme. At the same time I had become enthused by the application of anthropology’s methodological, conceptual and theoretical tools to the study of British society – in particular within the department where I was studying this was exemplified in the work of Sarah Green (1997),

Having begun the PhD research I became aware of the work of Will Rollason (2008) and Valentina Bonifacio (2009), recent University of Manchester PhD students who had looked at the playing of football in Papua New Guinea and in indigenous communities in Paraguay respectively.
Jeanette Edwards (2000), Gillian Evans (2006) and Sharon Macdonald (1997). It seemed to me at the time that these anthropological ‘tools’ could be productively utilised to study the effects on football fans’ ‘identity’, which I broadly conceived at the time as being related to notions of class, gender, race and locality, of sizeable changes that had occurred within the political economy of English football over recent decades. These were changes that I was aware of through my own experiences as a football supporter. When I began the PhD research I quickly discovered an ethnographic tradition within the sociology of football – including the work of Gary Armstrong (1998), Richard Giulianotti (see: 1995 for an overview of his ethnographic work), Anthony King (2002, 2003) and Gary Robson (2000). However most of this research had taken place more than a decade ago and I felt there was still a need for an up to date ethnographic account of English football supporters, although I was unsure for much of that preparatory year where and with which clubs’ supporters I wished to base the research.

**CRESC Project**

In the summer of 2009 when I was beginning to write a proposal to carry out a year’s fieldwork commencing that October, I was offered a small grant by CRESC to carry out two months research. The research would be on the themes I had been working on within the PhD and would lead onto a working paper (Poulton 2009) and a presentation to other CRESC researchers. The direction I was given for the research by those supervising this project was methodologically prescriptive. They asked that I carry out four semi-structured interviews and two pieces of participant observation on which I would base the working paper and presentation. This project necessitated me making a choice of what group of football fans I wished to carry out the particular piece of research with. I chose FC United and this choice was affected by several factors. First, and most practically, was the issue of location, I was living in Manchester and had no means of independent transport and therefore it seemed sensible to pursue a fan grouping within Manchester. Second, as a football fan and a fan loosely interested in the ‘politics’ surrounding fandom I had followed through newspaper articles and TV reports the formation of FC United in 2005 and so had a longstanding curiosity around the club. Third up to that point I had been heavily influenced by Anthony King’s (2002, 2003) academic work with Manchester United fans and I was

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9 Evans (2006: 124-125) work does briefly address football, when she looks at the importance of competency at playing football amongst male children in Bermondsey where she conducted her research.
interested in the link between what was going on now at FC United and the issues he had outlined amongst fans at Manchester United at the time of his research. Fourth, I had read Adam Brown’s two journal articles (2007, 2008) on the formation of FC United and saw there was potential for further research.

With no pre-existing personal contacts amongst FC United fans, I adopted a variety of means to find willing interviewees for the CRESC research. I was lucky to be given contact details for two FC United fans through my supervisor, Jeanette Edwards, which I followed up and successfully interviewed. I also contacted the editor of the FC United fanzine Under the Boardwalk (hereafter UTB) through the publications website and the editor kindly agreed to give me an interview. Finally I contacted Adam Brown, who as both an FC United board member and a sociologist of sport I saw as a potential key ‘gatekeeper’, and he kindly contacted a large number of fans (around 20) on my behalf asking for an interview. Around five or six replied indicating a willingness to be interviewed – unfortunately due to the time restrictions involved with the CRESC research project I was only able to interview two of them. ¹⁰ These interviews, which were semi-structured and lasted between an hour and two and a half hours, made me believe that there was something profoundly interesting about FC United and worth researching in greater depth. In particular I had gone to the interviews with a series of questions about the impact of all-seater stadiums, the changing nature of crowds at Manchester United matches and the importance of ‘atmosphere’ at Manchester United and FC United, and while it appeared these were important issues I had also been bombarded with responses that related to ideas of community, locality and what it meant to be a Mancunian which I had not been prepared for at all. Furthermore at the interview with the fanzine editor he kindly gave to me a complete back issue set of UTB and reading through these fanzines I was struck by the way in which ideas and arguments that I had come across for the first time during these interviews circulated within the fanzine. However if I was now convinced that FC United was interesting and worth researching in much greater depth following the CRESC project, I had also become aware of a number of methodological problems which I had not

¹⁰ Adam was senior research fellow at the now defunct Institute for Popular Culture at the Manchester Metropolitan University and is now a researcher at Substance, a Manchester based research co-operative specialising in sport, community engagement, youth services and issues of social exclusion (see: http://www.substance.coop/).
considered previously and needed to address in order to carry out a successful ‘fieldwork’ year and it is to these methodological issues I now turn.

**Problems of Methodology**

The first problem was that of locating the ‘field’ in which my one year of fieldwork – a necessary component of a social anthropology PhD – would take place. Notions of the geographically bound single field-site in which the anthropologist could come to know a spatially fixed culture have been thoroughly critiqued through the writing culture debates, for example James Clifford argued such approaches hid ‘the wider global world of intercultural import-export in which the ethnographic account is always already enmeshed’ (1997: 23). Proponents of these concerns about how intensive single site fieldwork obscures relations that stretch beyond the geographically local suggested that anthropologists move towards multi-sited ethnography in order to capture the ‘circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space’ (Marcus 1995: 96). In response to these proposals for multi-sited research Matei Candea argues that there was ‘a problematic reconfiguration of holism implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the multi-sited research sensibility – a suggestion that bursting out of our field sites will enable us to provide an account of a totality out there’ (2007: 169) and to this end he suggests intensive study of a single geographical-site remains a productive anthropological endeavour if we appreciate that that site is by definition incomplete and fractured and marked by people’s movement through and beyond it.

FC United and its supporters, and football clubs and their supporters more generally, as objects of anthropological enquiry sit uncomfortably between these ideas of multi-sitedness and single-sited research and at times appear to defy the idea of being sited altogether. As I commented earlier, notions of locality and community were everywhere in my early interviews but it is not self-evident where FC United was located. Professional football by its very nature is an ephemeral ritual; clubs play matches a certain number of Saturdays and weekday evenings within a given year which brings supporters together in communion at these times (whether physically at the match or in more dispersed manners through television, radio and internet broadcasts) but the rest of the time football introjections within supporters’ lives and within the city are more dispersed and diffuse – discussions in pubs and workplaces, the wearing of replica shirts of favourite teams, to choose two examples. In the case of FC United this is exacerbated further, as Andy Walsh,
the FC United general manager, commented to me ‘at the moment we play games at Gigg lane [in Bury], we have community facilities that we hire out in the community but nowhere we can call our own, we have an office in a mill on the fifth floor in Ancoats, so we’re a bit disjointed’ (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010). So while FC United fans often spoke to me about the importance of Mancunianess in those early interviews, FC United’s actual physical marks on the city of Manchester are extremely limited. Furthermore, there was no particular geographically defined area of the city in which FC United supporters were located, as the map below, which I produced from a list of season ticket holders’ postcodes, shows:

Figure 1: FC United Season Ticket Holders 2010/11 by Postcode Area

11 Ancoats is a district just to the north of Manchester city centre.

12 Thanks to Adam Brown, the FC United board and FC United office volunteers for allowing me the data of Season Ticket holders postcodes on which this map is based. The data given to me was of postcodes only with name and address details blanked out. Thanks to Michael Atkins for his help with producing the map.
While the areas of Chorlton, Prestwich, Stretford and Denton have between 25 and 32 FC United season ticketholders living within them, this represents an insignificant amount relative to the size of the general population. Further to this, FC United enjoys significant support from beyond Manchester, with 41% of season ticket holder living in the north-west beyond Manchester and 15% of season ticket holders living outside the north-west of England. The geographically diffuse nature of supporters, along with their relatively small number posed a clear research challenge. If football plays an ephemeral part in supporters lives - they also have jobs, families and friends outside of supporting their team, which also added to the complexity of this challenge - how was I to situate myself (in terms of where I chose to live during research and where I looked to socialise with informants) in order to anthropologically apprehend FC United and capture this ‘diffuseness’ in a meaningful research project? How in such a context was I to make meaningful the classic anthropological methodological truisms of the researcher ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz 2001: 107)? As Vered Amit has argued ‘episodic, occasional, partial and ephemeral social inks pose particular challenges for ethnographic fieldwork’ (2000: 14-15).

Further to this, as I noted earlier, I had been given a set of FC United fanzines from one of my interviewees and had been struck by the way the ideas my interviewees spoke to me about circulated within the fanzine. Additionally, in my early email correspondence with Adam Brown he recommended I read a fan-written book, Undividable Glow, about FC United by fanzine writer Robert Brady in order to understand the relationship between FC United and Manchester United as FC United supporters perceive it. During the interviews people asked me whether I had visited the FC United ‘e-zine’ forum and talked to me about this aspect of the club. It seemed to me that these multiple texts were manifestly important to the cultural context in which I wanted to research but I felt unsure as to the extent to which analysing such textual sources could be considered ‘anthropology’.

The problem of ‘diffuseness’ and the difficulty of situating myself in relation to FC United was exacerbated by two factors. First, my outsider status to FC United and, second, the way in which I had entered the ‘field’ during the CRESC project. Several ethnographic

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13 A season ticket is a single ticket purchased from a specific football club at the beginning of a football season for a set price which entitles the owner to entrance at all home league matches for that particular club. While season ticket holders do not account for all of a team’s supporters, others may pay at the ground for a particular match, I think it serves as a useful proxy through which to measure a team’s most-committed support in given areas – particularly where cost does not act as a barrier to purchase as in the case of FC United season tickets which cost £90 minimum.
projects with football supporters have been carried out by scholars who share support of that particular team with those they wish to research (Armstrong 1998; Giulianotti 1995; Robson 2000) and therefore utilise those pre-existing ties they have with fellow supporters to carry out their research. As a West Ham United FC (hereafter West Ham United) supporter this was not the case for me when looking to conduct research with FC United fans. Therefore, I looked to the work of Anthony King (2002) who had conducted ethnographic research with Manchester United fans with whom he had no prior contacts. His approach had been to contact the editors of two Manchester United fanzines and offer to provide assistance with the publications as a way to gain access to a wider network of supporters, which he did by helping out with the United We Stand (hereafter UWS) fanzine and then travelling to both domestic and European away games on coaches organised by the fanzines (King 2002: 212-213).\(^{14}\) This was an approach I attempted to replicate by contacting the editor of UTB for the CRESC project and while we had an extremely cordial and lengthy interview (two and a half hours) and I subsequently met up with him at the first couple of games I attended, the fanzine’s informal and sporadic production (only two issues were produced during the time of my research) meant there simply was little scope for me to help out with the fanzine and this quickly became a research dead-end.

Additionally the approach I had used for making contacts to fulfil the research brief of the CRESC project, that of asking people to carry out an informal interview with me, tended to proscribe against the long-term open ended social interactions on which so much anthropological knowledge is based. This is because when approaching people in this way the interview comes to define the interviewer’s social relationship to the interviewee. I had asked my initial interviewees the questions to which I needed answers and they had given me full and frank responses, so why when we had no pre-existing relationship to one another would we need to continue seeing each other? Furthermore this problem of building lasting ‘deeper’ social relations with FC United fans was exacerbated by the difference in age between me and the initial contacts I made. At the time of the CRESC project I had just turned 22, my initial interviewees varied in age between early 40s and late 50s. Informal non-structured sociality across this kind of age gap was not something I was used to and it was not something I subjectively considered ‘normal’ and this contributed to my difficulty in building ‘deeper’ social relations with those initial contacts I had made. A final issue was the kinds of people I wanted to get to know at FC United, I was

\(^{14}\) Fanzines will be dealt with in greater depth later in this chapter.
keen to make contact and get to know the ‘leaders’ but most of these people were extremely busy, holding full-time jobs as well as dedicating large amounts of free time to the running of FC United and a loose notion of ‘deep hanging out’ did not seem especially useful to making and maintaining these kinds of contacts. ¹⁵

The end of the CRESC research project in September 2009 coincided with the submission of my research proposal and internal viva, which were successfully passed. This meant I had been cleared to go to the ‘field’, although as revealed above I was increasingly unsure of what the ‘field’ meant and whatever it did mean, how I went about ethnographically understanding it felt increasingly ambiguous. This was an ambiguity which was heightened in a context where ‘going to the field’ meant staying in exactly the same city as I had been living for the last four years. In response to these concerns I adopted a twin methodological strategy to ‘construct the field’ (Amit 2000) in which my ethnographic research would take place. First, this strategy involved in the short-term looking to take on a volunteer role within FC United. Second, and in the longer-term, it involved starting to take seriously the multiple texts within the FC United context. It is to these two methodological strategies that I now turn.

Volunteering

My decision to become a volunteer with FC United was not motivated by methodological concerns alone. During the interviews for the CRESC project, several of the interviewees had mentioned the ‘empowering’ nature of being able to help with the voluntary running of the club and I saw this as something unique and interesting about FC United and worth researching in greater depth. Additional to this, several of the interviewees had spoken at length, and with considerable pride, about the ‘community work’ that FC United carried out and again I was interested to gain an insight into this. So I used Adam Brown, who was the board member responsible for community work at FC United, as a gatekeeper - asking him to help me become involved as a volunteer with the community work and he put me in contact with Robin Pye, the Community and Education manager at FC United. From there I helped out with a variety of tasks over the following year. These included writing articles

¹⁵ By leaders I broadly conceived that to mean at the time board members, those involved in club management and above all club general manager Andy Walsh – who I was familiar with from newspaper reports about FC United and from Anthony King’s work (2002, 2003) where he is interviewed as a key figure in Manchester United supporter activist politics of the 1990s.
and taking photos at community activities for publication on the FC United website, helping out and assisting with the organisation of events and tournaments, assisting with the monitoring and evaluation of community work and writing grant applications to get funding for further community work. I now wish to look at how this volunteering addressed the methodological concerns I raised above.

Principally, volunteering overcame many of the concerns I had with my outsider status at FC United. By giving me a defined role, that of a volunteer, it both legitimised and structured my presence at FC United as those fans I came into contact with understood my regular presence around FC United as both a volunteer and researcher. It gave me the kind of repeated, informal, contact with fans that had seemed so difficult to establish through the means of interviewing during the CRESC research. It also helped overcome the problem of making contacts as a non-FC United fan, as a part of being a volunteer and a researcher I was introduced to many different people within FC United. Those I got to know well through volunteering with the community work were older than me by a similar number of years to those I had met during the CRESC project. However, with the volunteering playing a structuring role within our sociality – and therefore subjectively ‘normalising’ the relations I had with these people - it allowed me to build ‘deep’ social relations with those informants. The volunteering also provided structure to my year long ‘field’ research – I would spend on average between two and three days a week in this way and it continued through the summer when no football matches were being played – and concretised a ‘site’ where research could take place. Furthermore volunteering allowed me regular access to three key figures at FC United, Robin Pye, Adam Brown and Andy Walsh, and created reciprocal relations between me and these people which I was able to utilise at the end of the research to carry out in-depth interviews – as Andy Walsh commented when I thanked him for giving the time for an interview ‘you deserve it for all the work you have put in’ (fieldnotes: 3/12/2010).  

Furthermore the year I had spent researching, and the ‘deep’ social relations I had built up, meant I asked a very different set of questions in my final interviews than I had in my CRESC research. These questions both responded to issues that had arisen in the last year and utilised the pre-existing reciprocal relations I had built

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16 Because of their key importance within FC United, I considered pseudonyms inappropriate when writing about these three people and therefore obtained signed consent to use their real names within the thesis. All other informants referred to in the thesis have been given pseudonyms.
up with these interviewees to ask about relatively more personal and contentious matters, such as personal political views and their relation to FC United.

However while there were a great many advantages to becoming a volunteer as a research strategy, it also created limitations to the research. As Candea (2007: 173) notes no researcher can be ubiquitous and when we make choices that always curtails other research possibilities. From the outset I realised that if I was going to be a volunteer I needed to be a ‘good’ volunteer, by that I mean conscientious and fully committed to whatever I was expected to assist with, otherwise I would be betraying inter-personal relationships and the access and help I had been give by various people at FC United. Furthermore I felt that in the long-run by being a committed volunteer it would be reciprocated in terms of information given and interviews granted. However this commitment to volunteering directed strongly my match day routine at FC United and the experiences I had that were associated with attending games at FC United. Before every home Saturday game I helped organise and run ‘community cohesion’ football tournaments for different groups of young people from Greater Manchester. This involved getting to Bury for 12PM, helping with the tournament until 2.30PM and then heading to the ground to watch the match with other volunteers and some of the community groups who had taken part in the tournaments. Clearly, this was not a ‘typical’ match-day experience for FC United fans and it also prevented me from taking part in other events associated with the match-day, such as pre-match drinking in pubs or attending the social event ‘Course you can Malcolm’.  

Furthermore, by using volunteering as a strategy for meeting people it meant I was more likely to get to know people who were very committed to FC United rather than more casual fans and this had the potential to determine what I came to know about FC United. However this concern was somewhat ameliorated by meeting other FC United fans away from games. Having lived in Manchester for several years, I knew many people who were familiar with FC United and some of them introduced me to people they thought would be interesting for me to meet for my research. For example a trip to the pub with friends led to me being introduced to an FC United fan who had gone regularly in the first couple of seasons and now only attended sporadically. This led to several interesting hours of conversation and I subsequently talked with him on

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17 This is a pre-match ‘club-night’ organised by volunteers in a function room at Gigg Lane in Bury. Independently sourced beer and food is sold and Mancunian bands, musicians, poets and performers perform for free.
several more occasions. Further to this, reading of the fanzines and ‘e-zine’ forum also opened me up to different viewpoints within FC United and it is to explaining and analysing these as a methodological tool that I now turn

Fanzines and ‘E-zines’

I begin this section by providing a brief overview of the historical genesis of fanzines and ‘e-zines’ and the relationship between the two mediums. I then look at the different fanzines I researched, explaining the background to each one and why and how I went about researching them, before doing the same for the ‘e-zine’ internet forum. Finally I present a discussion of the implications of using these types of textual sources within an anthropological study.

Peter Millward (2008: 299-300) suggests the first fanzine appeared in the early 1970s, ‘Foul’ an amateur publication produced by a group of Cambridge Graduates which spoofed the style and content of conventional football publications at the time such as ‘Shoot’ and ‘Goal’. As Richard Haynes (1995: 62) and Anthony King (2002: 172) reveal, the explosion in number of fanzines, that is fan written and produced magazines, began following a series of disasters in 1985 that led to a number of fans dying while attending English football matches and then intensified during the rapid changes to the political economy of English football in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So in January 1988 there were 22 different fanzines, by January 1989 there were 215 and by January 1992 they were 600 different fanzines within English football (Haynes 1995: 62). The fanzines acted as a medium through which fans could discuss and, sometimes, contest changes occurring within the political economy of football and attempt to change dominant representations of fans in this era as ‘hooligans’ (Haynes 1995: 146-147; Jary et al 1991: 585,587; Taylor 2008: 371). Most of these fanzines were specific to supporters of a particular club, although there were a small number of fanzines such as *When Saturday Comes* that catered for fans of all clubs, and in these early years the fanzine market was characterised by many different fanzines rapidly entering the market and then ceasing publication (King 2002: 6). It seems that following

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18 During my time researching FC United I never heard anyone refer to the unofficial FC United internet forum as an ‘e-zine’, however I take the term from the work of Peter Millward (2008) as I believe it has a useful analytic purpose of calling attention to the relationship between traditional fanzines and new internet based modes of fan discussion.

19 Both these disasters and the changes in the political economy of English football will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.
this initial boom of fanzine publishing in which the market was highly volatile, established fanzines emerged from the early 1990s onwards at many clubs and the production of these fanzines became increasingly professional. However as Millward (2008: 302) reveals, the popularity of fanzines has waned since the early 1990s partly due to the rise and proliferation of e-zines. E-zines are internet forums, generally specific to particular clubs supporters but there also some for all supporters, where fans can discuss and debate issues which they subjectively consider important. Unlike fanzines they allow supporters to instantly comment, and read other supporters’ opinions, on a given topic rather than wait for the publication of a particular fanzine. Furthermore, unlike fanzine content which is controlled by an editor who has limited space in which to publish fan views, internet forums allow any fan with access to the internet to publish their view to be read by other supporters. I will now look at the different fanzines and e-zines I used during my research.

As I discussed earlier the first fanzine I came across was UTB, having contacted the editor asking for an interview. UTB was the original FC United fanzine with the first issue being produced and sold in the opening months of the 2005/06 season. One of the writers of UTB, Dave, told me how having been a long-term reader, but never writer, of the Manchester United fanzines Red Issue and UWS he felt ‘empowered’ to start writing for UTB as it was a ‘blank page’. UTB, significantly, is positioned very differently to most clubs fanzines which have historically often taken an oppositional stance to those running their club (Haynes 1995: 63) – this kind of stance makes less sense within a member-owned democratically controlled club - as the editor of UTB commented to me ‘it’s difficult for us to criticise the structure of the club, if not impossible, certainly it would be very churlish for us to do so seeing as we’re fan owned’ (‘Wolfie’, interview: 17/8/ 2009). The fanzine also contains a lot of articles that are not about football but rather about music, Mancunian culture and history and a host of other topics. As the editor of the fanzine reflected to me ‘one of the jokes we have about the fanzine is occasionally they’ll be an article about football ... there

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20 Forums normally have moderators who may remove posts that are offensive (racist, homophobic, threatening) or libellous but they do not normally edit for reasons of quality or brevity in the way that a fanzine editor does.

21 Wolfie is the pen-name that the editor of UTB writes under.
seem to be a lot of 30 and 40 somethings who are angry with the world [writing for the fanzine]’ (‘Wolfie’, interview: 17/8/2009).  

The second FC United fanzine is *a fine lung*, which has a blog (www.afinelung.com) attached to it. This fanzine first appeared in the season before I began my research and I became aware of *a fine lung* from my discussions with the editor of UTB who spoke in positive terms about it. During my time researching two copies of the fanzine were produced which I purchased at games. I also read the blog, which was updated on an irregular basis, during my research period. A large number of the writers for *a fine lung*, unlike the bulk of the original writers for UTB, are former or present writers of the Manchester United fanzines *UWS* and *Red Issue* (Anon: 2010). The money raised from the sale of the fanzine is put towards the development fund which is to be used to help finance the building of FC United’s own ground; again this kind of relationship between a fanzine and the club which the writers support is not usual at privately owned clubs.  

As with UTB much of the fanzine is taken up by articles that are not directly about football, as the ‘About a fine lung’ section of the website explains ‘You will find within the pages of both the paper and electronic versions an unapologetic love of Manchester, music and pubs’ (Anon, *a fine lung*: undated). Furthermore *a fine lung* has a clear political bent and can be seen as a socialist football fanzine, many of the articles within the fanzine and on the blog explicitly link FC United to wider socialist politics, and as the website explains: ‘This is an open forum for writers to express their views. If your writing is in keeping with the broad socialist principles that have guided *a fine lung* to this point then you are welcome to send stuff in’ (ibid).

While I read both these fanzines and the blog throughout the research period, I also carried out a systematic analysis of the fanzines during the summer of 2010, a couple of months before my ‘fieldwork’ year drew to a close with final interviews. I went though each fanzine or blog article in turn, drawing out points from articles that I subjectively considered

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22 The age of the writers is interesting; Millward (2008: 301) cites a survey (Bucke: 1988) in the late 1980s which found that 80% of writers were younger than 30 years old, the age of the writers given by the editor of UTB could indicate the writing of fanzines being restricted to a particular generation.

23 As one writer of the fanzine colourfully put it ‘the profits will go towards the building of a football ground which will symbolise an unyielding resistance to the Glazer family, who unopposed by any of the relevant authorities, were allowed to pillage Manchester United’s heritage and destroy our beloved club in 2005. Fuck them and fuck their families.’ (Anon, *a fine lung*: undated)
relevant and placing them within a word document in a table for each fanzine issue or blog article. What I noted down from each fanzine or blog article as relevant was based on the experiences I had had over that last year researching FC United, whole articles were ignored where the content did not seem to relate in anyway to the other experiences I had had around FC United. As such my wider experiences at FC United, as a volunteer, at matches and talking to different supporters, shaped and constituted the way in which I read and analysed the different texts. Furthermore the reading of these texts also shaped the way in which I conducted my final interviews, so for example the stress on socialist politics within the pages of *a fine lung* made me ask more questions about the relationship between support for FC United and people’s wider politics. Of course this interest in the socialist politics expressed in *a fine lung* was informed by having met some FC United fans prior to that who had a background in formal socialist politics. What is revealed here is the way in which my personal social relations and my reading of texts within the FC United ‘cultural field’ mutually constituted one another and my analysis and understanding of either cannot be separated from the other.

Since the late 1980s there have been three main Manchester United fanzines – *Red News* which began in 1987, *Red Issue* that was first printed in 1988 and *UWS* which was founded in 1989. FC United was formed out of discussions amongst *Red Issue* staff members and the original steering committee contained representatives from all three of these fanzines. In my initial interviews several people told me about how they had been long-time readers of *Red Issue* and *UWS* but no one mentioned *Red News*. Further to this both *Red Issue* and *UWS* are widely sold in newsagents within Manchester while I have never seen *Red News* on sale within newsagents in my time living in the city. So from the time of my CRESC project through to the end of my ‘fieldwork’ I bought the monthly copies of *Red Issue* and *UWS* but did not ever purchase a copy of *Red News*. *Red Issue* has maintained a positive and supportive relationship with FC United fans since 2005; the fanzine is sold at home FC United games, a column is regularly given to publicising FC United’s upcoming fixtures and related news, and long term columnist ‘Life of Smiley’ writes in a *fine lung* as well as *Red Issue*. *UWS* has endured a slightly more tempestuous relationship with FC United supporters. While Andy Mitten, the fanzine’s long-time editor, has offered a consistently

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24 Although, the *Red Issue* columnist Mick Hume – a journalist who also writes in *The Times* and is editor at large of *spiked online* (http://spiked-online.com/) - has written articles which are critical of FC United.
supportive line towards FC United in his editorials, *UWS* printed an article in 2007 that was heavily critical of FC United saying of its supporters ‘The Glazers were a godsend to these people as it allowed them a bigger stage and the excuse most had been looking for to set up their own little thing’ (Andy Hall, *UWS*: 2007). This article received a robust response within the pages of *UTB* (Ogden-Street: 2008) suggesting that *UWS* had declined in quality since its time as a key part of the formation of IMUSA in the 1990s. While this dispute is indicative of a view more widely held amongst FC United supporters that *UWS* ‘had gone downhill’ and has declined in quality relative to *Red Issue*, it remains the case that I heard discussions of articles printed in both fanzines and saw both fanzines being read around FC United games during my time carrying out research.

It is worth noting here an important point about FC United supporters’ relationship to Manchester United. Most FC United supporters continue to see themselves as Manchester United supporters but in a situation where they do not wish to give money to the Glazer ownership of the club, they see support of FC United as the best mode of manifesting this support. For instance Sarah told me ‘I have taken a particular course in following [Manchester] United, which involves being at FC United’ (interview: 3/8/2009). Furthermore, most supporters are keen that the club is perceived as opposed to the Glazer ownership and the wider commercialisation of the club and explicitly not anti-Manchester United. This continued support is expressed in the widely used phrase ‘two Uniteds but the soul is one’ amongst fans and through support of the team when Manchester United fixtures are televised. Supporters’ songs at matches also refer to this continuing relationship with Manchester United, for example:

- Won’t pay Glazer, work for Sky
- Still sing City’s gonna die,
- Two Uniteds but the soul is one,
- As the Busby Babes carry on (carry on).\(^{26}\)

‘City’ here refers to Manchester City and this line of the song references a continuing antipathy amongst FC United fans towards Manchester United’s traditional rival. ‘Busby

\(^{25}\) Andy Mitten’s younger brother Joz Mitten played for FC United in their inaugural season. His great-uncle Charlie Mitten played for Manchester United between 1946 and 1950.

\(^{26}\) Sung to the tune of *Spirit in the Sky*
Babes’ is a common term used to refer to the successful Manchester United teams of the 1950s and 1960s managed by Sir Matt Busby, particularly the team leading up to the 1958 Munich air crash in which eight Manchester United players were killed. This line in the song serves to position FC United as a continuation of Manchester United’s history. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that Manchester United fanzines continue to be widely read among FC United’s support.  

During the autumn of 2010 I carried out an analysis of the issues of UWS and Red Issue that I had purchased during my ‘fieldwork’ in much the same manner as I described above for my analysis of UTB and a fine lung. At that stage I had no plan to carry out a systematic analysis of back issues of UWS and Red Issue. However responses to my final interviews made me decide that such an analysis was a necessary component of understanding the research that I had undertaken, for example in response to a question about what had made the formation of FC United possible, Andy Walsh replied ‘I think the biggest factor was the quality of the fanzines and the fan organisations at [Manchester] United, so the fanzines had always had an intelligent approach to football, it wasn’t just about having a bitch about players or the manager, there was always a very strong element in all of the major fanzines’ (interview: 3/12/2010). While Dean, a ‘regular’ supporter of FC United, when asked what had influenced his views prior to 2005 on the way football clubs should owned and run, replied without hesitation ‘Red Issue’ (interview: 10/12/2010). In order to carry out an analysis of these back issue fanzines I borrowed a large set from my supervisor, Peter Millward, who owned a large number of Red Issue dating back to 1988 and a similar sized set of UWS from 1993 onwards. While the set was not complete, even after supplementing it by buying further copies of the fanzines through EBay, there were sufficient copies from every season from 1988 onwards to build up a clear understanding of the way in which arguments and ideas had built up and developed over the period. The analysis took up the entirety of January 2011, immediately after I had finished interviewing and volunteering with FC United and was no longer involved in face to face research, and required the reading of 1000s of pages of texts. There were many different and intellectually interesting themes running through the pages of the fanzines but I only...

27 The implications of this continued support for Manchester United, and expressions of rivalry with Manchester City, will be fleshed out in greater depth in Chapter Six and, particularly, Chapter Eight.

28 I use the term regular here, simply to distinguish Dean who holds no particular role within FC United from people such as Andy Walsh who hold formal roles within FC United.
pursued and noted down those parts that related to ideas and arguments that I had come across during the year of research I had carried out. What also became clear from reading the back-issue was the way in which the debates and opinions contained within the pages of the fanzines had shaped the contexts of my research, the mutually constituting relationship between texts and lived social relations within my ‘fieldwork’ became clear. For example, through reading the fanzines I could see how over the preceding years ideas of Manchester United ignoring its ‘communities’ had come to shape the context of ‘community work’ at FC United in which I had conducted so much of my research. Of course I was only interested in those particular ideas within the fanzines because of the research I had been conducting over the previous year.

The ‘e-zine’ research began from the time of the CRESC project, where a couple of the interviewees asked me whether I had been on the forum and I began viewing the forum from then onwards and throughout the research. The FC United forum is an unofficial internet discussion space, where supporters of FC United, and supporters of other clubs if they so wish, can discuss and debate issues they subjectively consider important relating to FC United. There is also an ‘off-topic’ forum where users discuss issues that are not related to FC United (politics, music and other sports for example). During the research period I noted down and recorded discussions which were related to issues that were becoming noticeable and interesting within my ‘fieldwork’. Furthermore newspaper articles, book recommendations and TV programme links related to FC United and wider issues in football were often posted up and I used these to guide my reading and watching habits during the ‘fieldwork’ period. It was noted to me several times by informants that the forum was not ‘representative’ and was not therefore a good place to conduct research about FC United. It is also true that several of my informants did not use the forum and those in positions of leadership at FC United, in particular the general manager and board members, do not express opinions on contentious matters on the online forum. Yet in my experience the opinions expressed on the forum were not, as a general rule, out of line with those I heard elsewhere during my ‘fieldwork’. In any case I would argue that ‘representativeness’, certainly in terms of the statistical implications of the term, is not something anthropologists should aim towards. Rather the task is to apprehend the conceptual tools, idioms and tropes that informants within a given cultural context use to make sense of their lived reality.

29 The forum is ‘unofficial’ because the club is not involved with the running of it.
The literary culture I have discussed in this section is intrinsic to FC United. The texts do not merely act to ‘represent’ the lived culture which I research through conventional participant observation means, but rather they both represent and constitute lived reality simultaneously, they are both a repository of significant cultural meaning and a creator of cultural meaning. They are not a secondary source of information but are a vital part of the research ‘field’. In the absence of a clear geographically defined locale in which FC United exists they act as dispersed forms of sociality, textual means through which people engage with one another. However to treat texts in this way creates a sense of unease with the way in which the anthropological project has historically been conceived. Anthropology as a discipline has often been defined by a methodology of intensive long-term participant observation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 1; Moore 2004: 74), certainly British social anthropology has long been influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski’s famous exhortation for anthropologists to ‘come off the verandah’ and study the groups they want to research up close. As James Clifford (1997: 63) has argued this disciplinary self-definition has political consequences, as anthropology uses its commitment to long-term participant observation as a pre-requisite to research as a way of marking disciplinary boundaries from subjects such as cultural studies, sociology and media studies to justify funding streams and academic positions – a process of self justification that is set to intensify within the British context with ongoing public funding cuts and possible rationalisation.30 For my own part, conducting the research with textual sources often created a sense of unease – my early field notes often record feeling of guilt and of not being a ‘proper’ anthropologist when days were spent reading fanzines or internet forums rather than out in the ‘field’ (wherever that might have been) it was as if I had taken anthropology back on to the verandah. Clifford (1997: 62-63) discusses the work of Susan Harding (1987, 1990, 1993) who in her study of a fundamentalist church combined traditional participant observation, cultural criticism and media and discourse analysis. He reveals how her claim to an ‘anthropologist’ identity was predicated on having lived with an evangelical Christian family and therefore ‘entered the field’ but ‘while it certainly helped define her hybrid project as anthropological, it was not the privileged site of interactive depth or initiation’ (Clifford 1997: 63). My own claim to the identity of an ‘anthropologist’ would be structured somewhat similarly, that it was only because of the volunteering, the interviewing and the attending matches, the

30 See also: Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 2) for a similar argument to the one made by Clifford (1997: 63).
being out there in the ‘field’, that I could make sense of the textual representations in the way I have. Of course, this claim to an ‘anthropologist’ identity cannot escape the politics of the need for such claim-making – that is as someone writing for an anthropology PhD it is necessary that I can claim such an identity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has set out much of the contextual background which shaped the knowledge I came to have of FC United through my research and therefore the arguments I am able to make in this thesis. I have described how the amorphous nature of FC United (and football clubs more generally), combined with my positioning as an outsider to FC United and as considerably younger in age than my initial informants, presented me with an initial difficulty in locating a clear ‘field’ in which to carry out the ethnographic ‘fieldwork’. I showed how the methodological strategy I adopted was an attempt to make coherent, and therefore into a meaningful research project, what was ‘diffuse’ and ‘messy’ by its very nature. So I described how I utilised volunteering as a way to create a ‘somewhere’ in which in-depth face to face research could take place and how I pursued texts, in the form of fanzines and ‘e-zines’, as a way to trace the ‘diffuse’ forms of sociality in which ideas and arguments circulated amongst FC United’s support. It is only with hindsight, that I can find the coherence to the ‘field’ in which I carried out my research by appreciating the way in which the texts and face to face interactions of my research mutually constituted each other and defined the way in which I came to understand each of those interactions. The next chapter reveals further the contextual background shaping the arguments within the thesis by explaining and analysing the long-term historical context of English football from which FC United emerged.
Chapter Two: The Historical Context: Governance, Ownership and Fan Protest

Introduction

In the opening section to this thesis, I outlined the immediate circumstances, in terms of the leveraged buy-out of Manchester United by the Glazer family and the failure of the campaign to prevent the takeover, which led to the formation of FC United in 2005. This chapter explains the longer-term context in which FC United arose. I show how from the moment football clubs moved to limited liability status in the 1880s and 1890s fans have never had formal control of the clubs they supported. I look at the work of Rogan Taylor (1992: 16-22) on Leicester City fans in the 1920s and 1930s and their demand for a greater say in the club they support to show how the power structure within English football, and the exclusion of fans from this, carried the possibility of generating mobilisations from supporters long before the formation of FC United. Then I trace the fluctuating regulatory environment within English football after the Second World War, noting how it reflects shifts in the management of the economy at large (an argument drawing particularly from the work of Anthony King (2002)). The chapter analyses a shift from a regulatory regime which emphasised maintaining the financial viability of all clubs, through cross-subsidisation and intervention in the relations between capital and labour, to a free-market de-regulated system in the 1980s which encouraged the investment of entrepreneurial capital into football. I suggest that a process of commercialisation within English football which had begun in the 1970s, in response to financial instability within the game, intensified with the mandating of all-seater stadiums at top-level football grounds following the Taylor report in 1990. In particular, I look at how the entrepreneurs running top level clubs addressed the need to raise the finance for stadium redevelopment through the advent of the Premier League and the sale of television rights to BSkyB, the dramatic increase in ticket prices – alongside targeting a richer demographic – and the public sale of shares or bond schemes. The chapter traces how some Manchester United fans mobilised to contest these changes in the 1990s and utilised the public availability of shares in the club as a platform to challenge the way in which the club was being run. I argue that these movements amongst Manchester United fans shaped, and reflected, the issues which would mobilise FC United fans in 2005 – in particular the need for supporter control, the
exclusion of supporters through the price of tickets and the increasingly restrictive match-day experience.

Football Before the Second World War

English football took on a common codified set of rules during the 1860s which allowed for different football clubs to play in fixtures against one another under a shared set of regulations. The early football clubs tended to be formed from existing organisations such as schools, public houses, churches and work places (Mason 1980: 21-23; M. Taylor 2008: 34). For instance, Manchester United was formed as Newton Heath Lancashire and Yorkshire Railways, and was composed of players who worked in the carriage and wagon department of the railway depot in Newton Heath (Mason 1980: 30). Matthew Taylor (2008: 70) suggests that these clubs were initially voluntary organisations run by member-elected committees. Football in the 1870s and 1880s became increasingly popular with the mass of the working-class who in the same era had won through union militancy increased free time and were enjoying significant rises in real wages (M. Taylor 2008: 44-45, Tischler 1981: 32). This increase in interest in football combined with greater time and money available to spend resulted in an increased desire to watch football and a willingness to pay for the privilege. This created an economic stimulus for budding entrepreneurs, who realised that if they could build enclosed football grounds with restricted access, they could charge for entry and in so doing football could become a branch of the burgeoning commercial leisure industry (M. Taylor 2008: 44; Tischler 1981: 37). However, if large gates were to be attracted and football clubs were to succeed financially then they needed the best players to draw large crowds and so football became professionalised, with clubs paying wages to attract the best players (M. Taylor 2008: 48; Tischler 1981: 37-38). This move to professionalisation and the building of enclosed grounds, as noted above, required the input of entrepreneurial capital and, in return for finance, investors wanted a controlling say in the running of clubs. Furthermore, the enclosure of grounds required the taking on of debt to fund this and this was not possible within the structure of a voluntary member-owned club (M. Taylor 2008: 70). Therefore, in the 1880s and 1890s clubs converted from being member run voluntary organisations to limited liability companies owned by shareholders and run by boards of directors (Goldblatt 2006: 65). As Steven

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31 Taylor (2008: 19-44) deals in depth with the historical debates around the origins of a codified and standardised set of rules for football and the role of industrialisation and the public schools in this process.
Tischler (1981: 1) notes, the structure of ownership that emerged within English football reflected that of other late Victorian enterprises, that of limited liability companies. This structure of private club ownership was distinct from the dominant model which emerged in some other European countries, such as Spain, Portugal and Germany, where many professional clubs remained mass-membership organisations and this ownership structure was underpinned by regulation within those countries (Brown 2007: 616). Furthermore, the people in charge of running English football clubs by the start of the 20th century were overwhelmingly drawn from the wealthiest classes and were owners and directors of other significant commercial enterprises (Goldblatt 2008: 65). However, it should be noted that in response to this shift to limited liability status the Football Association (hereafter FA) introduced in 1892 a rule limiting the level of dividends a shareholder could receive to 5% of share value in order to reduce the potential for the intense commercialisation of football (Millward 2011: 43). There is debate within the historical literature over whether shareholders in the first decades of the 20th century were seeking to extract profit from their investment in football clubs. Tischler (1981: 69-71) argues that the profit motive was key, suggesting owners could circumvent the 5% rule by placing the club in a holding company and could accrue indirect profits by supplying goods and services (e.g. provision of alcohol) to the club. For James Walvin (1994: 88) the benefits for shareholders lay in the local standing and reputation it gave to local businessmen and prospective politicians rather than any direct financial gain, while Matthew Taylor argues that in comparison to other sectors of the leisure industry ‘professional football emerges as considerably less thoroughly commercialised and freer from the control of profit-seeking capitalists’ (2008: 73). Nonetheless, the control of the levers of power within football from its earliest days did not lie with the majority of spectators, drawn overwhelmingly in that era from the mass working-class, but rather the wealthy gentlemen who owned and directed football clubs and the aristocratic elite that ran the game’s governing body, the FA. David Goldblatt sees the position occupied by the working-class within football vis-à-vis the elites running the clubs and the game in this era as reflecting the relationship between the working-class and elites in society more generally:

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32 Goldblatt suggests that 20% of directors came from the ranks of manual and clerical workers while the other 80% who, were generally larger shareholders, came from ‘substantially wealthier backgrounds’ (2006: 65)
Football mania did not create a reformist Labour Party and a cautious economicistic trade union movement; it merely reflected these institutions and their outlook. Thus despite their numerical advantage, the British working classes did not attempt to wrest ultimate control over the nation’s sporting or political institutions from the aristocrats and entrepreneurs who ran the state, the FA and football clubs (Goldblatt, 2006: 52).

There is some, limited, evidence of attempts by football spectators in the pre Second World War era to challenge these existing power relations and gain a greater say in the running of the clubs they supported. Rogan Taylor (1992: 16-22) provides an account of how Leicester City fans sought a greater role in the power structures of the club. For instance, he cites letters sent to local newspapers between 1923 and 1924 demanding a say in the club and criticising the lack of information given by the board of directors to supporters. For instance one letter writer argued:

Surely we supporters are entitled to some say in the government of the game we support, and surely it is not asking too much that those in authority should answer the critics? We are terribly interested in the game and its welfare in Leicester, though the city directors don’t seem alive to this fact … they veil themselves in mystery … we grope in the darkness (Leicester Mercury 1924 cited in R. Taylor 1992: 19).

Meanwhile other letter writers called for the establishment of a supporters club to represent the supporters to the directors and demanded the right for supporters to elect two members of the board (R. Taylor 1992: 18). Indeed, some supporters contested the very idea of Leicester City as a private company:

The club is, properly speaking, an institution of the town and not a kind of private trading company, conducted at the whim of the few men who are at the moment immediately interested (Leicester Mercury 1923 cited in R. Taylor 1992: 19)

The Leicester City chairman, however, was adamant that ‘he had no intention of being drawn into correspondence with local supporters’ (R. Taylor 1992: 19). Amongst Manchester United fans there were also attempts by supporters to influence the running of the club they supported through organising a boycott of a home fixture in 1930 in response to on-field failure, a lack of financial investment in to the club and the board’s refusal to
meet with supporters (Blundell 2006: 324-370; R. Taylor 1992: 42-43). Rogan Taylor does not provide sufficient evidence to generalise from the cases of Leicester City and Manchester United fans in this era, although neither does he advance any reasons why they might be exceptional. Nonetheless what his work does suggest is that the power structure of English football, where supporters did not have any formal means of control over the clubs they supported, had the capacity to generate moments of tension and possible mobilisation amongst groups of fans, although, as Rogan Taylor (1992: 18) points out, the desire to challenge the power structure off the pitch was linked to a lack of success of the supporters’ respective clubs on the pitch.

In this section, I have identified how a particular power structure emerged in English football, distinct from that in many other European countries and reflecting larger trends in British capitalism, where clubs became limited liability companies owned by wealthy individuals, and individual supporters had no formal say in the running of the clubs. I have shown that there is some evidence that such an ownership model generated, limited, moments of tension and supporter mobilisation to try to challenge this very power structure well before the formation of FC United. In the next section, I look at the processes in the post-war era that precipitated the radical political and economic transformation of English football that occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s.

1945-1979: Emerging Commercialisation and Calls for Radical Democratisation

The in-coming Labour government in 1945 established a political and economic settlement (commonly known as the post-war consensus) that was to last till the end of the 1970s based upon following the economic dictum of John Maynard Keynes. This involved utilising government spending to ensure full employment alongside the establishment of a welfare state, centred on the principle of universality where all citizens would be protected by the state, which would act as a safety-net from ‘cradle until grave’ (King 2002: 26; Also see: Harvey 2005: 10). Furthermore the government was to take an active role in mediating relations between capital and labour (King 2002: 25; Harvey 2005: 10). Anthony King (2002: 37) has argued that the governance arrangements of English football in the immediate post war period mirrored those of the wider economy in several key respects. In particular, the principle of universality within the post-war consensus was reflected by the interventionist approach of football regulations which aimed to ensure the financial viability of all clubs and competitive balance within the league. This was done through a degree of cross
subsidisation of financially weaker clubs by richer ones through regulations requiring an 80-20% split between home and away sides of gate receipts in league matches meaning clubs that drew large crowds effectively subsidised those with small ones (M. Taylor 2008: 271). Furthermore, television and football pools money that started to come into the game in the 1950s and 1960s also tended to be shared equally between all clubs (M. Taylor 2008: 271). The Football League also intervened in the relationship between football’s labourers and capitalists by setting a maximum wage which ensured that financially richer clubs could not bid up the price of labour and in so doing expose financially weaker clubs to either taking on debt to fund player wages or becoming uncompetitive (King 2002: 40; M. Taylor 2008: 269). However, these arrangements within football, much like the post war consensus itself, were to come under increasing pressure from the 1960s which would eventually lead to a radical shift towards a neo-liberal free-market model of (non) regulation in the 1980s. A series of factors were crucial in the shift towards free-market arrangements within football, first amongst these were a decline in attendance at English football games and the abolition of the maximum wage (King 2002: 37-47). English football enjoyed a post-war boom in attendances, with a historic peak of a cumulative attendance of 41.2 million in the 1948-49 season, brought about by the economic conditions in which there was minimal unemployment but continued rationing and a lack of alternative leisure options, meaning people had money but little to spend it on (King 2002: 38-39; M. Taylor 2008: 194). However throughout the 1950s and 1960s attendances decreased sharply, barring a slight increase in the season following England’s victory in the 1966 World Cup, in response to rising affluence and the increased availability of other leisure options, such as home televisions (King 2002: 38-39; M. Taylor 2008: 252; Walvin 1994: 165). The combination of problems of spectator violence emerging in the late 1960s and crumbling, underinvested facilities exacerbated further the fall in attendances (Goldblatt 2006: 442-451; M. Taylor 2008: 264-266). The fall in attendances was not evenly distributed though, with a greater fall in attendances for lower league and small town clubs than the successful big city clubs, increasing the financial disparity between clubs (King 2002: 38; M. Taylor 2008: 265; Walvin 1994: 165). In 1961, the Football League abandoned the maximum wage due to threats of strike action, negative popular opinion towards the regulation and the increasing possibility of English football's best players leaving to European leagues in search of higher salaries (Goldblatt 2006: 444; King 2002: 39-47; Walvin 1994: 175). The abandonment of the maximum wage led to inflation in wage levels and therefore an increase in cost for football clubs, however, again this increase in costs did not affect clubs evenly with big city clubs
with large attendances having a greater ability to meet this increased expenditure (King 2002: 46). Therefore the financial situation within football had become increasingly unstable by the end of the 1960s with clubs facing falling incomes from gate receipts and larger costs in terms of wages and there had also been an increase in inequality between the clubs (King 2002: 37-47). Such an unstable situation meant radical change to the structure of football and football club governance and regulation was increasingly likely. I now turn to a series of works (Clarke 1978; Critcher 1979; I. Taylor 1971) which addressed the question of football hooliganism and sought explanation for hooliganism in the changing political economy of the game. While as an explanation for football hooliganism these articles were empirically lacking, they provide an interesting analysis of the response of club directors and owners to the prevailing economic problems within football in the 1970s and are also interesting for the solution advocated by Critcher (1979) to football’s problems.

For John Clarke (1978), Chas Critcher (1979) and Ian Taylor (1971) there had been a fundamental change in the relationship between the game of football and its working class support by the 1970s. They all argued that before the 1960s working-class fans had felt a degree of (imagined) control over the clubs they supported (although Rogan Taylor’s (1992) work discussed earlier casts doubt on such an argument). In particular, they argued that the player and the fan shared a common class status and fans had felt they had a degree of access to and control over those players (Clarke 1978: 39; Critcher 1979: 162-163; I. Taylor 1971: 143-144). This relationship between working class fan and player was seen as being decisively weakened by the rescinding of the maximum wage which had given players access to wealth far above that of the fan – ‘the player has been incorporated into the bourgeois world ... soccer has become, for the player, a means to personal (rather than sub-cultural) success.’ (I. Taylor 1971: 147 emphasis removed). Furthermore, Clarke (1978:39, 45-47), Critcher (1979: 168-171) and Ian Taylor (1971: 148-149) suggest the football ground had previously been a site for the expression of the fans’ masculine working class values through active support but they argued this was no longer the case by the 1970s due to a series of measures introduced by football club owners in response to falling attendances and the competition of alternative leisure pursuits. For example, Ian Taylor (1971: 148) and Clarke (1978: 47) argued that football grounds became less accessible to control by working-class spectators as they were transformed into stadia with the provision of private boxes, modern toilets, the integration of other leisure facilities such
as restaurants, nightclubs and bars and the provision of pre-match and half-time entertainment. These measures were seen as attempts by football clubs to attract a richer and more passive ‘consumer’ audience to football grounds (Clarke 1978: 47; Critcher 1979: 178; I. Taylor 1971: 148-151). In essence what these authors were identifying was a process of commercialisation amongst football clubs in order to respond to the financial instability within football in the 1970s, and this process of commercialisation is understood as taking (the illusion of) control of the clubs they support away from working-class fans. ‘Hooliganism’ was understood as these fans’ response to that loss of control. For Critcher, the solution to football problems lay in reversing its power structure in favour of the mass of working class fans:

Ultimately the problem is that in football, as in many of its corporate cultural activities, the power to control the institution does not rest with those on whose behalf it has been created. The susceptibility of football to the financial dictates, consumer ideologies and cultural definition of advanced monopoly capitalism may be revelatory of weaknesses inherent in the traditional corporate working-class culture. The need, in football as elsewhere, may be to take control. (1979: 184).

Similarly David Triesman (1981), just two years later in the pages of Marxism Today, suggested that football’s financial problems should be overcome by turning the clubs into mass-membership organisations, effectively owned and controlled by the fans.33 The problem for such plans for the radical democratisation of football clubs was that even had the mass of fans wished to take formal control of the clubs they supported, little organised basis existed through which football fans could have acted to achieve such a plan (I. Taylor 1984: 18). The only formal fans’ organisation at the time was the National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs which did not allow individual fan membership and represented supporter clubs which tended to have close relationships, often acting as fundraisers, for the clubs to which they were affiliated (I. Taylor 1984: 18; R. Taylor: 1992). Instead, as we shall see in the next section, rather than any radical-democratisation of football what emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s in response to the English game’s financial instability was an embrace of free-market principles, in line with the emerging neo-liberal Thatcherite

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33 David Triesman went on to become a prominent trade unionist and Labour Party politician before becoming the first independent chair of the FA in January 2008.
consensus, and the intensification of the commercialisation that Clarke (1978), Critcher (1979) and Ian Taylor (1971) described in the 1970s.

**Football’s Free-Market Revolution**

Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government was elected in 1979. Thatcherite Conservatism represented a decisive shift away from the post-war consensus, which had come under great strain in the 1970s from spiralling inflation, chronically weak public finances and high levels of industrial conflict. In particular, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s were underpinned by a belief in the necessity of free de-regulated markets, the virtue of privatisation of nationalised assets and the prioritising of low inflation rather than full employment as the government’s chief macro-economic goal. Thatcher’s political commitment to these policies can be understood as being at the vanguard of a broader shift in economic policies across the world towards a ‘neo-liberal’ model (Harvey 2005: 1-3; Peck and Tickell 2002: 380). The ‘neo-liberal’ economic model, which had germinated intellectually since the second world war through thinkers such as the Austrian Economic Philosopher Friedrich von Hayek and the Economist Milton Friedman (Gledhill 2004: 332; Ong 2006: 10), is one that ‘combines a commitment to the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian and/or collectivist strategies’ (Peck and Tickell 2002: 381). In this context the structure of English football, with its emphasis on revenue sharing and the cross-subsidisation of financially weaker clubs, looked increasingly anachronistic (King 2002: 95-96). Furthermore, as I set out in the last section, the governance and financial arrangements of football had come under increasing strain through the 1960s and 1970s with increasing inequality amongst clubs and rising costs and falling incomes for clubs. The beginning of the 1980s saw the FA attempt to address the financial instability by rescinding the rule on maximum dividend payments and relaxing regulation prohibiting the payment of directors in order to attract entrepreneurial capital into the game (Conn 1997: 40; King 2002: 123). This move saw a number of entrepreneurs, who King describes as the ‘new directors’ (2002: 120-145), start to invest into the top clubs in the hope of yielding profits. Further to this, the increasing financial inequality within the league meant that the richer clubs had an economic self-interest in ending the revenue sharing, particularly of increasingly significant television rights income, and cross-subsidisation arrangements within the game. The league was increasingly reliant on the richest clubs for income, therefore these clubs used the threat of a breakaway super-league and the negotiation of independent television contracts to first secure the
end of gate receipt sharing in 1983 and then, in the 1986 and 1988 television contracts, a far greater share of the revenue for the top clubs than they had enjoyed previously (King 2002: 58-64; M. Taylor 2008: 273, 342). These changes further re-enforced the possibility of football clubs as a site for profit accumulation for entrepreneurs. By the end of the 1980s the governance arrangements of football had begun to fall in line with the wider free-market economy in which they were situated and the logic of neo-liberalism which underpinned this form of economy. However, the crucial moment in bringing about the transformation of English football to a hyper-commercialised form lies in Lord Justice Taylor’s recommendation in 1990, following the Hillsborough disaster, to introduce all-seater football stadia within England. I now wish to briefly analyse the circumstances in which the disaster occurred before describing the process of commercialisation that followed.

The popular image of English football throughout the 1980s had been dominated by the spectre of football hooliganism. In 1985 the behaviour of Liverpool FC fans at a European cup final, in Heysel Belgium, contributed to the death of 39 Juventus fans that were crushed to death by a collapsing wall as they attempted to flee ‘charging’ Liverpool FC fans (King 2002: 74; Scraton: 1999; M. Taylor 2008: 318). In the same year, a teenage fan was killed by a collapsed wall at Birmingham City’s St Andrews ground during disturbances between opposing fans (King 2002: 74; M. Taylor 2008: 318). However, it was not only the behaviour of supporters that contributed to disasters in that era, on the same afternoon as the death at St Andrews 56 Bradford City fans were killed in a fire at the club’s dilapidated Valley Parade ground caused by a discarded match or cigarette (King 2002: 74; M. Taylor 2008: 318). However in the government inquiry, led by Justice Popplewell, which followed these incidents the issues of crumbling unfit grounds and violent and unruly behaviour of spectators were conflated and only the second issue addressed with the recommendation for a national membership scheme to prevent known hooligans from entering football grounds (King 2002: 80-84; M. Taylor 2008: 318). This recommendation for a membership scheme was taken up by the Thatcher government in proposals for a national ID cards for

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34 The top divisions’ clubs share of total television revenue rose to 50% in 1986 and then 75% in 1988 (King, 2002: 60-64).

35 1985 is often seen in academic and popular accounts as English football’s historic low point, its “annus horribilus” (M. Taylor, 2008: 318) or ‘moral ground zero’ (Goldblatt 2007:543), alongside the incidents described here English football reached its historic low in terms of cumulative attendances in the 1985/86 season of 16.5million (King, 2002: 38).
football supporters (King 2002: 84-86). Alongside government proposals for authoritarian measures towards fans, football clubs installed perimeter fences to prevent fans from invading the pitch (King 2002: 84). However the failure to address the issue of the poor standard of English football grounds along with the erection of perimeter fences was to have deadly consequences. On the 15th of April 1989, 96 Liverpool FC fans were crushed to death on the packed Leppings Lane terrace, where perimeter fences prevented any means of escape, at Sheffield Wednesday’s Hillsborough Ground at an FA cup semi-final fixture (Scraton 1999 provides an authoritative account of the events of the 15th of April 1989). The Taylor Report (1990) which followed the disaster shifted the emphasis away from the authoritarian control of football supporters towards a ‘new ethos’ for football where:

Attitudes should be more welcoming. The aim should be to provide more modern and comfortable accommodation, better and more varied facilities, more consultation with the supporters and more positive leadership. (P. Taylor 1990 cited in King 2002: 97 and M. Taylor 2008: 338)

To achieve such a ‘new ethos’, Justice Taylor mandated all clubs in the top two divisions of English football to replace existing terraces and build all-seater stadiums. In order to carry out such a renovation of facilities a huge amount of financial investment would be required and, as King has pointed out, ‘in the context of 1990s Britain, Justice Taylor’s recommendations were only ever going to be implemented by means of the free market and by the initiatives of entrepreneurs’ (2002: 100). Within the emergent neo-liberal free market model of English football the entrepreneurs running top-level English football clubs pursued a strategy of aggressive commercialisation to finance the building of all-seater stadiums. The first means through which top clubs achieved this necessary finance was by finally ending the cross-division revenue-sharing arrangements which had been weakened throughout the 1980s. The top division clubs resigned en bloc from the Football League in August 1991 and formed the Premier League under the auspice of the FA, which, while still being part of the league structure in England (there was promotion and relegation to the divisions below), would be able to sell its television rights independently (M. Taylor 2008: 344-345). The first television contract the Premier League signed was with BSkyB, itself a product of the Thatcherite de-regulation of broadcasting, and this deal provided a large increase in television revenue and therefore finance towards the rebuilding of football grounds (King 2002: 109-114). Furthermore, alongside this increase in television revenue clubs sharply increased ticket prices in the post-Taylor report years to pay for the re-
development of football grounds. The FA released a ‘Blueprint for the Future of Football’ which argued that English Football needed to pursue the ‘affluent ‘middle class’ consumer’ (FA 1991 cited in Goldblatt 2006: 729) and such a strategy was actively pursued by the entrepreneurs running top level clubs. The process may have been self-fulfilling, in the sense that the more facilities were improved the more likely it was that richer consumers would be willing to pay higher ticket prices to watch top-level football and therefore even more improved facilities could be paid for to attract further people. It is worth noting though that Malcolm et al (2000) dispute the extent to which the spectators at English football matches were increasingly drawn from richer socio-economic groups during the 1990s and argue that the class profile of spectators did not alter during that period. However, the survey data that Malcolm et al (2000) base these conclusions on is extremely limited and therefore it is difficult to be sure to what extent football clubs were successful in altering the class make up of crowds during that period.\footnote{Malcolm et al (2000: 130-131) base their conclusions on a series of surveys conducted between 1984 and 1997 with different fan groups and these surveys used different distribution methods, had low response rates and had sampling biases. While acknowledging the limitations of this data the authors state 'these surveys constitute the only data source at our disposal’ (Malcolm et al 2000: 131).} What is clear is that, despite rapidly rising ticket prices, attendances increased consistently throughout the 1990s, as more spectators were willing to pay to watch football within improved stadia. Alongside rising ticket prices club owners adopted a strategy of diversification to raise further revenue, particularly by dramatically increasing the level of merchandise available for sale (King 2002: 136). A final means through which club owners funded the re-building of stadiums was the public sale of shares through the flotation of clubs on the stock market (turning them into Public Limited Companies (PLCs)) and the use of bond schemes, which involved fans purchasing a ‘bond’ at exorbitant prices which would give them the right to buy a season ticket in future and the money from the bond sale was used to re-develop the grounds (Brown 1998: 54-58). These changes were to generate significant fan dissatisfaction and protest. These protests were manifest through the formation of Independent Supporters Associations and the use of fanzines at a number of clubs to contest the transformation occurring.\footnote{This is not to say all Independent Supporters Associations and fanzines were exclusively concerned with contesting the changes occurring to football in the 1990s. Brown (1998:52; see also: Nash 2001: 44) suggest that while some Independent Supporters Association were formed for such a purpose others were set up in response to club specific issues of removing boards and managers before also...} However, I want in the next sections to focus on
the fan movements at Manchester United, rather than nationally, as it was out of these specific movements that FC United came.

**Manchester United Supporter Mobilisations**

Since 1964 the Edwards family had held majority ownership of Manchester United. Initially this was through Louis Edwards, owner of a large Manchester meat supplier, and then following Louis’s death in 1980 his son Martin became the club’s majority shareholder. Martin Edwards became one of the first full-time paid chief executives, following the ending of FA restrictions on this, and he was a key figure through the 1980s in the threats of a breakaway super-league that helped to end much of the revenue sharing in English football discussed above (Conn 1997: 41). Martin Edwards was an unpopular figure amongst many Manchester United fans: ‘he wasn’t really seen as one of us, he was, you know, son of the chairmen, born with a silver spoon, someone who was seen to have a greater love for rugby than he did for football’ (Andy Walsh speaking on ‘The Choice’ BBC Radio 4: 2005). Furthermore the 1980s was also a period of stagnation on the pitch for Manchester United, while off the pitch Martin Edwards twice unsuccessfully tried to sell the club, to Robert Maxwell in 1984 and to Michael Knighton in 1989 (Conn 1997: 41-44; Crick and Smith 1990: 184,280). By the end of the 1980s a sizeable contingent of Manchester United fans wished to see Martin Edwards removed from the club:

I feel it just goes to show what I have personally believed for years in that there is a cancer growing within the club, and has gone completely malignant since Louis [Edwards] took his bath night special [died]. Cancers need to be cut out if the patient is to survive. It really is time this one [i.e. Edwards] was removed (Zar, Red Issue: 1989).

Michael Crick, the investigative journalist and Manchester United fan, and David Smith, the former head of the Manchester United supporters club, in their critical expose of the Edwards family ownership of the club, ‘Betrayal of a Legend,’ argued ‘no longer can such a community institution, dependent on thousands of local supporters, be permitted to remain in the hands of single individual’ (1990: 303). As we shall see in Chapter Four, this mobilisation of the notion of Manchester United as properly a ‘community’ institution, in

addressing these wider issues. Taylor (2008: 371) also cautions against seeing fanzines as exclusively concerned with protest and contestation.
opposition to the existing private model of ownership, is one that would be utilised with increasing frequency in the late 1990s and early 2000s and played a key role in the formation of FC United in 2005.

In the context of the hostility towards Martin Edwards’s ownership, some fans saw public flotation in 1991 as an opportunity to gain a measure of control in Manchester United. For instance the editor of Red Issue argued:

Public flotation … if done properly could once and for all give the club back to the fans. The option is not an easy one though and would have to be fully investigated to ensure that [it] really did pass control to a board made up of major shareholders and supporters representatives. Otherwise it would be far too easy for [Manchester] United to be turned solely into a business empire at the expense of both fans and supporters (Veg, Red Issue: 1990)

For ‘Veg’ then public flotation offered the possibility of an alternative to Manchester United becoming a ‘business empire’. However others fans of a leftist political persuasion, who as I will describe in Chapter Seven were highly significant to the formation of FC United, were opposed to public flotation which they saw as an extension of the Thatcherite idea of a share-owning democracy. For example Andy Walsh, who had been involved in many socialist campaigns during the Thatcher years, commented on public flotation ‘Politically, I was opposed to that kind of share owning democracy. I saw it as a sham.’ (Speaking on ‘The Choice’ BBC Radio 4: 2005). Similarly a writer, ‘Irish Des’, in the FC United fanzine UTB reflecting on the flotation wrote ‘I gave up my season ticket in K stand back in 1991, being politically opposed to share ownership and all-seater [stadiums]’ (UTB: 2005).

Furthermore, it appears that many supporters who had initially shown some enthusiasm for flotation as a way of getting some form of supporter influence of the club were disillusioned by the timing and cost of the eventual flotation, as well as the way Martin Edwards personally profited from it. ‘Veg’ the editor of Red Issue, who had initially enthused about the prospect of public flotation, commented after:

It is worrying to note that over half of the shares that were offered to the public have ended up in the hands of the underwriters, people whose links with football are tenuous to say the least. Even though nearly 10,000 [Manchester] United fans are believed to have taken up the offer, I suspect that two factors kept more Reds [Manchester United fans] from investing, when it came down to it. The first is the
well publicised fact that at a time when most us had just shelled out a couple of hundred on the trip to Rotterdam [for the UEFA Cup Winners Cup final] and renewed our season tickets, another £194 for shares just did not exist. Second and less publicised was the realisation amongst many, that whilst under the ‘Reasons for and proceeds of the offer’ £6.7million was towards the redevelopment of the Stretford End and £6.4million was going to Martin Edwards. \(^{38}\) The thought of lining his pockets must have put some people off (Veg, Red Issue: 1991).

For ‘Veg’, then, public flotation did not result in a transfer of control over the football club as the majority of publicly available shares did not end up in supporters’ hands. However, the enthusiasm for share buying as a means of supporter control expressed by some supporters at the time of flotation would turn into one of the dominant modes for exerting influence over the running of the club by supporters in coming years.

Alongside the public flotation, Manchester United increased season ticket prices rapidly: Between the 1988-89 season and the 1994-95 season the cost of season tickets rose by 240.9%. While season ticket prices were increasing rapidly across top-level football in England these were comfortably the biggest price rises at any club (King 2002: 135).

In February 1992 in order to pay for the re-development of the Stretford End at Old Trafford the board announced 50% increases to the cost of season tickets (Brown 1998: 59; King 2002: 134). \(^{39}\) Two season ticket holders, Johnny Flacks and Peter Kenny, organised a protest group against these prices rises, called HOSTAGE – which stood for Holders of Season Tickets Against Gross Exploitation (Brown 1998: 59-61). The initial meeting at Lancashire Cricket Club was enthusiastically promoted by the fanzines at Manchester United and attracted a crowd of over 1,000 fans. \(^{40}\) However HOSTAGE fell away fairly

\(^{38}\) The Stretford End is a stand at one end of Manchester United’s Old Trafford ground. It has often been associated (by fans and journalists) with Manchester United’s most committed support.

\(^{39}\) Brown (1998: 58) suggests that the Manchester United board chose to raise ticket prices rather than use a bond scheme to pay for the re-building of the Stretford End because they had seen bond schemes fail at Arsenal and West Ham due to fan protests led by Independent Supporters Associations.

\(^{40}\) Both Taylor (2008: 371) and Brown (1998: 51) suggest that the role of promoter and information distributor was one fanzines took in many protests organised by Independent Supporters Associations and other groups during the 1990s.
quickly without having any impact on Manchester United’s ticket pricing policy, as Adam Brown explained:

I suppose the first meeting of any kind I went to was a thing called HOSTAGE, Holders of Season Tickets Against Gross Exploitation. That was under the Edwards regime in 1991 [sic – 1992] and they were increasing season ticket prices by about 50%, [Manchester] United were one of the first to start the move towards all-seaters – that was a big turn-out, lot of news when it first started but was very short-lived, the people who were running it didn’t really make the most of it. All I can remember is the football got in the way of it and the Cup Winners Cup run (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010). 41

Indeed, following the failure of the HOSTAGE campaign, the re-development of the Stretford End saw a 15,000 person standing section providing the cheapest access to the ground replaced by a all-seater ‘family’ stand which contained thousands of high-priced ‘executive’ and ‘club-class’ seats alongside now vastly more expensive ordinary seats (Brown 1998: 59-61). Despite the failure of the HOSTAGE campaign ‘the attendance of so many at a meeting at such short notice demonstrated the potential for action’ (King 2002: 162) and this potential for action was to come to fruition in the formation of IMUSA in 1995.

The rising prices and introduction of all-seater stadiums were leading to increasing concerns about the nature of the match day experience at Old Trafford, in particular a decline in atmosphere, and concerns about the increasing exclusion of supporters because of cost. Furthermore as Manchester United became increasingly successful on the pitch, in 1993 winning their first league title since 1967, there was a concern that local supporters were being excluded by non-Mancunian ‘tourists’ who were taking the limited supply of tickets. Many of these concerns crystallised themselves with the formation of IMUSA which was catalysed by events at a crucial home league game against Arsenal. At the match many fans were stood throughout offering vocal encouragement and the club made a public address announcement telling fans to sit down or risk ejection (King 2002: 162-163). Many fans stood in defiance of this announcement, one fan recalled in the letters page of UWS;

41 It was actually the final stages of the 1992 league season, with Manchester United competing with rivals Leeds United FC (hereafter Leeds United) at the top of the league, that ‘got in the way’ of HOSTAGE rather than the UEFA Cup Winners Cup, which took place a year earlier, as Adam recalled.
When that announcement was made, we showed that we are no longer willing to take this shit from the club anymore, the clearly audible ‘fuck off’ from the K-stand and scoreboard paddock was a breath of fresh air ... I bet Merrit’s [the stadium manager] arse dropped when he saw three quarters of the stadium standing in an act of clear defiance. In the Stretford End the suits were assaulted when they told people to sit down, it was revolution and it was brilliant (Little Bob, UWS: 1996).

For many fans though the announcement at the game represented a fundamental statement on the way the club viewed supporters;

The football experience is everything or it is nothing ... That’s our football, and that’s why last season’s ‘sit down and shut up’ announcement was as depressing, as soul destroying, as mind numbingly crippling as any defeat on the pitch ever could be. One of the all time lows in supporting [Manchester] United; effectively saying no longer your game, [Manchester] United is no longer your club (RWA, UWS: 1995).

In response to the events at the Arsenal game IMUSA was formed, led by Andy Walsh, Jonny Flacks and the editors of Red Issue and UWS, Chris Robinson and Andy Mitten. IMUSA from the beginning went beyond just the specific issues of that game and looked to address the wide range of issues that I identified above which were of concern to a significant number of Manchester United supporters. To this end they produced a ‘Redprint for Change’ which was distributed through the fanzines. In this document they called for Old Trafford to be re-developed in a way which encouraged the atmosphere, standing to be allowed in certain parts of the ground, lower pricing particularly to encourage the attendance of younger fans and an increased dialogue between supporters and the club (IMUSA, Redprint for Change: 1995). The problem IMUSA faced was that the club took little notice of them ‘We got lots of courteous one-line replies saying ‘thanks very much for your comments’ but nothing much more than that’ (Andy Walsh speaking on ‘The Choice’ BBC Radio 4: 2005). In order to counter this IMUSA launched a share buying club, where they bought shares on people’s behalf allowing them to overcome the £50 transaction fee on each share purchase, and these shares gave IMUSA representatives the right to attend the Manchester United Annual General Meeting which they used as a platform for challenging the club board’s policies (Andy Walsh and Adam Brown, interviews: 3/12/2010 and 10/11/2010). Nonetheless, a sizeable number of Manchester United supporters continued
to perceive a decline in match-day experience and an increasing alienation from the club throughout the 1990s;

There are a growing number of lads who choose to give Old Trafford a miss on a Saturday afternoon, so gutted are they at what the ground has become ... As passionate as my love of [Manchester] United is, I share an equal hatred of everything the club has become. There’s been times when I’ve questioned whether I even want a part of it anymore ... those three additional letters, PLC, have made MUFC [Manchester United Football Club] unlovable at times, but the hold it has over our lives is massive. We all want the best for [Manchester] United, ironic then, that it may well take a failure on the pitch to once more give us a united club off the pitch (RWA, UWS: 1996).

Indeed, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Four the issues which led to the formation of IMUSA – declining match day experience, rising cost of tickets and the exclusion of local support – were key motivators for the formation of FC United and many fans’ decisions to support the club. As such, the formation of IMUSA in 1995, in conjunction with the fanzines, showed the potential these issues had for mobilising political action amongst some in the Manchester United fanbase ten years before the formation of FC United. 42

As I set out earlier, from the very first season of the Premier League, BSkyB became the exclusive holder of TV rights – with Rupert Murdoch (whose company News International owned 40% of BSkyB) seeing rights to show Premier League football as the essential ingredient to the success of the pay-TV company (King 2002: 109-118; Brown and Walsh 1999: 58). On the 6th of September 1998 BSkyB announced a bid to take over Manchester United and two days later the board of Manchester United formally accepted the bid (Brown and Walsh 1999: 11). IMUSA quickly came out in opposition to the bid and began a campaign to get the bid referred to the mergers commission on the grounds that a BSkyB takeover of the biggest player in its TV contracts would be anti-competitive (ibid). They were joined in the campaign by a fan shareholders group, which became known as Shareholders United Against Murdoch (hereafter SUAM), led by Michael Crick. IMUSA’s

42 This is not to imply that all those that were involved in IMUSA or the fanzines at this time went on to be part of FC United or that all supporters/members of FC United were previously involved with IMUSA or the fanzines – though clearly the cross-over in terms of people is significant. Rather I am arguing only that the issues at stake in the formation of IMUSA were also some of the same issues which mobilised those fans involved in the formation of FC United.
principal objection to the bid was that ‘for the first time in our existence the club will not be independent, we will become part of a large corporation. We will no longer be Manchester United but BSkyB’s Manchester United’ (IMUSA, UWS: 1998). The underlying fear was that decisions regarding Manchester United would not be made according to what is best for Manchester United but for what would serve the financial and media interests of BSkyB. The Red Issue editor Chris Robinson, who was heavily involved with the opposition campaign, argued ‘If there is a soul left in the football club, a club whose heart at least has been ripped out of it in recent years, it is being peddled to a man [Rupert Murdoch] whose only interest in this once great club of ours is the money and power it can bring him. Prostituted to the ripper himself’ (Red Issue: 1998). Furthermore the campaigners feared that ‘by becoming a small-part of a much bigger machine, a subsidiary of BSkyB, the take-over would further remove the club from connections to its community, its fans and its locality’ (Brown and Walsh 1999: 65-66).

Within the fanzines, both of whose editors had come out as opposed to the bid, there was a debate underway as to the merit of the takeover, with several letter writers supporting the bid;

I for one would not want anything to happen to the playing aspect, but who owns it has got nothing to do with me or him [an unnamed IMUSA activist] so long as we remain the biggest and most successful club in England, Europe and the World (Anon, Red Issue: 1998).

To compete in Europe you need the best, and to get the best you need to spend money. Sky’s money will enable us to do this and hopefully bring titles at home, in Europe and on the world stage (General De Goal, UWS: 1998).

These letters show a clear disjunctur between the political position of those involved in the IMUSA and SUAM campaign and other Manchester United fans who saw ownership as relevant to them only in so far as it directly affected the level of success on the pitch and were therefore supportive of the bid in the belief that BSkyB would provide extra money for new players. To others this view of Manchester United was entirely antithetical;

To hear a number, no matter how small, of Reds creaming themselves at the prospect of Murdoch’s millions buying supposedly world class players and with them an assured European cup victory, has been nauseating and a betrayal of
what supporting this football club has always meant ... I don't support success. It’s an irrelevance to my support because success doesn’t define my support, never has done never will do. Nor is my support bought by or easily seduced by money ... I don’t care what money is promised, what players are bought, what trophies are won, that’s not why I support [Manchester] United. I support Manchester United football club and everything that that entails. The history, the tradition, the culture, the identity, the dream, the aspiration, the idealism of Manchester United Football Club (Red Heads, UWS: 1998).

Further, Murdoch represented a particularly unattractive proposition to those of a politically ‘left’ persuasion within Manchester United’s support. Indeed one FC United fan who was involved with the anti-Murdoch campaign said to me ‘Murdoch was still very much associated with Wapping at the time, with the attacks on the trade union movement – so he was seen as this arch right wing figure’ (Neal, interview: 25/7/2009) and another FC United fan cited this political objection to Murdoch as the reason she got involved with a supporter campaign for the first time ‘I actually have a particular anti-Murdoch thing personally, in [19]98-99 I took it really personally that he was trying to take my club – so I got involved really because of that’ (Sarah, interview: 3/8/2009).

As the campaign gathered momentum IMUSA and SUAM lobbied MPs to try to build political pressure, they were assisted in this by the increasingly positive image football held in the country at large. New Labour politicians had made concerted attempts to be associated with football and to court football supporters, when in opposition they drew up a charter for football in consultation with supporters and then once in government they formed the Football Taskforce (of which Adam Brown was a member) to look at the way football was being run (Brown and Walsh 1999: 91). Conversely, New Labour had also worked hard in the run up to the 1997 General Election to woo Rupert Murdoch and gain sympathetic coverage in the Newspapers he owned (Brown and Walsh 1999: 88). In the end it was to be the campaigning of IMUSA and SUAM that won out, with the business secretary Stephen Byers referring the case to the Mergers commission, who following detailed submissions from IMUSA, SUAM and BSkyB amongst others, rejected the bid for its monopolistic implications(Brown and Walsh 1999: 141).

However, despite the success of the campaign it still left a fundamental problem of ownership unresolved, as one person involved with the campaign put it to me ‘The club
was left in corporate hands so it was [only] one battle won’ (Neal, interview: 25/7/2009). While many supporters were clearly disaffected with the way in which Manchester United was being run there was uncertainty about what the alternative was, as one critic of the anti-takeover campaign put it ‘You didn’t want the PLC, you don’t want Murdoch, just who do you want?’ (Gregori, UWS: 1998). It seems that the BSkyB takeover acted as a catalyst for some supporters to begin a concerted attempt to bring about supporter ownership at Manchester United;

BSkyB tried to buy Manchester United and that was when everyone realised we needed a more concerted attempt to build a stake in the club and you got SUAM which became Shareholders United and became the Manchester United Supporters Trust, I suppose that’s the trajectory there and it was that BSkyB takeover that pumped it [supporter ownership] up the agenda in terms of [Manchester] United fans (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

Andy Walsh (interview: 3/12/2010) also identified the BSkyB takeover bid as the key point at which he, along with other members of IMUSA and Shareholders United, began to investigate possible models of supporter ownership. This included looking to the member-ownership, as opposed to share ownership, models at Barcelona and at top-level German clubs and looking at how a mutual model of supporter ownership could be established within English football. Furthermore it was not only the issue of ownership that remained unresolved; despite the victory over BSkyB, issues of match day experience, rising prices and the exclusion of young and local supporters, in response to which IMUSA was formed, remained.

None the less, what is clear is that through the 1990s a section of Manchester United’s fan base became increasingly politicised, and willing to organise collectively, over a set of common issues. As Adam Brown argues:

I think that all the way through, certainly up until the Glazer takeover, you had three fanzines that were all saying the same thing about the issues of ownership, fan involvement, ticket prices and standing – at its height there was probably a reach of about 20,000, those 3 put together. So you had the fanzines building awareness, you had events like the price increases, the PLC, Galatasary – leading up to the conflict over standing in seated areas, that came to prominence in 1995 and then the formation of IMUSA following on from that, and then the BSkyB bid
and all the activity around that. So this side of [the year] 2000 there was a real, I called it somewhere else a culture of dissent, not that it was something every [Manchester] United fan subscribed too, but there was enough people to make a fuss, and have voices heard and be taken seriously and all the rest of it (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

It is this ‘culture of dissent’ from which FC United came in 2005 and which shaped the particular aims of the club – of supporter ownership, affordable ticket prices, a commitment to local ‘community’ and a non-restrictive match-day environment amongst others. Furthermore, the emergence of a ‘culture of dissent’ and politicisation to a common set of issues amongst some Manchester United fans meant that the Glazer takeover in 2005 was a ‘final straw’ for those who set up FC United.43 While the moral objection to the leveraging of debt upon Manchester United was a trigger for the formation of the club, it was the politicisation to the wider changes occurring to Manchester United from the 1990s onwards, described in this chapter, that led supporters to the point where they were willing to form their own club.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has set out the long-term historical context in which FC United emerged. I have shown how the power structure of English football, where since professionalisation fans have never had formal control of the clubs they support, had provided the stimulus for supporter mobilisations (like those described by Rogan Taylor (1992)) and calls for an opening up of the ownership structure of football clubs to supporters (Critcher 1979; Triesmen 1982) long before the formation of FC United in 2005. However, mobilisations were episodic and did not produce sustained and successful campaigns resulting in changes to the ownership model of English football clubs. I have demonstrated, following the work of Anthony King (2002), that a regulatory shift within English football from a Keynesian model towards a neo-liberal free-market model occurred in the 1980s which encouraged the movement of entrepreneurial capital into football and this regulatory shift paralleled a shift in the economy at large. The chapter has shown that commercialisation, which had

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43 The phrase ‘final straw’ was one I heard used by FC United fans in several interviews and conversations with me during my fieldwork. Adam Brown describes the Glazer takeover as a ‘tipping point’ (2008: 347) for those fans who set up FC United, while the FC United website talks of the Glazer takeover as ‘the catalyst, the final straw [leading to the setting up of FC United] … the tip at a pyramid of destruction’ (FC United: Undated).
been germinating since the 1970s, intensified following the Taylor report in 1990. Those entrepreneurs who had moved into football through the 1980s funded the building of all-seater stadiums through increased income from the advent of the Premier League and the sale of television rights to BSkyB, a dramatic increase in ticket prices – alongside targeting a richer demographic – and the public sale of shares or bond schemes. I have argued that the movements that emerged in response to these changes amongst Manchester United fans represented a politicisation of a section of the Manchester United fan base over the issues of ticket prices, match-day experience, the exclusion of local support and the ownership of the club. Furthermore, I have suggested that this politicisation directly informed the aims of FC United in terms of supporter ownership, affordable ticket prices, a commitment to local ‘community’ and non-restrictive match-day environment amongst others. From this chapter two key points emerge for understanding FC United. Firstly, the setting up of FC United should be viewed in the long-term context of a particular, largely submerged, tension within English football due to the oppositional power relations between owners and fan inherent in the structure of professional English football clubs from the 1880s onwards. Secondly, and more immediately, FC United’s formation needs to be acknowledged as the product of a particular process of capitalist transformation within football, in turn reflecting wider socio-economic change, which acted to politicise some Manchester United fans to a set of issues within the game.

The next two chapters will unpack this process of politicisation and show in greater depth how it influenced the form FC United came to take and the relationship of supporters to the club. In doing so, I particularly focus on how ideas of commonality and community were elicited within this process. In Chapter Three I look at FC United fans’ feelings of increasing disenchantment with the match-day experience at Old Trafford through the 1990s and early 2000s and look at how FC United offered an opportunity to make anew the match-going experience. In Chapter Four, I trace how many of the changes occurring at Manchester United through the 1990s and 2000s were seen by a significant number of its supporters as having weakened the relationship between the club and the local ‘community’ and show how this has informed FC United’s commitment to be of benefit to the ‘community’. This chapter also adds an element of the historical context not touched upon in this chapter, the increased transnationalisation of English football in the 1990s and 2000s, by looking at the response of some supporters to attempts by those running Manchester United to position the club as a global brand.
Chapter Three: The changing match-day: From Old Trafford to Gigg Lane

Introduction

In the last chapter I set out how one of the outcomes of the rapid changes, in particular the adoption of an all-seater stadium and sharply rising ticket prices, at Manchester United following the Taylor report (1990) was increased dissatisfaction with the match-day experience at Old Trafford amongst many fans and I described how such dissatisfaction had manifested itself in the formation of IMUSA and the HOSTAGE campaign. Those collective enterprises represented a form of politicisation amongst some Manchester United supporters to issues of ticket prices and match-day experience and had directly influenced FC United’s aims in 2005 of providing affordable ticket prices and a non-restrictive match-day environment for supporters. In this chapter, I unpack this process of politicisation by showing in depth how FC United fans related to the changing match-day at Old Trafford during the 1990s and early 2000s and how negative experience of these changes increased their willingness to take political action in the wake of the Glazer takeover of Manchester United. In this chapter I argue that such a process of politicisation amongst FC United fans over the changes occurring to the match day was chiefly related to the loss of significant social relationships around watching football and feelings of alienation and a lack of social connection to other Manchester United fans. This chapter then explores how the setting up of FC United offered these fans the opportunity to re-invigorate and make anew the match-going experience. I argue that what the FC United match-day offered for many fans was precisely the sense of social connection, commonality and indeed community with other fans that they felt had been lost around watching matches at Old Trafford. I now begin this chapter by surveying some of the dominant theoretical approaches that have been taken previously by those looking at football match-going and I suggest that they have stressed the forms of social connection that occur around attending football matches by drawing on the anthropological literature on rituals.

Going to the Match – Some Theoretical Approaches

‘the lads’ fandom by describing how they conceive of their support for Manchester United as analogous to religion. This idea of football support as being a form of ‘secular religion’ is one I came across from informants during my own research and has been discussed both in popular and academic accounts of football fandom. In order to understand the religiosity of the football match-day for the lads, King productively draws upon Durkheim’s ‘The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life’ (1976 [1912]). Durkheim’s argument, in précis, was that aboriginal clans of dispersed hunter-gatherers would come together periodically for ecstatic rituals of totem worship where ‘the aborigines experienced the social existence of their clan viscerally. The aborigines’ emotions were focussed on the totem of the clan and, since the totem represented the clan, the aborigines were, in fact, worshipping their own society in celebrating the totem’ (King 2002: 151). King (2002: 150-153) sets out how ‘the lads’ he researched described the ecstatic emotions they experienced through communal practices of drinking and singing together in pubs before games and into the football ground itself and it was through these practices they experienced a sense of mutual masculine solidarity. For King, Manchester United is analogous to the totem in clan rituals and so the ritual of match going functions in a way for ‘the lads’ that is analogous to the way totem-worshipping rituals did for aboriginal clans:

The love which the lads feel for the team is simultaneously also a love for the feeling of solidarity which they experience every time they see their team and participate in the communal practice of drinking and singing. Just as Durkheim suggested that aboriginal tribes worship their society through the totem, so do the

44 See Percy and Taylor: 1997 for an outline of the use of the analogy between religion and football in literature about football fandom.

45 To some extent ‘lad’ is an under-explored term in King’s (2002) work. In my experience to call someone a ‘lad’ can carry two meanings within Manchester United supporter culture. In one context ‘lad’, for example when someone is described as a ‘Manchester United lad’, refers to someone who is involved in, or at least heavily associated with supporters who are involved in, football violence. In other contexts ‘lad’ is simply used to refer to male supporters, normally those who offer active (singing, chanting) support to the team, shun official club transport to away games and organise much of their support around the consumption of alcohol. For example, Dave told me ‘There are a lot of good lads left at [Manchester] United, who want to get the atmosphere going but they’re surrounded by people who aren’t interested’ (Fieldnotes: 4/8/2009), in this context ‘lad’ merely refers to male supporters who offer active support and carries no connotations of violence. Within King’s study he describes ‘the lads’ as attaining status through fighting (2002: 153) which would suggest the first definition of ‘lad’ but the active, alcohol fuelled, support he describes ‘the lads’ as engaging in would seem to me to be common to a broader group of fans who may also at times be referred to as ‘lads’ without this carrying connotations of violence.
lads reaffirm their identity as lads, with all the values and associations which go with that identity, and their relations with other lads through their love for the team. The love for the team is a transposed love of the lads’ own social groups and the masculinity which informs the group’s relations with itself and others. The team, and the love invested in it, is a symbol of the values and friendships which exist between the lads (King 2002: 152).

In utilising Durkheim’s work, King draws attention to the social relationships that are forged between masculine fans around watching Manchester United. Furthermore, King (2002: 153-158) sees ‘the lads’ style of support, involving drinking and singing, and the masculine values that inform it, as a distinctive practice. Such distinctive practices not only divided ‘the lads’ from supporters of other clubs, who were perceived as unmanly, but also from other members of Manchester United support who did not share their style of support. King’s (2002) account is particularly interesting as it describes the response of a particular group of supporters in the immediate aftermath of the changes described in Chapter Two: Old Trafford had just become an all-seater stadium and ticket prices were increasing rapidly in cost and furthermore, as Manchester United became successful on the pitch, ticket availability was scarce. In particular, King (2002: 155) sets out how some ‘lads’ faced a double exclusion set by the increased cost and scarcity of available tickets and, with the replacement of terraces with an all-seater ground, those ‘lads’ who did attend matches were no longer able to gather together in communal ecstatic support and celebration. As such, King argues, ‘the lads’ were losing ‘a fundamental resource which mediates their relationship with others’ (2002: 159). In this context ‘the lads’ became increasingly aware of a ‘new consumer support’, of families and of more affluent fans, attracted by recent changes to the ground who did not share their active vocal mode of support for the team and this reinforced a sense of distinction for ‘the lads’ from this ‘new’ support. King quotes one of his informants, Michael, making this distinction between himself and the ‘new’ support, in terms of their passive mode of support, explicit:

It ruins it for me sometimes, the atmosphere, you know when you go out the ground and all these people you don’t want there. It just ruins it for me. When I’ve been at some matches at Old Trafford this year and I’ve just been looking at the people sat around me. It just fucks me off so much to look at them all sat there in shirts not singing (2002: 155).
The fanzines, which King describes ‘the lads’ as being key producers and consumers of, also documented the distinction that was made by a significant section of Manchester United’s support between themselves and ‘new’ supporters, in terms of mode of support but also, significantly, in terms of a perception of social class:

A visit to Old Trafford is seen by too many people as a Disney like experience, something to bring the kids to as a birthday treat etc. A very middle class experience all round. The trouble is the contribution these people put into the atmosphere at Old Trafford seems to be in inverse proportion to the amount they swell the souvenir shop coffers by every week (Veg, Red Issue: 1994).

If perceptions of social class formed a key cleavage around which these fans made distinctions between themselves and other supporters who did not share their mode of support, it also provided an analytic framework for ‘the lads’ to understand the motivations of Manchester United in bringing about the changes, such as rising ticket prices, which were transforming their match-day experience. King cites one informant, Phil, saying ‘lately they [Manchester United] want more upper class people – they don’t want the working-class there’ (2002: 159). However, King suggests the class difference between ‘the lads’ and ‘new’ supporters, whose style of support they object to, should not be overstated, with the more affluent lads ‘holding equivalent [class] positions to the new consumers’ (2002: 154).

Having reviewed King’s Durkheimian approach to understanding the football match-day, I now wish to consider some alternative approaches.

Armstrong (1998), Armstrong and Young (1999) and Giulianotti (1995a) draw theoretical inspiration for their analyses of football support from research around carnival and notions of the ‘carnivalesque’, and in particular the work of Abner Cohen (1993) on the Notting Hill carnival. Cohen suggests people are attracted to carnival because it ‘occasions release from the constraints and pressures of the social order, generates relationships of amity even among strangers and allows forbidden excesses’ (1993: 3). In producing a moment outside of the everyday social structure, Cohen suggests carnivals can occasion what Victor Turner (1969) calls ‘Communitas’. ‘Communitas’ for Turner referred to a liminal moment within rituals in which he suggests ‘we are presented … with a “moment in and out of time”, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition … of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties’ (1969: 96). For Armstrong (1998),
Armstrong and Young (1999) and Giulianotti (1995a) the football match-day can be understood as analogous to carnival, a place in which people indulge in behaviour such as singing, chanting and communal celebration that they would not do elsewhere and, as Armstrong and Young (1999: 178) and Giulianotti (1995a: 194) argue, because of this ‘carnivalesque’ nature the football match-day is capable of producing a sense of ‘communitas’ and ‘generalized social bond’ amongst those participating in the ritual of football support. However, Armstrong (1998: 319-322) and Armstrong and Young’s (1999: 202-203) work suggests the ‘carnivalesque’ nature of the match-day, and the consequent sense of ‘communitas’, were under threat from the socio-spatial transformation of football grounds in the early 1990s. Armstrong’s (1998: 319-322) work with Sheffield United supporters, specifically those involved in football hooliganism, documents this changing match-day experience in the early 1990s and both his own and his informants’ negative reaction to these changes. In the epilogue to his book Armstrong reflects on how he perceived the introduction of all-seater stadiums as having lessened the atmosphere and therefore levels of enjoyment of the match-day. He also describes how ‘many [of his informants] no longer attended, as admission prices increased and forms of carnivalesque behaviour were surveyed even more. At times, a hundred and fifty [fans] would gather in pubs, minutes from Bramall Lane [Sheffield United’s home ground], only to watch on satellite TV’ (Armstrong 1998: 322). Here Armstrong suggests that the limitation of ‘carnivalesque’ behaviour within the football ground led some Sheffield United fans to abandon match-day support within the ground altogether in favour of the pub.

Furthermore, alongside Malcolm Young, Armstrong has argued that the move to all-seater stadiums and the introduction of large-scale use of CCTV within football grounds by the football authorities was motivated by a desire to eliminate the ‘carnivalesque’ through these attempts to ‘standardize behaviour and make the audience react in predictable and preordained ways’ in order to create ‘a purified community of compliant consumers’ (Armstrong and Young 1999: 202-203).

In this section I have reviewed two approaches towards understanding the football match-day, a Durkheimian paradigm and an alternative approach based on ideas of the ‘carnivalesque’ and ‘communitas’, both of which emphasised the social connections and relationships that could be forged around watching football. Furthermore the accounts discussed in this section set their analysis in the context of rapid changes occurring to the nature of football going in the early 1990s. What I now wish to do is turn to my own
ethnographic data and set that against these earlier theoretical and ethnographic insights into the nature of the match-day, in order to explain the role that changing experiences of the match-day played in motivating fans’ support for FC United.

Deterioration of the Match-Day Experience at Old Trafford

When I asked my informants about their reasons for supporting FC United many of their responses centred on issues to do with the changing match-day experience at Old Trafford over the last twenty years. Furthermore the fanzines, particularly the early issues of UTB, I read during my research extended my insight into the role these changes had played in motivating people’s involvement with FC United. I found three distinct themes in FC United fans’ negative responses to changes to the Old Trafford match-day. These themes were the destruction of relationships built around watching Manchester United, the perceived negative impact of ‘new’ supporters and the increasingly restrictive nature of the match-day environment. I will now discuss each of these themes in turn.

Within my review of King’s (2002) work in the previous section of this chapter I described how he argued that through watching Manchester United matches together ‘the lads’ celebrated their masculine solidarity with one another. He suggested this was under threat due to ticket price rises and scarcity, which excluded some lads, while others were kept apart from one another by the conversion of Old Trafford to an all-seater stadium. Much like ‘the lads’, my informants described how these changes at Old Trafford in the early 1990s negatively impacted on the relationships they maintained around watching Manchester United. However these relationships were not exclusively restricted to ones of masculine friendship. While Steven (interview: 13/8/2009) told me how he had given up his season ticket at Old Trafford in the mid-1990s following the re-development to all-seater as he was no longer able to stand with his friends, as they were either sat in other parts of the ground or could not get or afford a ticket, other FC United fans suggested to me it was the break-up of family relationships around watching Manchester United that led to their disillusionment with the Old Trafford match-day. Jenny described how price rises and the move to an all-seater stadium prevented her taking her children to Old Trafford in the 1990s: ‘you couldn’t take your kids anymore, because it was too dear [expensive]. You couldn’t go as a family, because even if you got a ticket, you’d be over there and the kids would be over there’ (Jenny, interview: 7/7/2009). Another informant, Dave (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009), told me how he had become increasingly unhappy with the Old Trafford match-
day: he was unable to take both his sons together because he had only two season tickets between himself and his two sons and, with a further ticket both very expensive and difficult to obtain, was therefore forced to rotate the two tickets between the three of them. What was particularly interesting about Dave was that he had shared much in common with ‘the lads’ in King’s ethnography in terms of style of support. He told me stories of self-organised alcohol-fuelled trips to Manchester United away matches with groups of male friends, but it was ultimately the inability to take his children to home games as they grew older that alienated him most from the Old Trafford match-day.  

Attending Manchester United matches had been a means through which the bonds of kinship, not just masculine friendships as in King’s (2002) work, could be re-affirmed and celebrated. It was the curtailment of these differing relationships, due to higher ticket prices and Old Trafford becoming an all-seater ground, around watching Manchester United which created much of the disillusionment with the match-day experience, because the social meaning of the match-day for those supporters was contained within these relationships. The way in which the football match-day can function to re-affirm and mediate the bonds of kinship was further evidenced to me by another informant: Paul, who was in his late twenties, and attended both FC United and Manchester United home games (when they didn’t clash) – a ‘dualist’ in FC United fan parlance. In explaining to me why he went to both teams’ matches he suggested that, while morally he felt he should boycott Manchester United home matches, he continued to go to games because ‘it’s only watching [Manchester] United that I see my dad. If I didn’t go to watch [Manchester] United I probably wouldn’t have a relationship with my dad’ (fieldnotes: 31/10/2009). Thus for Paul, watching Manchester United functions to directly re-affirm his bond to his father and, in King’s terms, provides ‘a fundamental resource’ (2002: 159) through which he mediates his relationship to his father. What is interesting is that because attending Manchester United continues to function in this way for Paul it limited his political response in the wake of the Glazer takeover in 2005: while he attended the anti-Glazer protests leading up to the takeover he ultimately did not boycott Old Trafford because he did not want to lose the relationship he had with his father. For others, such as Dave, Jenny and Simon, it was precisely because the match-day at Old Trafford could no longer function

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46 In relation to the previous footnote, Dave’s style of support has much in common with ‘the lads’ in King’s study, in terms of alcohol consumption and active support, but he had not been involved in football violence.
to mediate the relationships that they wished it to that their desire to take political action increased in the wake of the Glazer takeover.

Echoing ‘the lads’ in King’s (2002) study, I found that many of my informants made distinctions between themselves and a ‘new’ support, which they perceived to be attracted by Manchester United’s success in the 1990s. My informants saw this ‘new’ support as having a detrimental effect on the atmosphere, where a good atmosphere was chiefly defined in terms of loud active vocal support for the team through chants and songs, and therefore their enjoyment of the match-day at Old Trafford. For example, Dave told me how the atmosphere at Old Trafford through the 1990s had been increasingly diluted by ‘daytrippers’ looking for a ‘theme park experience’ (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). The idea of ‘new’ fans seeking a form of commercialised ‘entertainment’, represented by Dave in the idea of the ‘theme park experience’, was one I came across frequently and was always aligned with the idea that those who sought ‘entertainment’ did so in a passive way that undermined the atmosphere. Steven told me, in response to a question about why he felt the atmosphere had declined at Old Trafford: ‘I can’t disagree that there are a big part of the Old Trafford entertainment complex that are more interested in entertainment than getting behind the team’ (Steven, interview 13/8/2009). While another informant Sarah told me that ‘the really worrying thing about Premiership crowds now, is they do sit and wait to be entertained, instead of seeing their role as part of the process … actually you’ve got to get behind the team if they’re 1-0 down and not sit there and mutter’ (Sarah, interview 3/8/2009). Both Steven and Sarah view the quest for passive ‘entertainment’ as antithetical to fandom and the generation of atmosphere which they see as an active ‘process’ of ‘getting behind the team’ vocally. This distinction made between themselves and a ‘new’ passive support at Old Trafford, like it was for King’s ‘lads’, was often overlaid by issues of social class. For example, when I asked both Dean and Paul why the atmosphere had declined at Old Trafford they sought to explain it to me through the lens of social class:

I place ‘new’ in inverted commas, in relation to ‘new’ support or ‘new’ fans, during this chapter because the actual temporal newness of these supporters in attending Manchester United games may be as much perceived on the part of those supporters quoted here as it is rooted in reality. In King’s (2002: 193-203) work on ‘New Consumer Fans’ he identifies a constituency of support who have been attending games well before the 1990s but are happy with the transformation occurring at Manchester United in the 1990s and to adopt passive modes of support. When the idea of a ‘new’ support is invoked in relation to those who do not share my informants’ mode of match-day support they are also grouping these more long-standing fans within this category.
I think it’s not entirely a class thing, but it’s largely a class thing, the key thing is it’s the people who view it as just another form of entertainment like going to Disneyland or going to the cinema and you pick and choose and that’s not entirely a class thing as I’m sure there are working class consumers who bought into the Old Trafford experience like that but it was very largely a kind of middle-class [thing] (Dean, interview 10/12/2010).

At Old Trafford there are a lot of moneyed people now. For them it’s just like going to the theatre (Paul, fieldnotes: 31/10/2009).

For Dean and Paul those fans who viewed going to watch Manchester United as ‘entertainment’, or ‘like going to the theatre’, and were perceived as undermining the atmosphere were largely seen as ‘middle-class’ or as ‘moneyed’. As such, perceptions of social class provide an analytic framework through which Dean and Paul understand the changing match-day, perceiving the increasing presence of a passive and consumerist middle class as leading to a declining atmosphere at Old Trafford. The idea of FC United being a ‘working-class’ club, or being for ‘working-class’ people, was one I came across several times during my research. For example, Steven in interview told me how there had been a flag at several FC United matches bearing the legend ‘FC United – Football for the Working Classes’ and in discussing this flag he went on to confirm the idea of a class-based distinction between the support of FC United and much of the present match-going support of Manchester United ‘I’d say the demographic of FC United supporters is a lot less gentrified than the people who are occupying Old Trafford these days’ (Steven, interview 13/8/2009). However, while it is clear perceptions of class provide a trope through which a distinction is made by many FC United supporters between themselves and a ‘new’ support at Old Trafford, and class is also used as an analytic tool to understand the changing match-day experience at Old Trafford, I would suggest that FC United fans’ experience of these social processes cannot be reduced to an objective class position – measured in terms of occupational status or income for instance. For example, Dean while seeing a ‘middle-class’ consumerist takeover of Old Trafford as being responsible for the loss of atmosphere at Old Trafford was employed as a University Lecturer. Several other FC United fans I met had skilled professional jobs as teachers, civil servants and skilled engineers amongst others, which is suggestive that the class basis of FC United’s support could not be described through objective categorisation as ‘working-class’. The point is that the social processes that led to disillusionment with the Old Trafford match-day and the setting up of FC United
should not be rendered as a simple narrative of an authentic working-class movement being set up in response to middle and upper-class colonisation of football. Nonetheless my data reveals that perceptions of social class as a category of understanding and analysis holds salience for many at FC United despite a social reality which defies such categorisation. It is worth considering why FC United fans choose to deploy such a strong class narrative in understanding their changing experience of the Old Trafford match-day. This is particularly so given that other researchers (Savage et al 2000, Smith 2012) in Manchester have found a trend for people to dis-identify from class categories and reject class labelling of themselves - Smith amongst poorer residents in north Manchester and Savage et al amongst residents with a wide range of incomes from across Greater Manchester. I would suggest two reasons why class identification and class-talk is more prominent amongst FC United fans. First, the changes bought about within football in the 1990s that FC United fans objected too were, as discussed in Chapter Two, often framed by those driving these changes as explicitly about attracting an ‘affluent middle-class consumer’ and as Malcolm et al (2000) noted, that, despite the absence of primary evidence, there has been a widely held perception that such a class transformation in football crowds has been successful. To make a distinction on the basis of social class between oneself and the ‘new’ support attracted by the changes which have occurred within football is then both an acknowledgement of this wider motivation underpinning the changes and an oppositional distancing of oneself from these changes. Such an oppositional deployment of class labels was something Katherine Smith also came across, though much less frequently, in her ethnographic study in north Manchester, she suggests the ‘label of ‘working-class’ was rarely, if ever, mentioned, unless to signal the abhorrence of a specifically ‘middle-class’ way of being’ (2012: 8). A second reason for the strong class-narrative amongst FC United fans lies in the powerful popular understanding of English football as being authentically tied to the (male) working-class, as Steven said to me ‘it was always seen as the working man’s game, football’ (interview: 13/8/2009). As such then, to suggest FC United is a working-class club is to tie into a wider cultural understanding of what football authentically should be. Further to this, to label another supporter middle-class is to utilise this wider cultural understanding to highlight the perceived in-authenticity of their fandom and its practices and modes of behaviour. FC United fans’ own class narrative about the changes which occurred within football is a particular framing of a wider class narrative about football.
It was not only the disruption of significant social relations around watching Manchester United and the sense of a lack of social connection to ‘new’ supporters that led to disenchantment with the Old Trafford match day. For many FC United fans’ disenchantedness was also related to how the increasingly securitised Old Trafford in the 1990s, with an all-seater stadium heavily policed by private security and CCTV, had removed opportunities for ‘carnivalesque’ (Armstrong 1998; Armstrong and Young 1999; Giulianotti 1995a) behaviour from the ground. For example, ‘Wolfie’ the editor of UTB discusses here why he gave up his Manchester United season ticket a few years before the Glazer takeover:

I’ll be honest here … I’d gone right off football, I stopped going to OT [Old Trafford] a few seasons ago because it had become a dull experience. No not dull, totally bleedin’ soul destroying. You know the score: twenty odd quid to sit next to a numpty in a (oh no here it comes) JESTER HAT and watch a bunch of millionaires whilst being told to behave by a faceless PA announcer, and the no-fun security mob! I’m getting too old for that kind of manufactured entertainment. It wasn’t the football of old, the football that we grew up with, more like some marketing man’s idea of what football should be (Wolfie, UTB: 2005).

Others I spoke to share this sense that Manchester United had become increasingly restrictive in its treatment of fans and therefore Old Trafford had become less enjoyable to attend. Dave, for instance, told me how Manchester United had become ‘dictatorial’ towards fans (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). This frustration over the increasingly restrictive nature of the match-day at Old Trafford seems to particularly focus around the issue of being made to sit in the re-developed all-seater Old Trafford. Steven told me how being ‘forced’ to sit at Old Trafford had been a key catalyst in him giving up his season ticket ten years prior to the Glazer takeover (interview: 13/8/2009) whilst Jenny reflected that ‘there’s no atmosphere [at Old Trafford], everyone is told to sit down and shut up’ (interview: 7/7/2009). Furthermore, expressive ‘carnivalesque’ shows of support, such as singing and chanting, were felt by some to have become more embarrassing due to ‘new’ supporters who did not share this mode of support. So Dave told me how he had given up trying to

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48 ‘Wolfie’ uses the description of a fan wearing a Jester Hat to symbolise the perceived in-authenticity of some supporters in attendance at Manchester United home games; as Millward has argued ‘Traditional supporters tend to see the wearing of ‘Jesters’ hats’ as threatening a supporter’s claim to be part of authentic fan code’ (2011: 72).
start chants and songs at Old Trafford because other fans would ‘stare at you as if you were doing something wrong’ (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). However, as King points out it was not just the attitude of other fans that made these kinds of ‘carnivalesque’ shows of support more difficult, it was also the reconfiguration of the ground: ‘certain practices carried out in the communal anonymity of the terrace could become embarrassing from the isolation of the seat. The very anonymity of standing in a crowd protected the fan from humiliation if that fan started to sing alone or performed an action which no one followed. There is no such comfort in the panoptic isolation of the seat’ (2002: 161).

Within this section I have traced the increasing disillusionment with the Old Trafford match-day which provided some of the motivation for the formation of FC United in the wake of the Glazer takeover. I now turn to FC United fans’ stories about returning to Old Trafford after the Glazer takeover in 2005 in order to see how these experiences shored up their desire to take further action in the form of continued support for FC United.

Going Back to Old Trafford

I begin this section with an extended narrative told to me by one informant, Dean, of his experiences of returning to watch a match at Old Trafford following the Glazer takeover. The narrative highlights the sense of isolation and lack of social connection to other fans at Old Trafford, which appears common to many FC United fans who have attended matches at Old Trafford following the Glazer takeover. In my analysis of Dean’s narrative I will place his story alongside those of other FC United fans in order to highlight this common thread. Dean told me the following:

Dean: I’ve been to one game at Old Trafford since the takeover, that was Wigan that first season … I only went because my mate hadn’t given his season ticket up and he couldn’t find anyone to take it and I’d basically said to him I’m not ever going to give you any money for a ticket again and he couldn’t find anyone to buy it. So I went in for free and the atmosphere was fucking awful, even compared to the days before, you could hear a fucking pin drop and there was this one lad, who I’d never spoken to but he was on our row, we were on the Stretford End almost directly behind the goal two tiers up, and he always came in 10 minutes late. It didn’t matter whether it was a weekday evening match or 3 o’clock on a Saturday or whatever he was always 10 minutes late, regular as clockwork, shaved head, bit beefy and I’d seen him a couple of times at FC [United] as well. He was one of
those ones who kept the ticket on [continued purchasing a Manchester United season ticket after the Glazer takeover] and fair play to him, you know, and he was about 10 seats down but he always leading the singing, the chanting, and there was no singing going on and towards the end he started singing ‘how we kill him [Malcolm Glazer] I don’t know, cut him up from head to toe’. So I joined in and a few joined in and there was this couple in front of me who in my imagination had posh southern accents, even though they might of come from Manchester, who knows, and they turned round to look at me as if they wanted to have a go at me and then they thought better of it, almost as if how dare you sing that here ....

GP: So how did you feel towards the people around you?

Dean: I felt absolute – well, this is the thing you don’t want to say because it ties into that kind of negative view people have about FC [United] fans - at that moment I felt absolute animosity and contempt, who the fuck are these people, what have they got to do with Manchester United at all and don’t they get anything? I mean I can remember at the second meeting [the second public meeting of Manchester United fans prior to FC United’s formation, discussed in the Introduction], the Apollo meeting, Andy Walsh saying ‘Manchester United isn’t the PLC, it’s not the board, it’s not even the players, it’s us in this room’ and it’s very glorious kind of rhetorical statement, you can tell the guy’s socialist past, but you know in a sense I felt these people don’t mean anything to me. I don’t want to be sat next to these people really.

GP: So you felt a lack of commonality with those people?

Dean: I felt a complete lack of commonality with the people at Old Trafford that day, apart from the lad with the shaved head singing away, the rest of them I felt I couldn’t give a fuck about them and to say that there had been all of these things, the atmosphere had been worsening if you like in the last five years building up to the Glazers’ takeover but I had never felt a feeling like that. This is not the party

49 The song referred to is a widely sung anti-Glazer song which goes as follows:

He's gonna die,
He's gonna die,
Malcolm Glazer's gonna die,
How we kill him I don't know,
Cut him up from head to toe,
All I know is Glazer's gonna die
line because it’s the sort of thing anti-FC [United] people will use against us to say ‘they’re a bunch of arrogant cocks’ etcetera etcetera but I felt these people are just bending over and getting f*cked up the arse. I’ve got no time for these people at all, now that’s not a good way to think about everybody there because I know there are thousands of decent committed [Manchester] United fans who hate the Glazers and for whatever reason still go, so that’s not my logical official position but at that moment of looking round this ground that was sold-out but felt empty, the whole ground felt empty, it was like being in some weird science fiction fucking ’Day of the Triffids’ thing you know, and it was like ’Invasion of the Body Snatchers’, it was like who the f*ck are these people and clearly mixed in with those people were thousands of decent people but at that moment it felt like you were surrounded by numpties (Dean, interview: 10/12/2010).

Dean begins his narrative with an account of singing an anti-Glazer song at the match and how other fans reacted negatively to this. What is particularly interesting is that he associates these fans with a specific class position and location, ‘in my imagination [they] had posh southern accents’, even though he acknowledges he had no actual evidence for this. As I noted earlier a particular class position, that of ‘middle-class’, ‘moneyed’ or in this case ‘posh’, was often associated with a ‘new’ passive support at Old Trafford in the 1990s and, as we will see in more depth in Chapter Four, the same is true of a particular location, where ‘new’ passive supporters are associated with coming from outside Manchester and in particular being ‘southern’. Dean’s statement here is somewhat ambiguous though, given that he himself was born and raised in the south-east of England. While he deploys ‘southern’ as a way of signalling the inauthenticity of those fans who stared at him for singing the anti-Glazer song, ‘who the f*ck are these people, what have they got to do with Manchester United at all’, he is able to view himself as an authentic fan despite hailing from the south of England. In understanding Dean’s use of ‘southern’ here it is useful to draw upon Anthony King’s (2003) argument about the relationship between locality and fandom amongst the Manchester United fans he worked with. King argues that Manchester was ‘employed as a common symbol which the fans invoke to define appropriate behaviour’ (2003: 201) and non-Mancunian fans who adopted this ‘appropriate behaviour’ could be considered legitimate members of the group. Dean then invokes ‘southern’ in just such a symbolic manner, it symbolises these fans in-appropriate mode of support, which was evidenced by looking negatively at him for singing an anti-Glazer song. While at the
same time he can view himself as a legitimate supporter, despite also hailing from the south of England, because he displays particular forms of behaviour such as opposing the Glazer takeover. To return to the narrative, Dean’s experience of other fans reacting negatively to him singing an anti-Glazer song led on to him experiencing a sense of total alienation from the mass of other Manchester United fans present, ‘the whole ground felt empty’ and ‘I felt a complete lack of commonality with the people at Old Trafford that day’. Such an experience is an example of what Brown called the ‘atomization of the Glazer takeover’ (2008: 349) in which divisions between Manchester United fans became manifest following the takeover of the club and can be seen as the very opposite of the ‘communitas’ or a generalized social bond which Giulianotti (1995a) and Armstrong and Young (1999) suggested the football match-day could make possible. Rather Dean was left with a generalized sense of difference and animosity to others present, ‘it felt like you were surrounded by numpties’, despite acknowledging the possible presence of ‘thousands of decent people’. Other FC United fans who went to games at Old Trafford following the Glazer takeover record similar feelings of alienation from other fans to Dean:

I went to a few MUFC [Manchester United Football Club] home games last season; I felt no connection to those around me. This is no earth shattering realisation; I (and many others) have been feeling it for seasons, however, the memory of a well spoken lad sat in front of me talking to his mate about ‘missing the last game because the family are popping out to our villa in Spain’ revisited me during my shipping forecast revelation. This was not the football I fell in love with (Lenin, UTB: 2006).

I bought my season ticket [for FC United] over the summer [of 2005] really as an act of solidarity, because I didn’t think actually I was brave enough to leave Old Trafford and I had my season ticket for Old Trafford that season. So what I expected to do was go to Old Trafford or if there wasn’t a game or I could combine the two I would go to FC [United] but it very quickly became clear to me that actually that wasn’t the way it was going to be because emotionally when I went back to Old Trafford I felt very isolated because I had been so involved in that fight [against the Glazer takeover] over the summer yet clearly for most people going back to Old Trafford it was business as usual and it just wasn’t for me, and I couldn’t bear it because it just seemed like to them nothing had changed and to me absolutely everything had changed (Sarah, interview 3/8/2009).
For ‘Lenin’ his sense of difference from other match-going Manchester United fans, ‘I felt no connection to those around me’, was confirmed by a display of wealth by a fellow fan, ‘popping out to our villa in Spain’. Much Like Dean, ‘Lenin’s’ feelings of alienation were overlaid by a class narrative which made a distinction between themselves and the fans who they encountered on their return visits to Old Trafford. For Sarah what contributed to her sense of alienation on returning to Old Trafford was that those present did not appear to share her political conviction about the impact of the Glazer takeover -‘I couldn’t bear it because it just seemed like to them nothing had changed and to me absolutely everything had changed’. It was this sense of alienation, due to a sense of a lack of shared political belief, which led Sarah to stop attending Old Trafford and give up her season ticket and only attend FC United matches.

In this section I have shown how returning to Old Trafford following the Glazer takeover led to many FC United fans experiencing a sense of alienation from, and lack of commonality with, match-going Manchester United fans and this was overlaid by a sense of difference from these fans in terms of class and political belief. I have also suggested that this experience of alienation, which can be seen as being the very opposite of any form of ‘communitas’, provided motivation for continued political action in the form of attendance at FC United. In the next section I look at the experiences of the FC United match-day itself.

The ‘Re-Birth’ of the Match-Day Experience?

Within this section I look at how many FC United fans experience a sense of commonality, social connection and community with fellow supporters through the FC United match-day. I also suggest this commonality was related not just to fellow fans but also the players and management of the club. Furthermore, I contend that the FC United match-day also provides a means through which supporters can re-make relationships and experience forms of the ‘carnivalesque’ which were no longer possible at Old Trafford.

For many of my informants when I asked about what they enjoyed about the FC United match-day their responses focussed upon a sense of having something in common with other supporters:

GP: What did you enjoy when you first started going?

Nick: It was the feeling of ownership and participation, and feeling of we all did that, I felt a bond to all the other people watching the football match that was just
far far stronger than what I had experienced watching another football match. I felt more in common with all the people there than I had ever felt with the people at Old Trafford or at Besiktas.⁵⁰

GP: Why do you think you felt that greater bond?

Nick: Because we made it happen (interview: 07/11/2010).

GP: What do you enjoy about going to see FC [United]?

Sarah: It’s the community, it’s the communality of the experience, it’s knowing that there are people there for the same reasons as I am (interview: 3/8/2009).

Nick relates his sense of commonality or ‘bond’ to other FC United supporters, which he directly contrasts to his experiences at Old Trafford, to the shared political act of creating a new club - ‘we made it happen’. Similarly, Sarah relates the ‘communality’ she experiences watching FC United to the fact that she shares a common set of motivations for following FC United to other fans present, ‘it’s knowing the are people there for the same reasons as I am’. This relates back to the story she told me, relayed in the preceding section, about her feelings of alienation when going back to Old Trafford in 2005 because others there did not share her views on the impact of the Glazer takeover for Manchester United. Indeed such shared views of the Glazer takeover amongst FC United fans lead Sarah to feel she is part of a ‘community’. This is particularly interesting in relation to my comments in the introduction to this thesis, arguing in favour of Brown et al’s (2008) call to move away from geographically functionalist accounts of supporter communities, as here Sarah’s sense of community with fellow supporters is not based on a common geographical location but rather is elicited in a more self-conscious manner in relation to a shared set of politics. I noted in the preceding section how upon return visits to Old Trafford, following the Glazer takeover, many FC United fans experienced a sense of alienation in which notions of class and location took on heightened importance and were a means through which they expressed difference from those who did not share their anti-Glazer views. It seems that the FC United match-day, because of the shared political reasons for being there, functioned to militate against the importance of such differences and instead create a sense of commonality and community. For example Dean, who I quoted earlier discussing

⁵⁰Besiktas is a football team in Istanbul, Turkey where Nick had lived for a couple of years in the 1990s.
how he felt a complete lack of commonality with other fans at Old Trafford told me the following about his experience of the match-day at FC United

GP: Did you get that sense of commonality at FC?

Dean: Absolutely, 100%, and it was a weird thing in a way for me it was one of those moments where you didn’t have to worry about not having a Manchester accent, for example, it would just be assumed by the fact that you were there that you just kind of cared about things (interview: 10/12/2010).

Here Dean suggests how his non-Mancunian accent, which as noted earlier was often associated with ‘new’ passive supporters at Old Trafford, ceased to be important as a source of differentiation because ‘it would just be assumed by the fact that you were there that you just kind of cared about things’. The ‘things’ referred to here may be understood as the Glazer takeover and the general commercialising processes around Manchester United and football in general which gave rise to FC United. If we return to King’s (2003) argument about the use of Manchester as a shared symbol invoked to define appropriate behaviour, it appears from Dean’s comment that around the FC United match-day such symbolic uses of locality were no longer necessary because attendance itself at FC United symbolised a shared set of assumptions about what constituted appropriate support – that you ‘cared about things’. It could be argued from Dean’s comments, alongside the words of Nick and Sarah cited earlier, that the FC United match-day did afford many a moment which was very similar to Turner’s ‘communitas’ where they recognised a ‘generalized social bond’ to others present. However the use of Turner’s idea of ‘communitas’, with its focus on the experience of liminal forms of social bonding, has limitations in explaining the forms of community that can be experienced around watching FC United – as Brown et al have argued football support can be a ‘regular, structuring part of their [the supporters] existence that enables them to feel belonging in the relative disorder of contemporary social formations’ (2008: 308 – emphasis original). As an example of this, Sarah, who also acted as a volunteer for FC United, told me how the sense of ‘community’ she experienced at FC United had led her to move back to Manchester (having lived out of the city for many years) shortly after the club’s formation (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009): FC United had become a ‘regular, structuring’ part of her life.51

51 Brown (2007: 629; 2008: 352-353) also supports this suggestion that FC United can play a significant ‘structuring’ part in supporters’ lives.
Alongside the expression of commonality and community with fellow fans many informants expressed these notions in relation to the players and management of the club. So Jenny told me:

> You feel you belong, it’s [FC United’s] yours, it belongs to you and you belong to it, and everybody’s the same – the chief executive and the secretary of the club are on the terraces the same as everyone else and they’ll stop and say hello. (Jenny, interview 7/7/2009)

The secretary and chief executive (or more accurately the general manager) are the club’s only two full time paid members of staff. For Jenny, it is the fact that these members of staff are willing to share the same space, ‘the terraces’, at the match and speak with her and other supporters that encapsulates her sense of belonging to FC United. This sense of commonality between fans and club staff could also be seen in the way fans speak about the team manager Karl Marginson. I often heard people refer to how Karl ‘got it’, where ‘it’ implies the reasons why the club was set up and the ethos under which the club is run. Robert Brady in his fan diary expresses this idea of Karl sharing FC United’s aims when discussing his appointment as manager in 2005:

> He [Karl Marginson] also got, immediately, what this new club wanted to be about. He got it because that was what he wanted for his children, and the youngsters of east central Manchester Ancoats where he came from, who could no longer afford to go to Old Trafford regularly. (Brady 2006: 63).

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, this sense of commonality was often extended by supporters to the players at FC United. Many fans had felt a growing separation between themselves and Manchester United players, particularly in the light of rapidly escalating wages, as one put it ‘over the years at Old Trafford we’ve got used to the idea of players and fans living in separate universes and never the twain shall meet’ (Crowther 2006: 132). FC United fans often contrasted these feelings of separation from players at Manchester United with the close personal contact they were able have with players at FC United:

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52 Similarly, in the time I was attending FC United home games elected board members stood in the stands with friends rather than sitting in Gigg Lane’s directors box and were unidentifiable from fellow supporters, unless you knew who they were.

53 Briefly, ‘ethos’ here can be seen as including such things as supporter ownership and involvement in the running of the club, affordability of ticket prices and a responsibility to the local community.
I’d rather watch them because unlike the increasing number of free-loading opportunistic primadonnas that have engulfed the Premier league in recent seasons, this tuppence ha’penny team consists of honest... players who are as much in awe of the whole concept of FCUoM [Football Club United of Manchester] as the rest of us. I don’t remember hearing of any ‘icons’ from any premiership teams, never mind just MUFC [Manchester United Football Club], posting messages on fans’ internet forums, stopping the team bus and giving stranded supporters a lift, sharing a post match pint with supporters or actively seeking dialogue in an effort to forge relationships (A Balanced View, UTB, 2005).

The players still go in the pub, you can have a drink with a player and they will still give kids autographs, they’re just ordinary guys who happen to play football (Jenny, interview: 7/7/2009).

It appears that these personal relationships with the ‘ordinary guys’, in Jenny’s terms, who played for FC United changed, for some fans, the way they viewed the match-day:

You feel obliged to do your bit and sing, the players have been working during the day, then clocked off and come and [played], so the least you can do is support them, it’s a bit of a different relationship than with Ronaldo and co (Sarah, interview: 3/8/2009). 54

For Sarah because of the fact that the players were part time and held other jobs this created an obligation on her as a fan to offer active support to the team – an obligation she did not feel for the players at Manchester United. It seems to me that some of the social power of the match-day at FC United lies in the feelings of commonality supporters experience with not just fellow fans but also the club’s staff and players who are willing to be in spontaneous personal contact with them and shared the social status of ‘ordinary’ people.

Earlier in this chapter I argued that for many FC United fans their dissatisfaction with the Old Trafford match-day was partly the result of the fact that it could no longer function to mediate the social relationships which they wished it to and this dissatisfaction increased their desire to take political action in the wake of the Glazer takeover. The factors that my informants cited as preventing them from mediating significant social relationships around

54 ‘Ronaldo’ refers to Cristiano Ronaldo who played for Manchester United between 2003 and 2009
watching Manchester United were the prohibitive cost of tickets, scarcity of tickets and being unable to sit or stand with friends or family when inside Old Trafford, and I would suggest none of these factors applied around watching FC United. Ticket prices for each game during the 2009/10 season, during which I was conducting my fieldwork, were £7.50 for adults and £2 for juniors (under 16 years old) and FC United operated a ‘pay what you can afford’ scheme for season tickets; in contrast match tickets at Old Trafford cost between £33 and £55 for adults and £15 for children (under 16 years old) and the adult season tickets are between £532 and £950. Gigg Lane has an 11,000 spectator capacity and FC United have averaged attendances between 1,900 and 3,100 during their existence, therefore there is never a scarcity of tickets. Furthermore fans are able to stand or sit where they wish within the two open stands of the ground, rather than having to sit in a pre-allocated seat as you do within Old Trafford. Therefore it is always possible for fans to group with whoever they wish within Gigg Lane. What this has meant for many FC United fans is that, in contrast to what they had experienced at Old Trafford, the match-day was able to function to mediate the meaningful relationships that they wished it to. Dave, who as I discussed earlier had been unable to take both his sons to Old Trafford because he could not afford an additional season ticket, now found himself able to afford tickets for both his sons and was able to be with them in the ground at FC United matches (fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). Meanwhile for Steven, he was able to experience again the bonds of masculine sociality that he had lost at Old Trafford:

GP: What did you enjoy about attending FC United matches?

Steven: I think at first it was because it had some of the elements about matches that I didn’t experience anymore, for a start being able to go with your mates … to be able to have a laugh with your mates, it sounds a bit juvenile that, but it is kind of one of the reasons you go to football, it is a sort of shared experience … social to be able to chat with your friends at the football and have a few pints with them before the match (Steven, interview: 13/8/2009).

It was not just re-capturing the bonds of kinship and friendship around watching football that made going to an FC United match a meaningful and enjoyable experience. Many of

55 The ‘pay what you can afford’ season ticket scheme has run since the 2009/10 season and has attracted considerable media interest (for example: Gibson: 2009), it suggests a minimum fee of £90 but allows supporters to choose their own price.
my informants also spoke to me about the sense of freedom they enjoyed at FC United matches, in contrast to the increasing securitisation and restrictions they had felt at Old Trafford that I described earlier in the chapter. Dean told me of his initial experiences of attending FC United matches:

I loved it yeah, the fact that you could go a little bit mad ... I mean I’m probably not telling you anything other than clichés you’ve heard a 100 times before, but you could stand up, you could sing, you were expected to sing. There was a kind of sense in that, yeah, you were supposed to go a bit crazy and mad things would happen, the life boat at the first game at Leigh, and every week it felt like something like that was happening, it was just fun. Sometimes at the end at Old Trafford you’d be singing, and it was fun to sing, but you were singing out of a sense of duty because even the Stretford End only half the Stretford End were singing and you were kind of ‘come on make it happen’, you would do it because you didn’t want to be one of those muppets almost, at FC [United] you would get carried away with the enthusiasm of it (Dean, interview: 10/12/2010).

Dean stresses the out of the ordinary nature of both his own behaviour and the match-day experience itself, ‘you were supposed to go a bit crazy and mad things would happen’, citing an incident at FC United’s first ever game at Leigh where an inflatable ‘life boat’ was passed around the crowd, and contrasts this with the mundane nature of the Old Trafford match-day. Dean’s description of the ‘authorized transgression’ of the FC United match-day brings us back to Giulianotti (1995a), Armstrong (1998) and Armstrong and Young (1999) idea of the football match-day as analogous to carnival, as it seems the FC United match-day is an occasion that provides ‘release from the constraints and pressures of the social order, generates relationships of amity even among strangers and allows forbidden excesses’ (Cohen 1993: 3). I would suggest that part of the reason for this ‘carnivalesque’ match-day was to do with the fact that many supporters felt that, unlike at Old Trafford, they shared a common mode of support with each other at FC United. As one fanzine commentator put it:

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56 Although Gigg Lane is an all-seater stadium a no standing policy is not enforced by the small number of stewards, unlike at Old Trafford, and FC United fans almost all stand during games apart from a small section of supporters (mainly older fans and younger children) in one stand. The section where supporters sit is not formally enforced by stewards but rather it is a collective understanding amongst FC United supporters that in that section supporters sit.
One thing that does stand out though (and for me this is the most important thing) is that we are creating an unbelievable atmosphere in the ground, both home and away. The most enjoyable aspect of this carnival like approach has been the willingness of countless people to have a go at writing a song ... The reason? I honestly feel the creativity and humour has always been there amongst our support. It’s just easier to gain the confidence to ‘demo’ your latest creation when you’re surrounded by like-minded people eager to lend their voices to it, than it is when you’re being told to sit down and your song is met with disinterest and disdain (RM7, UTB: 2006).

Here ‘RM7’ explicitly references the idea of FC United match-day as ‘carnival’ and suggests part of the ‘carnival’ is people being willing to make up and sing songs and generate an ‘unbelievable atmosphere’. He suggests the making up of and singing of songs is made possible by being with ‘like-minded people’ rather than those who view you with ‘disinterest and disdain’. Here it is commonality that produces ‘carnivalesque’ behaviour rather than the other way round as suggested in those accounts of the football match-day based on Abner Cohen’s idea of how carnival is productive of a sense of communitas.

However, the match-day at FC United does not remain fixed in how it is understood by supporters and in the meanings it carries for them. Given that FC United’s average attendances have fallen from around 3,000 in the first season to around 2,000 in the last three seasons, it is clear that for some the match-day at FC United ceased to create the same level of enjoyment and meaning as it had previously.\(^\text{57}\) For the methodological reason that supporters who no longer went to FC United were difficult for me to meet it is not possible to get a full insight into these processes. Nonetheless, I did meet supporters who expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the current match-day at FC United and that it was not the same as it had been in the initial seasons. For example, Dean who I quoted above talking so enthusiastically about the first season watching FC United told me about his return to an FC United match after two years away from Manchester:

> Since I got back I’ve been to one league game before the FA cup game last night but it was a home game at Stalybridge because Gigg Lane was double booked and

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\(^{57}\) To be exact, in 2005/06 FC United Average attendance at home games was 3,056, in 2006/07 it was 2,581, in 2007/08 it was 2,086, 2008/09 it was 2,152, 2009/10 it was 1,954 and in 2010/11 it was 1,961.
the stand we were in wasn’t covered but the noise didn’t seem as loud somehow. It seemed flatter than I remembered it and maybe that’s hindsight doing something to you but whereas in the first two seasons everything seemed kind of joyous and bumping in the air and uncharted territory it seemed a little bit routine, you went through the songbook and some songs weren’t there anymore but it just seemed a little bit routine somehow, I didn’t get a buzz from it in the same way as I had done in the past. (Dean, interview: 10/12/2010)

For Dean the FC United match-day no longer had the ‘carnivalesque’ edge it used to, it had become routine and as such he no longer got the ‘Buzz’ from it that he once had and, as such, it had lost some of its social meaning as an event. Another supporter, Ned, who rarely attended home games during the time I was conducting my research but had done in the initial seasons told me ‘Sometimes I’m not really sure what it is about anymore, what the aim of the club is, whether it is still about Glazer’ (fieldnotes: 24/7/2010). So Ned was no longer as inclined to attend match-days as he did not feel sure that he shared a common political goal, expressing opposition to the Glazer takeover of Manchester United, as he had in the early seasons. I also heard complaints that the relationship with players was not as close as it had been the first seasons, certainly in the time I was carrying out research players did not write on the internet fan forum or appear to drink with supporters in pubs as often as they seem to have done in the first season. Clearly for many the FC United match-day continues to be a meaningful event and one in which they experience moments of the ‘carnivalesque’, feelings of commonality and a sense of community but it must be appreciated that these meanings are always in process and never final.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed a key element of the motivation for the setting up and supporting of FC United, which is the increasingly negative experience that FC United supporters had had of the Old Trafford match-day in the light of changes associated with the rapid commercialisation of Manchester United from the 1990s onwards. In particular, I showed how these negative experiences were chiefly related to the breaking apart of significant social relationships (both of kinship and friendship) around watching Manchester United, the feeling of a lack of commonality and social connection with a ‘new’ support (who were perceived as distinct in terms of their passive mode of support and social class) and the lack of opportunity to engage in spontaneous ‘carnivalesque’ shows of
support within a re-developed Old Trafford. Such motivation for supporting FC United was reinforced for some fans by the sense of alienation from other Manchester United supporters they experienced when returning to Old Trafford following the Glazer takeover. Following from this, the chapter highlighted one of the most powerful features of FC United supporters’ relationship to the club, which is the way that through the match-day at FC United supporters experienced a sense of commonality and community with fellow fans, and indeed players and club staff, tied, in particular, to a sense of shared politics and common view on the impact of the Glazer takeover and wider commercialisation of Manchester United. Furthermore, I showed how the low ticket prices, the ability to stand freely and the absence of restrictions for obtaining tickets at FC United allowed supporters to re-establish significant social relationships around watching football and to experience a sense of freedom and the ‘carnivalesque’ at the match.

This chapter highlights two key wider points. Firstly, football fandom as an activity is capable of generating a powerful sense of social connection with others - expressed through ideas of commonality and community but also through the maintenance of significant social relationships around football. Secondly, through my account of FC United fans’ match-day experience, at both Old Trafford and Gigg Lane, I have shown how the disruption to such a sense of social connection can be a source of politicisation underpinning collective action, in this case providing some of the motivation for support for FC United. Alongside this I have also shown how the process of mobilising to attempt to produce change, in this case forming and supporting FC United to oppose the Glazer ownership of Manchester United and the wider commercialisation of the club, can generate a sense of community amongst those involved. Such a point is consistent with an argument made by Delanty about the relationship between community and social movements: ‘community is not an underlying reality, but is constructed in the actual processes of mobilization. It is a processual concept of community in which community is defined and constructed in social action rather than residing in prior values’ (2010: 95).

Having looked in this chapter at the role the changing match-day experience at Old Trafford had in the formation of FC United, in the next chapter I look at how issues associated with Manchester United’s relationship to its locality affected the form FC United took in 2005. In particular, the next chapter will explain how FC United came to have an explicitly localist and communitarian objectives, in terms of being of benefit to its ‘local community’.
Chapter Four: The Making of a Community Club

Introduction

FC United of Manchester is a new football club founded by disaffected and disenfranchised Manchester United supporters. Our aim is to create a sustainable club for the long term which is owned and democratically run by its members, which is accessible to all the communities of Manchester and one in which they can participate fully.

FC United of Manchester Founding Manifesto (FC United: Undated, emphasis mine)

The Club’s objects are, either itself or through a subsidiary company or club trading for the benefit of the community and acting under its control:

i. to strengthen the bonds between the Club and the community which it serves and to represent the interests of the community in the running of the Club;

ii. to benefit present and future members of the community served by the Club by promoting encouraging and furthering the game of football as a recreational facility, sporting activity and focus for community involvement;

iii. to ensure the Club to take proper account of the interests of its supporters and of the community it serves in its decisions

FC United of Manchester Club objects (FC United: Undated b, emphasis mine).

The above quotes, taken from FC United’s founding manifesto and club constitution, democratically ratified by the club’s membership at the first extraordinary general meeting
on the 5\textsuperscript{th} July 2005, show the emphasis placed from the beginning by the club and its membership on being a ‘community’ club and being of service and benefit to the ‘community’. The Manifesto quote shows how the notion of ‘community’ was explicitly related to Manchester as a place— as in ‘the \textit{communities} of Manchester’ – and as such the club had an explicitly localist agenda promising to ‘develop strong links with the local community’ (FC United: Undated). This chapter looks to understand the historical circumstances that led to FC United fans seeking to place this emphasis on the club having a particular relationship to the ‘communities’ of Manchester. Firstly it does so in order to understand one of the key motivations for setting up FC United, that is Manchester United’s shifting relationship to Manchester as a place. Secondly, it is particularly important for me to engage with these historical circumstances given that the ‘community projects’ that much of my ethnographic research was based around (see Chapter Five) were aimed at fulfilling these Manifesto and Constitutional commitments to FC United being of benefit to its local community. Therefore this history provides much of the context in which the ‘community projects’ were embedded.

My argument is that many local Manchester United fans came to feel through the 1990s that Manchester United’s relationship to Manchester as a place had become increasingly precarious. I will relate this to three principal processes. First, rising ticket prices alongside rising demand for tickets led to many local Manchester United fans believing they were being excluded from Old Trafford relative to an increasing ‘out of town’ support. Second, I show how a local and national discourse emerged through the 1990s which questioned Manchester United fans’ legitimacy as Mancunians. Third, I look at how Manchester United attempted, successfully, to position themselves as a global brand within the increasingly globalised and commercialised English Premier League and the socio-economic system at large. I argue that while these processes heightened many local fans’ consciousness of issues of location and place, this came to be reframed into an emic critique of the free-market way in which clubs were owned and the economically reductionist relationship they sought with their fans. In particular I suggest that while Manchester United tried to frame their relationship to their supporters as that of producer to individual consumer and as contained within that economic transaction, some supporters began to argue that Manchester United had a moral duty to the wider ‘community’ in which it was located and could only be understood as a community asset rather than as a privately run business. I
will demonstrate how this critique manifested itself within the formation of FC United as a ‘community’ club and as a club with a responsibility to be of benefit to the local community.

The politics of local exclusion

Manchester United has long been a nationally and internationally supported club. The growth of such national and international support has often been attributed to the events of the Munich air crash in 1958, when the plane carrying Manchester United’s team back from a European match crashed killing eight players, and this led onto a wave of public sympathy and support well beyond Manchester (Crick and Smith 1990: 71). Gavin Mellor (2000, 2004) has described how such growing support for Manchester United was further augmented by a sustained period of playing success in the late 1960s, including in 1968 becoming the first English club to win the European Cup, which led to further rapid growth in the club’s support - with Manchester United games in London drawing huge crowds, the first overseas supporters clubs being set up and contemporary newspapers recording this widespread national and international support. Such a pre-existing national and international support meant Manchester United were particularly well placed at the start of the 1990s to enjoy commercial success as attendances and ticket prices rose rapidly in English football. So, as described in Chapter Two, in the early years of the 1990s, as Manchester United experienced playing success, demand for tickets rose, as did ticket prices, while at the same time Old Trafford’s stadium capacity was reduced while re-building work was carried out to make the stadium all-seater. This meant that many supporters were excluded on the grounds of cost and lack of availability of tickets and amongst some local Mancunian Manchester United fans this issue came to be framed in terms of location and of ‘local’ fans being excluded in favour of ‘out of town’ supporters. So for example, ‘A.H’ wrote in UWS:

As has been said a million times, going to the match ain’t what it used to be. I can no longer attend with my mates, have a laugh and a joke with the lads. They can’t afford to come anymore and they can’t get tickets. Yet goofballs from Devon to Skegness always seem to have little problem getting tickets (A.H, UWS: 1995).

As King (2002: 159-160) has noted there were widespread complaints about the supposedly random draw for tickets being manipulated so as to award more tickets to non-Mancunian fans (specifically Irish supporters clubs) that were likely to have a higher second
spend on club merchandise than local Mancunian supporters. Within the Editorial of Red Issue fanzine ‘Veg’ bemoaned:

Why is it that I know of an Irish fan who applies for two tickets for every game and somehow always ends up a winner ... and yet I know of Manchester people who apply every week and are rarely successful. It couldn’t be that the ticket office are under instructions to send tickets to people whose profile best fits that of high spender in the souvenir shop could it? (Veg, Red Issue: 1994).

However this critique of the economic circumstances under which non Mancunian supporters were perceived to be preferred for tickets, that it was part of the club’s pursuit of profit, was also placed alongside criticism of what was seen as the inappropriate way in which these ‘new’ ‘out of town’ supporters conducted themselves:

As [Manchester] United become a phenomenal success again, so all the hangers-on return. New fans are attracted, out of towners especially. These people, disaffected by the performances of their home town lower league teams, switch allegiance to the greats; Liverpool [FC] in the eighties, us in the nineties. That trip to Old Trafford that you might have made a thousand times is a once in a lifetime pilgrimage to these so called ‘fans’. And they come. Wide-eyed and camera wielding. No knowledge of any of the songs and with no desire or even ability to contribute to the atmosphere. They want goals, and boy are they pissed off when they don’t come. Yet they will go home having spent a month’s wages in the souvenir shop so naturally the club greets them with open arms. We, the true supporters, who will be there long after the success is gone, do not (House of Style, UWS : 1994).

Here the commentator asserts the superiority of Mancunian ‘true supporters’ in opposition to recent ‘out of town’ supporters who behave in ways that are considered inappropriate and as undermining the match-day experience in terms of atmosphere – ‘Wide-eyed and camera wielding. No knowledge of any of the songs and with no desire or even ability to contribute to the atmosphere’ – at the same time he notes that these fans’ greater ability to spend money is perceived as leading to preferential treatment from the club. So some supporters, such as ‘House of Style’, perceived that Manchester United, as a commercial entity, exploited the economic disparity between local and ‘out of town’ supporters to favour the latter group in the pursuit of financial gain. Clearly many ‘out of town’
supporters would also have been excluded by rising ticket prices and falling availability of tickets (and richer local support would have been favoured by these changes) but what is interesting is that this issue was framed in terms of location by many Mancunian Manchester United fans. Further to this, during this period some writers within the fanzines stressed how being a Mancunian gave supporters a privileged relationship to Manchester United:

[Manchester] United fans from outside Manchester can love United, can be more loyal to United than any Mancunian United fan, but that is it, they can love United more, but not Manchester United more, seems harsh? Hear my reasoning. The Manchester in the Manchester United is an inseparable binding for Mancunians, it is associated with our city, growing up in Manchester welds you to Manchester and Manchester United (Abbey Hey, UWS: 1995).

What makes a loyal red? Is the Manc red better than the out-of-towner? As a Manc my answer to that is a cautious ‘yes’! We have the town in our blood. We eat, breathe, sleep and talk all the issues that make our town tick. We know its pubs, its clubs, its bus routes, its streets, everything. You could never have that knowledge of the city as an out-of-towner or ever love it as much as us locals do-for all its faults it’s our home (Fletchermoss, UWS: 2000).58

King has suggested that being Mancunian was ‘never a particularly important issue [to supporters] while [Manchester] United were unsuccessful in the 1970s and 1980s and before commercialisation had seemed to favour out-of-town supporters’ (2003: 205-206). This argument may be overstated to some extent, for example the fan diarist Richard Kurt (1994: 143) noted tensions between ‘Cockney Reds’ (London or southern based Manchester United fans) and Mancunian Manchester United fans in the 1970s and a letter in Red Issue from a southern based fan in 1989 records ‘I purchased my copy of Red Issue and discovered that Terry McDonald doesn’t like southerners supporting [Manchester] United. For years I have put up with people like him abusing me for being a Red’ (Dave, Chiselhurst Kent, Red Issue: 1989). Nonetheless, King (2003) is right to draw attention to the impact of commercialisation, with its increased demand for tickets and the exclusion of

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58 Both Pen names ‘Fletchermoss’ and Abbey Hey refer to places within Manchester. Abbey Hey is an area of East Manchester and Fletchermoss is a park in south Manchester. It is interesting to note that both these commentators have gone on to be prominently involved with FC United.
supporters on the grounds of cost and/or scarcity, on the relationship between Mancunian and non-Mancunian Manchester United supporters. The fanzine comments from ‘House of Style’, ‘Veg’ and ‘A.H’ cited previously in this section show clearly an antipathy towards commercialisation favouring non-Mancunian supporters developing during the 1990s and how in this context the locality of supporters came to be identified with perceived inappropriate modes of support, through the figure of the ‘out of town’ supporter attracted by commercialisation. Further evidence of this can be found in informants’ recollections of how there had historically been a positive reaction to out of town support but this had been undermined in the 1990s; as Steven told me:

It’s [out of town support] become more noticeable since we started winning things probably. I mean we’ve always had out of town supporters but some of them were the most loyal supporters we had and no one ever had a problem with them in the 1980s when we were rubbish and we had Cockney Reds coming up. I was always quite proud of the fact we had supporters in London who were sometimes crazier about us than people from Manchester but there’s a sort of new breed of out of town supporter now – from Norway [laughs] – I mean we have always had a lot of Irish support at Old Trafford but they seem to be a new breed of Irish supporter now who come over in waves, we used to get a healthy support from our Celtic fringe supporters, I suppose because of the Irish connection because [Manchester] United have always had loads of Irish players, we always had that but there seems to be miles more. You can’t move in certain sections of the ground for Norwegian and Irish accents and that kind of dilutes the atmosphere a bit. If you have a 1000 blokes from Manchester and Salford they’re going to make a lot more noise aren’t they? Traditionally you would expect that to be the case anyway (Steven, interview: 13/8/ 2009).

Dean suggested a similar set of reasons to Steven as to why the perception of ‘out of town’ fans shifted during the 1990s:

We think now of the term Cockney Red as an insult, a Cockney Red means you’re a sad fucker who should be supporting your local team who just jumped on the Sky Sports Premiership bandwagon and supported the Beckham and glory show, but of course in the seventies Cockney Red was a term that had a largely positive
[connotation], it had a grudging respect to it.59 These were people supporting what had become an unfashionable team, an unsuccessful team at least, and there was a sense from the people who I’ve talked to who were around back then that local {Manchester] United fans would give those Cockney Reds more respect than locals, because locals had to come two miles down the road, these were people who cared enough about the club to get the train up from London or Surrey at six [am] in the morning to come to a game, they were kind of given a bit of credit for it and so that whole out of towner thing only becomes an insult when it becomes associated with a certain type of fan, when out of towner gets associated with day trippers, glory seekers (Dean, interview: 10/12/ 2010).

Both Steven and Dean suggest that previous to the 1990s non-Mancunian support had been associated with positive qualities, ‘the most loyal supporters we had’ and ‘these were people who cared enough about the club’. It was only when they came to be associated with the process of commercialisation, ‘jumped on the Sky Sports Premiership bandwagon’, which threatened Mancunian supporters access to watching Manchester United and the active modes of support for the team that the perceived inauthenticity of ‘out of town’ support came to be highlighted as ‘glory seekers’ who ‘dilute the atmosphere’.

If the locality of Manchester United supporters was increasingly highlighted during the 1990s by some Mancunian Manchester United supporters in defining authentic support, these distinctions were not absolute. As noted in the previous chapter, where non-Mancunian Manchester United supporters adopted modes of support that were perceived as appropriate they could still be considered authentic supporters. ‘House of Style’, who I cited earlier criticising ‘out of town’ support for their inappropriate modes of support, argued towards the end of his article ‘the attitude of wanting only [Mancunian Manchester] United fans gets us nowhere. Some of these non-Mancunian United fans have been there week in, week out for years; and it ain’t just a hop, skip and a jump on the Metrolink for them either. Accept these people for what they are; TRUE [Manchester] United fans’ (House of Style, UWS: 1994). Furthermore, alongside concerns about the exclusions of Mancunian based Manchester United fans and the effects non-Mancunian fans had on the atmosphere were counter narratives that ‘imagined’ Manchester as a

tolerant city of immigrants and welcoming of outsiders and therefore ‘out of town’ supporters. For example one fanzine contributor described the ‘ideal’ of Manchester United thus:

The ideal of a football club born in a city built by immigrants, the sons and daughters of those same immigrants that would later form the bedrock of Manchester United’s early support and shape the outlook of a city where the outsider is immediately the insider … The ideals that shaped a worldwide support of a football club that transcended locality and birthplace just as the immigrants who built its city of birth had done (Red Heads, UWS : 1998).

Here the writer constructs a particular ‘imagination’ of Manchester as a welcoming place for outsiders – ‘a city where the outsider is immediately the insider’- out of a particular historicity of the city – ‘a city built by immigrants’ – in order to make sense of Manchester United’s non-local support. This construction of Manchester as a diverse, cosmopolitan and tolerant city is one that Anthony King (2003: 215-216) came across during his research with Manchester United fans in the late 1990s and is one that I found during my research. For example, one informant, Rick, described how Mancunians took pride in coming from a multi-cultural city and having such cosmopolitan features as a large ‘Gay Quarter’ and a ‘China Town’ area of the city (fieldnotes: 02/12/2009). Interestingly ‘Duns’ an FC United/Manchester United fan originally from Ireland uses this notion of Manchester as a city of immigrants in order to assert his authenticity as a Manchester United fan:

An esteemed writer once wrote that non-Mancunian Reds could love the ‘United’ in Manchester United but never the ‘Manchester’, or words to that effect. I’ve always disputed that. I feel pride whenever I hear Manchester mentioned in a good light and I feel ire when it is slandered. I don’t know if I have any right to feel those feelings about a place where I was not born and have no blood connection to, but that’s the way I feel. Like it’s my own home being slandered. Some people of an ‘us and us only’ bent might be discomforted by that, but then again, there were thousands more like me over the previous 200 years who came here for whatever reason, plenty of them from Ireland, and who put down roots here and whose descendents now burst with Mancunian pride. The surnames of many of those I know suggests that their bloodlines aren’t that far removed from mine. I think that this is the key to Manchester’s greatness of character and admirable
politics that have always been preached from within its boundaries (Duns, *a fine lung*: 2010).

The ‘esteemed writer’ ‘Duns’ refers to is Abbey Hey—a pen name of writer Robert Brady who also writes in the *a fine lung* fanzine in which this piece is written and ‘Duns’ uses Manchester’s history of Irish immigration as a way to dispute Abbey Hey/Robert Brady’s claim, which I cited earlier, that a non-Mancunian Manchester United fan has a less privileged relationship to the club. However it is worth noting that within that fanzine article Abbey Hey/Robert Brady wrestled with notions of Manchester as a diverse, tolerant city – ‘I’m proud of the city’s diversity, it’s no surprise that the gay village in Manchester is so vibrant, it is a statement of the atmosphere of our city’ – and how this diversity related to claims of support for Manchester United: ‘This [claiming non-Mancunian supporters cannot love the Manchester in Manchester United] is not calling non-Mancunian Reds, we are a far-reaching cosmopolitan club, the loyalty and love of out of towners is not in question … But Mancunians love our city, it is all our memories, it is our everyday life, we cannot divorce the Manchester from United’ (Abbey Hey, *UWS*: 1995). So while Brady recognised the notion of Manchester as a diverse city he ultimately re-asserted the value of being a Mancunian to being an authentic Manchester United supporter. What I would argue is that while different Manchester United fans may have understood the potential authenticity of non-Mancunian Manchester United fans differently, they did so through a conceptual framework that was intimately tied to notions of locality and the city of Manchester and this reflects the increasing importance these issues were taking on and continue to take on amongst these fans in the light of commercialisation. In the next section, I will discuss how the importance of issues of locality and of fans being from Manchester was further heightened by a local discourse amongst Manchester City and Manchester United over who could claim the city as ‘theirs’ and a national discourse which posited that Manchester United fans did not come from Manchester.

**Manchester is Red?**

Adam Brown (2004) has documented the intensification of local rivalries between Manchester City and Manchester United fans during the 1990s and early 2000s over Manchester United fans’ legitimacy as Mancunians, a rivalry which I have witnessed both as a resident and researcher in Manchester as continuing into the present. Brown (2004) records how in 2001 Manchester City fans produced a banner reading ‘MCFC – Real Club,
Real fans’ which they flew from a plane above Old Trafford before a derby fixture (a match between Manchester City and Manchester United). Alongside this Manchester City fans regularly chanted at Manchester United fans ‘Do you come from Manchester?’ and ‘you’re the pride of Singapore’. As Brown states ‘the stereotype of Manchester United fans upheld by many [Manchester] City supporters contrasts the local, northern, Manchester-based [Manchester] City supporters with southern, globally-located and non-Mancunian [Manchester] United fans’ (2004: 181).\(^{60}\) This stereotype also found, and continues to find, resonance on a national scale amongst English football fans of other teams. Both Red Issue and UWS frequently documented throughout the 1990s, and into the last decade, fans of other clubs questioning their Mancunian credentials:

While walking through the [Aston] Villa fans at Wembley I was taunted with chants of ‘do you come from Manchester?’ I have two answers to that question, one you can be Mancunian, cockney, Irish, Black or White. We all follow the same team. The second answer is yes! (Matt - Manchester, Red Issue: 1994).

While following West Ham United in games against Manchester United I have heard similar chants, such as ‘race you back to London’ and ‘we support our local team’, aimed at Manchester United fans in order to call into question their authenticity as fans and as Mancunians.\(^{61}\) Brown has reflected how ‘for Manchester United supporters, among the particular constituency of locally-based fans I have identified there has been growing antipathy toward such attacks on their legitimacy as fans and as Mancunians’ (2004: 181-182). Locally based Manchester United fans have adopted a number of strategies in order to re-assert their authenticity as Manchester United fans. Prominently, some have suggested, and continue to suggest, that Manchester City’s support itself did not come from Manchester but rather from outlying suburbs and towns and therefore ‘Manchester is Red’. The quote below from Robert Brady’s FC United fan diary eloquently reveals those claims made about Manchester City fans and is worth quoting at length:

\[^{60}\]Edensnor and Millington (2008) have described how these stereotypes amongst Manchester City fans were utilised by Manchester City football club in its ‘Our City’ branding campaign launched in 2005.

\[^{61}\]There is a certain irony to West Ham United fans chanting about following their local teams given that the large-scale movement of white residents out of East London since the 1960s means that much of West Ham United’s support is dispersed across the South-East of England and further afield rather than located in Newham and East London (See: Fawbert: 2011 for a more detailed reflection on this).
I was going past the site of the old Johnson’s Wireworks [where the City of Manchester stadium stands] by the new big ASDA in Clayton. This dickhead came past in his city shirt, none of my blue Mancunian mates would wear a city shirt. This dick was never going to get a game for city so there was no reason for him to be wearing one. He’s a bloke. Children wear football kits. I wouldn’t usually abuse blues in shirts but it was derby day [a day when Manchester United were playing against Manchester City], he was bigger than me and he was in our Red area trying to use his shirt as a way of showing off that he was part of the great loyalty that is city... I was going past and I told him to fuck off out of our area, the fucking mill town josskin. They’ve built that cancerous stadium near us. You wouldn’t like it near you. When there are thousands of them infesting it on match days it is very depressing. So, early in the morning a bell end thinking that he can walk around without a hard time on derby day is a much mistaken bell end. He can Baddiel and Skinner himself as much as he wants when he’s with his pie-head mates espousing loudly that our city, that he visits from his white bread and Blue Band margarine village, is a blue one. Abuse at 9.15 in the morning might not fit in with his Soccer AM, we’re all right righty right blue brothers in Manchester when we visit. Only that special city BO that they all formulate saves them from a crack [punch] as no one wants to touch wet lepers. He’ll still be telling you Manchester is full of blues when he visits your town. Ask him how an out of towner like him knows and he’ll eventually crumble and admit Skinner and Baddiel told him after Gazza was good in the World Cup (Brady 2006: 211).

Here Brady not only posits that Manchester City fans do not come from Manchester but rather outlying towns and villages – ‘mill town josskin’ and ‘white bread and Blue Band margarine villages’ - and that Manchester belongs to Mancunian Manchester United fans- ‘our area’ ‘our city’- but also references the national discourse, through the television programmes Soccer AM and Skinner and Baddiel’s Fantasy Football League, which he saw as creating the idea that Manchester United fans were non-Mancunian. These national

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62 I have left ‘city’, referring here to Manchester City, non-capitalised as it is in the original text. This is a common rhetorical device across Manchester United fanzines and Manchester United fan writing, in the rest of the thesis I will leave ‘city’ non-capitalised in quotations where it appeared as such in the original text.

63 Baddiel and Skinner’s Fantasy Football League, presented by comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner, was a BBC2 light entertainment show between 1994-1996 based around football. It
and local discourses about Manchester United fans’ legitimacy as Mancunians seem also to have shifted the attitudes of some local fans towards non-Mancunian support:

When I was a young girl, in the seventies, the biggest source of pride for Manchester United fans was our club’s fantastic worldwide following which had bloomed even though we were marooned in the twenty-six year championship-free zone. I can remember delightedly reading the banners which announced ‘Cockney Reds’ and the rest, the further away the better, just as I can remember conversations on the lines of ‘and I was talking to this kiddie who’d come all the way from Norway/Malaysia/Dublin/Land’s End/ John O’Groats …’ and how great it was. In the last 6 years successful years it appears that we have lost the art of being proud of our mass support and instead been busy borrowing and internalising the insults of our critics and turning them against ourselves (Joyce Wooldridge, UWS: 1998).

However others used the ‘imagination’ of Manchester as a city of diversity and tolerance to argue that Manchester City fans’ perceived obsession with the location of supporters was not an appropriate way for a Mancunian to behave:

It appears to be that time in the season when a bluenoses [a Manchester City fan] thoughts turn to what constitutes ‘real’ Manchester. Even that well known Mancunian and leading authority on Manchester history, Jimmy Greaves, has recently got in on the tired old act, declaring that whereas [Manchester] United belong to the country and attract misfits from all over, [Manchester] City belong to the Manchester and have 100% Manc support … Manchester has never been about boundaries, never been about lines on maps or about local authority bureaucracy. Manchester is not so much of a city, but a state of mind. The whole history is one of progress and one of change but more importantly one of people. People who refused to accept the boundaries of the mind. The least English city in the country, a city that drew influence from all over the world and still retains a vibrancy of culture that reflects every nuance of life in the world. To deny that is

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featured football based sketches and jokes, alongside celebrity interviews. Soccer AM, a Sky television show, has adopted a similar format and had run from 1995 to the present day. Both shows have often been associated by longstanding football fans with a ‘new’ support attracted to football in the post-premier league era.
to deny your history, to deny the essence of Manchester. That’s the Manchester that [Manchester] City fans seek to deny as they increasingly resemble small town hicks, little Englander-Mancs, insular, backward and decidedly non-Mancunian (Things Irwellian, UWS: 1996. Also cited in King 2003: 216).

So for this commentator it is precisely the ability to accept people from outside, and therefore ‘out of town’ support, which highlights Manchester United fans’ superior claims to being Mancunians in relation to Manchester City fans. What seems clear is that this local and national discourse about Manchester United fans as not being from Manchester heightened the importance of issues of locality amongst Manchester United supporters, necessitating a range of strategies to counteract these discourses.

Building the Global Brand

I now set these discussions of locality and Mancunianness within a wider context of Manchester United’s attempts to position itself as a global leisure brand over the last 20 years. To begin this section it is worth noting that Manchester United’s attempts to take commercial advantage of their burgeoning appeal in the 1990s are not without historical precedent. Mellor (2000) has argued that from the late 1960s onwards Manchester United tried to take advantage commercially of its increased national and international support to create a marketable ‘brand’ by playing fixtures in Ireland and other countries where they had a sizeable support and by appointing a commercial manager. However as Millward (2011: 26) has argued even if the attempts of clubs to position themselves as football ‘brands’ has a lengthy history, the transnational power of these ‘brands’ has grown exponentially over the last 20 years and Manchester United has been at the forefront of this development – a 2005 Mori Poll finding Manchester United have 75 million supporters worldwide and research by Sportspro finding that Manchester United were the 8th most valuable sports brand in the world and the single most valuable sports team in the world with a worth of $1.495 billion (Millward 2011: 78,31,22). Millward posits that this development within English football over recent decades has mirrored structural changes within the UK (and world) economic system, following free-market de-regulating policies in the 1970s and 1980s, towards ‘disorganised capitalism’ (Lash and Urry 1987) and ‘the quest to find larger markets – or spaces for material profit- which tend to be located at the transnational level and trade upon mobilities of images, information, money, commodities and labour’ (Millward 2011: 4). David Harvey’s (1990, 1993, 2005) notion of ‘time-space
compression’ is also useful here, as it points to how the present neo-liberal era of
globalisation is marked by the ever greater frequency of market transactions across
transnational geographical space and football club’s global branding is but one example of
this. Bose (2007: 86), King (2003: 125-126) and Millward (2011: 26) all noted that the
appointment of Edward Freedman as merchandising manager in 1992 was key in turning
Manchester United’s long held global commercial potential into material profits from
transnational markets as he persuaded the club to market and sell merchandise on a global
scale. This attempt to turn a transnational fan-base into monetary profit, known as
‘leveraging the global brand’ or ‘monetising the global fan-base’ amongst the Manchester
United hierarchy, continued apace from 1992 onwards and dominated the club’s
commercial strategy (Andrews 2004: 2; Brown 2004: 180). It seems that for many locally
based fans the increased attempts by Manchester United to penetrate international
markets were perceived both as altering the club’s relationship to its locality and also
altering the way in which these fans understood the nature of the club itself:

Manchester United is a football club that happens to be a business, it is not a
business that happens to be a football club. Such a distinction is seemingly lost in
the global branding world of David Gill and Peter Kenyon (where have these two
sprung from?). The more you hear about activities of ‘Manchester United
International’, the more your red heart blackens at the continued erosion of any
sense of local identity and any sense of what the football club actually represents
(Redologist, UWS:1998).

For ‘Redologist’ the globalist corporate ambitions – ‘Manchester United International’ – of
the club are perceived as ‘eroding’ the relationship between the club and its locality and
altering the form Manchester United is perceived as taking to an explicitly capitalist one –
‘a business that happens to be a football club’. A similar concern was also voiced by other
fanzine commentators around the same time:

The irony is that as the club is being shaped into an all inclusive, all embracing,
though ultimately meaningless, brand name that represents no distinct culture or
tradition, it continues to exclude and alienate the very supporters, a very localised

64 Peter Kenyon was Manchester United’s deputy chief executive from 1997 and then chief executive
between 2000 and 2003 before moving to work for Chelsea FC. David Gill was finance director at
Manchester United from 1997, before becoming chief executive in 2003 until the present day.
fanbase, that gave it its defining culture and tradition and upheld it for years. Why not ditch ‘Manchester’ all together, simply call the club ‘United’, build an 80,000 all seater mega-fuckin-leisure-village-hotel stadium complex in Milton Keynes and have done with it (Red Heads, UWS: 1998).

Manchester United’s attempts to ‘leverage the global brand’ under the conditions of ‘disorganised’ neo-liberal capitalism raised some fans’ consciousness both about being a Mancunian Manchester United fan and about the precariousness of the club’s relationship to Manchester as its locality – that is with the ability to trade in many different markets and with a fan-base across the country and internationally, Manchester United no longer necessarily needed a financial relationship with its local fan-base. This is neatly illuminated by this comment by an FC United fan writing in *UTB*:

> There are 7 million Manchester United fans in Thailand. I don’t get it. I often meet people who tell me they “support Man U” and I wanna say 'No you don't'. They've never stood on a grass verge watching Billy Garton play and nor would they or should they want to. They deffo wouldn't stand on a grass verge to watch Rory Patterson play. They wouldn't even stand on a grass verge to watch Wayne Rooney play coz if he played for a team that played in front of grass verges they wouldn't wanna know. And why should they. I know it’s all down to success (and the timing of [Manchester] United's success being post-Sky and that) and I wouldn’t wanna change that, but you know ... 'Manchester' is half the club’s name. Be nice if it still counted (Suede Shoes, *UTB*, 2008).

The commentator here explicitly links Manchester United’s global brand appeal – ‘7 million Manchester United fans in Thailand’ – to the perceived removal of the club from its location and exclusion of local supporters – “Manchester’ is half the club’s name. Be nice if it still counted’. In the remainder of this chapter I show how these concerns about location and Manchester – due to the club becoming a ‘global brand’, the exclusion of local supporters through increased price and scarcity of tickets and a local and national discourse denying local Manchester United fans their legitimacy as supporters- were

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65 Billy Garton is a former Manchester United player, who played for the club between 1984 and 1990. Rory Patterson played for FC United between 2005 and 2008. Wayne Rooney is a current Manchester United player.
channelled by many of these supporters into a moral claim on how a football club should be run and the relationship it should have with the locality in which it is situated.

Community Claims

In Chapter Two, I noted how Anthony King (2002) had described the movement of entrepreneurial capital into football in the 1980s through the emergence of the ‘new directors’, including Martin Edwards at Old Trafford. He argued that these entrepreneurs, attracted by the de-regulation of English football, saw football club ownership as a potentially profitable business and looked to maximise their potential financial return from investment in football clubs and in so doing changed the nature of football clubs into profit-seeking capitalist structures – ‘the pursuit of profit through the commodification of football was the distinguishing feature of the new directors and marked them out from their predecessors ... This transformation of football clubs from effective public utilities into profit-making companies is fundamental to the comprehension of the new consumption of football’ (King 2002: 124). One of the things I find particularly insightful about King’s argument is his suggestion about the way in which the creation of the ‘customer’ played a role in football club owners’ profit seeking in this era. King suggests that from the 1980s onwards owners began to see fans as individual ‘customers’ willing to pay a higher price for a better product within a free market, in particular they aimed to sell to richer consumers at as high a price as demand would allow, and following from this he argues ‘the free market argument ... reduces the relationship of the fans to the club to a purely economic one, given by the market’ (2002: 140). However, a significant group of Manchester United fans sought to challenge the economic reductionism of those in control of Manchester United, by arguing that the club was in a position of broader moral responsibility to the community in which it was located rather than involved in a series of individual economic transactions with consumers of the Manchester United brand. This challenge involves a particular mobilisation of the idea of the ‘community’ of Manchester which is born out of, and intrinsically related to, the issues I have discussed earlier in this chapter as heightening the importance of issues of location and Mancunianess amongst local fans. Such a moral claim about Manchester United’s reciprocal duties to the ‘community’ in which it is based can be usefully analysed in relation to anthropological debates about gifts and commodities and I now briefly set out those debates.
Anthropological interest in gift exchange is often traced to Malinowski’s (1978 [1922]) famous description of Kula exchange in the To briand Islands of Papua New Guinea (hereafter PNG). Malinowski (1978 [1922]: 81-101) described a network of exchange of shells (Kula) across the islands. What was noteworthy about the exchange was that the aim was not to maximise individual possession of shells (which had little functional utility), as would be assumed to be the purpose of exchange in economically individualist models, but rather to maximise the number of relationships with other traders entered into. Marcel Mauss (1954 [1925]) built on Malinowski’s description of Kula but also looked at other accounts of gift exchange networks. Mauss (1954 [1925]: 10-11) argued that gift exchange was marked by three obligations – the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to repay – and through such obligations bonds of enduring reciprocal interdependence were bought into being. Chris Gregory’s (1982) work particularly developed a contrast between commodity exchange and gift exchange through a reading of Mauss’s work on gift economies alongside Marx’s ideas about the commodity. Gregory (1982: 18-19) suggests that gift exchange could be characterised as an exchange between transactors in a state of reciprocal dependence and as establishing personal qualitative relations between those transacting, whereas he characterised commodity exchange as an exchange between transactors in a state of reciprocal independence and as acting to establish quantitative relationships between objects transacted. Such a contrast was critiqued as being overdrawn (see: Appadurai 1986: 11-12, Bloch and Parry 1989: 8) but the author himself argued he was not attempting to draw a pure distinction between gift economies and commodity economies but rather utilised such a distinction to understand how modern Papuans moved back and forwards between modes of exchange (Gregory 1998: 10). However, and particularly importantly for my own argument, Keir Martin has recently argued in his work on the Tolai people of PNG that, regardless of such critiques of the extent to which gift and commodity exchanges can be seen as in binary opposition to one another, ‘people the world over … often seem to be stubbornly attached to drawing stark distinctions between different types of exchange and to disputing how to characterize particular moments of exchange or particular ongoing exchange relationships’ (forthcoming: 11). Further to this, he suggests such distinctions and disputes often hinge on ‘different rhetorically opposed perspectives on the honouring of obligations and the extent of reciprocal interdependence’ (forthcoming: 15). Martin’s work shifts attention away from attempts by anthropologists to objectively classify particular exchanges and exchange relationships and instead focuses on how informants themselves classify, and dispute
classifications, of particular exchanges and exchange relationships. In the conclusion to his book on the Tolai, Martin (forthcoming: 385-387) suggests that one context in which such disputes over the characterisation of exchange and exchange relationships and the appropriate extent of reciprocal interdependence can also be seen is English football fandom. To this end, Martin cites a passage from Nick Hornby’s famous account of football fandom ‘Fever Pitch’ in which the author argues ‘Football clubs are not hospitals or schools, with a duty to admit us regardless of our financial wherewithal. It is interesting and revealing that opposition to ... bond schemes has taken on the tone of a crusade, as if the clubs had a moral obligation to their supporters’ (Hornby 1992: 222). Martin contrasts Hornby’s view that football clubs have no enduring moral reciprocal obligation to supporters, with the view of himself and others that ‘the allegiance and loyalty built up over years of exchanges can demand reciprocal recognition [from the football club of enduring obligations to supporters ]’ (forthcoming: 386).

Martin’s provocation about the presence of differing views on how to characterise the exchange involved between fan and football club, and to what extent the football club needs to recognise enduring moral reciprocal obligations, can be usefully applied and unpacked in relation to the context under discussion here. King’s (2002) discussion of the creation of the customer by the new directors, set out above, can be read as an explicit attempt by the new directors to characterise the operation of the football club as a stand-alone commodity exchange in which the club has no on-going reciprocal responsibility to those who are no longer able to attend due to rising prices. In opposition to this, the quote cited earlier from ‘Redologist’ where they argued ‘Manchester United is a football club that happens to be a business, it is not a business that happens to be a football club. Such a distinction is seemingly lost in the global branding world of David Gill and Peter Kenyon’ can be understood as directly disputing the type of exchange they believed Manchester United should be engaged in – as something other than the solely commoditised exchange of ‘business’ and ‘global branding’. Further to this, many Manchester United fans argued that the morally appropriate exchange relationship the club should engage in is one in which they recognised an enduring reciprocal obligation to the ‘community’ in which it was situated. For example, one fanzine commentator argued:

In this country, football’s commitment to its immediate community is little more than token gesturing that amounts to nothing ... where is the genuine
commitment to the community and besides creating more possible sources of income, where is the community’s genuine stake in the club? If city’s community commitment is little more than tokenism, [Manchester] United’s is all but non-existent. We’ve got the disgusting situation that Brian Hughes’s Tommy Taylor biography isn’t available at OT [Old Trafford] because it does not carry the official [Manchester] United seal of naffness. All money raised from the book goes to Collyhurst and Moston lads club, but couldn’t somebody at Old Trafford give something back to an area of Manchester that has not only served us well in terms of players but it is traditionally a heartland of red support? That’s your community [Manchester] United give something back? Where is the club’s presence in Manchester, Salford and Trafford? In comparison to European clubs, [Manchester] United’s involvement in the local community is pitiful and urgently needs a new outlook. Such is the current nature of the club that thousands of local kids have no chance of getting anywhere near Old Trafford, it’s time to take the club out to them, get them involved, give them a genuine sense of belonging and identity representing the club at all levels in all sports (Irwelian Thoughts, UWS: 1996).

Here the commentator argues that Manchester United should be showing a ‘genuine commitment to the community’ and supports this moral claim by referencing the economic reductionism of the club’s relationship to its fans and the community – ‘besides creating more possible sources of income’ - and relates this back to the exclusion of local supporters by arguing that ‘thousands of local kids have no chance of getting anywhere near Old Trafford’. ‘Irwelian Thoughts’ argues that it is precisely because areas such as Collyhurst and Moston have given to Manchester United in terms of players and support that the club has a reciprocal duty to ‘give something back’ to those areas. Linden Burgess, an FC United fan writing within Robert Brady’s fan diary, also makes a similar claim about Manchester United’s responsibility to its local communities:

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66 Tommy Taylor was a Manchester United player in the 1950s who died in the 1958 Munich air disaster.

67 Collyhurst and Moston are areas of North Manchester.
The worst thing though was the social breakdown that was happening in our communities leading to some of the worst poverty and deprivation in the country. Next door to the richest football club in the world. They should have cared (Burgess 2006: 89).

Linden Burgess uses the economic wealth that Manchester United as a global brand has generated to argue that Manchester United has a reciprocal moral obligation to the social collective in which it is situated. It is interesting that many contrasted Manchester United’s relationship to its locality with Manchester City’s in unfavourable terms:

On my last short walk to get my weekly tea at my mam and dads (in Openshawe) I passed four different sets of football playing youngsters, nineteen of these kids had [Manchester] United wear on of some description. The city is ours. But it’s a false hope for a red future, few will ever take that young shirt into the ground if Edwardsfication continues. It gives me no pleasure to tell you that [Manchester] city actually do the following. On the day of a [Manchester] city home match [Manchester] city’s local youngsters from seven years upwards can meet at the Platt Lane complex at twelve o’clock, train with Alex Williams, get a nosebag [meal] and then go to the match – all for a Harold Melvin (£5) (Abbey Hey, UWS: 1997).68

Here while Abbey Hey lays claim to Manchester United fans’ symbolic ownership of Manchester – ‘The city is ours’ – he sees the economic model which Manchester United is pursuing, the ‘Edwardsfication’ of Manchester United as he calls it, as exclusionary of young Mancunian fans and compares this unfavourably to the relationship Manchester City have with the community. This notion of City as a ‘community club’ was shared by others I spoke to during my fieldwork and according to Hand (2004: 194) is shared by many Manchester City fans. As Hand (2004: 194-195) reflects, Manchester City was perceived as such despite being enmeshed within many global corporate structures (it sold merchandise overseas, had overseas supporters clubs and overseas sponsorship), all be it to a lesser extent than Manchester United, and I would suggest the contrasting perceptions of the clubs’ relationships to their local community amongst local fans is largely explained by the

68 Alex Williams played for Manchester City between 1980 and 1986. Since 1990 he has worked on Manchester City’s community football schemes.
history at Manchester United which I have outlined above – that of exclusion of local
supporters by ticket price rises and scarcity due to large national and international support,
a local and national discourse which depicted the fans and the club as non-Mancunian and
an explicit and successful global branding strategy. This moral claim about the reciprocal
duty Manchester United had to the community in which it was situated was also related to
how many fans understood the ownership structure and formed a critique of the model of
private ownership, a critique that was actively mobilised around the Glazer takeover in
2005. So a Shareholders United advert argued that by virtue of local people having
contributed to the club’s continued existence Manchester United was not a privately
owned entity but rather belonged to local people collectively:

This club belongs to the people of Manchester, who have sustained it for over 125
years. Think about what would happen if someone came along, without any
knowledge of [Manchester] United, without any interest in our history, and
without any regard whatsoever for us and for our heritage, and simply because he
had the money was able to own OUR club. (Shareholders United, Red Issue: 2004)

While the FC United fan blog, It’ll be off, spoke of a ‘strong and staunch belief that
Manchester United didn’t belong to any one person, but to the people of Manchester’ (it’ll
be off: 2009). The FC United website meanwhile describes the Glazer takeover thus ‘the
material theft of a Manchester institution, forcibly taken from the people of Manchester,
was the tip of a pyramid of destruction’ (FC United: undated a). It is interesting that
Manchester United was conceptualised as rightfully belonging not to the fan per se but
rather the locality in which it was situated – ‘the club belongs to the people of Manchester’
and ‘forcibly taken from the people of Manchester’ – and as such ‘Manchester’ was
mobilised in opposition to the free-market form of private capitalism that allowed the
Glazer family’s leveraged buy-out. Of course Manchester United has never been collectively
owned by local people, but this stress upon local people’s rightful ownership of
Manchester United emerged out of a particular history which I have described throughout
this chapter: a history which made the relationship between Manchester United, the city of
Manchester and Mancunian Manchester United fans precarious, and it is out of this sense
of precariousness that these fans fashioned a claim for rightful ownership of Manchester
United. I now look at how this moral critique of the relationship Manchester United had
with the ‘community’ of Manchester, and the claim that the club had a reciprocal duty to
this ‘community’, shaped how those fans setting up FC United looked to structure the club’s relationship to the locality of Manchester.

This chapter began by citing the explicitly localist agenda of the FC United Manifesto and Constitution and showed how these documents set out the club’s obligations to the ‘communities of Manchester’. Such an agenda was conceived in opposition to the perception of Manchester United’s free market economically reductionist relationship to supporters and the community at large which has been set out above. For example, when I asked Adam Brown and Andy Walsh why the membership had been keen for community responsibilities to be written into the constitution and manifesto they told me:

I think there was a fairly widely shared belief that Manchester United had become removed from its locality, there was long standing complaints about ticket allocations, referencing those who didn’t live in Manchester, the out of towners as they were known ... there was that sense that [Manchester] United weren’t that engaged in the city and they wanted FC United to be much more so (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

I think that they [members/supporters] recognised that what we were doing wasn’t just about the members of the club or the supporters of the club, it was the club’s wider impact on the community within which it’s based and the opposition to the existing model of ownership. Within football and in particular Manchester United, community was very much of an add on and we wanted to make sure it was central to everything we did (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010).

Both Adam and Andy reference a widespread sense that Manchester United’s relationship to Manchester and its locality had become more remote— ‘there was a fairly widely shared belief that Manchester United had become removed from its locality’ and ‘community was very much an add on’. Andy makes clear how claims as to what FC United responsibility to the community should be – ‘the club’s wider impact’- were related to a critique of the free-market ‘existing model of ownership’ at Manchester United which was seen as creating a more precarious relationship between Manchester United and its locality. While Adam locates the desire for FC United to have a wider responsibility to the local community directly in the sense of exclusion Mancunian Manchester United fans felt over issues of ticket pricing, scarcity and distribution, which I highlighted earlier in this chapter. The point
is that the issues of exclusion raised the consciousness amongst these fans of issues of location and Mancunianness but by the time of FC United’s formation these issues had come to be framed as a moral claim about a football club’s reciprocal responsibility to its locality, a claim which stood in opposition to the economic reductionism of the commodity-exchange relationship Manchester United was seen as having sought with its ‘customers’.

This comment from Pete Crowther, in his FC United fan diary, further elucidates my argument:

Some of us want to see a club that stands proudly at the heart of its community.
Some of us want to see a club that gives back to its community - not because of some cynical calculation that this will attract more punters through the turnstiles, but because it sincerely believes that a club that loses its connection with its community loses its soul (Crowther 2006: 42).

Here Crowther demonstrates how the importance placed by FC United fans on an enduring reciprocal relationship between club and community – ‘a club that gives back to its community’ in order for the club to continue to have a ‘soul’ – was framed in opposition to the instrumental and economically reductionist relationship other clubs, implicitly Manchester United, were perceived as having with their locality – ‘some cynical calculation that this will attract more punters through the turnstiles’. Steven also voiced a similar conception of how FC United stood oppositionally to Manchester United in terms of the relationship it had to the communities of Manchester:

It is about us as Mancunians, and everyone else that wants to come. It’s not exclusively for Mancunians – Salfordians as well – but it is about doing something for your community and not being diluted by people who are just coming just to spend a bit of money. That doesn’t benefit the community, it benefits Manchester United quite handsomely but it doesn’t do anything for the Greater Manchester community (Steven, Interview: 13/8/2009).

Steven frames supporting FC United as part of an on-going reciprocal relationship with the ‘community’ in which it is situated – ‘it is about doing something for your community’ – in contrast with those who support Manchester United in what he perceives as a purely monetised commoditised manner – ‘people who are just coming just to spend a bit of money’ – that suits the economically instrumental agenda he perceives Manchester United as having. Such a distinction between Manchester United’s and FC United’s modes of
exchange was most straightforwardly articulated by Paul who told me ‘FC United is a community club whereas Manchester United is a business’ (Fieldnotes: 31/10/2009).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explained the motivation of supporters underpinning one of the key features of FC United, its explicit commitment to being a club that is of benefit to its ‘local community’. I have demonstrated that the changes associated with commercialisation at Manchester United – increasing ticket prices and scarcity and the attempt to build the club into a global brand - alongside a local and national discourse which questioned Manchester United fans’ legitimacy as Mancunians, acted to raise fans’ consciousness of issues of locality and of the ‘precariousness’ of the relationship between Manchester United and Manchester as a locality. Alongside this I showed that these changes were occurring in a context where football club owners had sought to frame their relationship with supporters as a series of economic transaction to individual customers. My argument has contended that some fans critiqued this economic reductionism, and the wider changes that they perceived as rendering the relationship between Manchester United and ‘Manchester’ precarious, by asserting the enduring reciprocal obligations Manchester United had to the wider community and that Manchester United rightfully belonged (in an economic and moral sense) to the people of Manchester. I showed how such a critique of Manchester United’s failure to recognise such obligations to the people of Manchester motivated those fans forming FC United to make the club have explicit commitments to the ‘communities of Manchester’. This chapter, like the previous one, suggested then that a key aspect of FC United supporters’ relationship to the club was that fans explicitly associated the club with the values of ‘community’. However, the notion of community discussed in this chapter was distinct from that of the previous chapter, which focused on the experience of community as a quality of sociality around watching the match, by showing how ‘community’ was also for FC United fans about the recognition of particular set of reciprocal obligations and about the football club engaging in a form of exchange that was perceived to be distinct from the values of ‘business’ in which the supporter is reduced to a ‘customer’.

This chapter raises two key points relating to wider debates, first about the nature of ‘community’ and second about the nature of exchange. Firstly, in the introduction to the thesis I noted how there had been a long-standing argument within the social sciences that
‘community’ was a throwback to an earlier era and had been superseded by the processes of modernity and capitalist transformation. I then suggested that more recent analysts have argued that ‘community’ has provided a conceptual resource through which social transformation can be understood and contested, and new and continuing forms of belonging can be expressed. This chapter gives clear empirical support to the second proposition but does so in a particular way. As Manchester United was transformed by the adoption of commercial practices in line with the wider free-market reality of English football and English society in the 1990s, the language of community became a means to contest this transformation by demanding the recognition of a moral obligation to a social collective – the ‘community’ of Manchester. ‘Community’ here then is a political language but one that was not only utilised to contest a process of capitalist transformation but was also utilised to bring a new reality into being - that of a football club owned collectively by its members which was explicitly committed to being of benefit to its local ‘community’.

Secondly, this chapter raises important points in relation to debates on economic exchange. Marcel Mauss in the conclusion to his famous essay on ‘The Gift’ raised the idea that the morally charged notions of reciprocity and obligation found in gift economies could also be found within western societies ‘much of our everyday morality is concerned with the question of obligation and spontaneity of the gift. It is our good fortune that all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale. Things have values which are emotional as well as material … Our morality is not solely commercial’ (1954 [1925]: 63). This chapter provides documentary and ethnographic evidence that such a morality of obligation, that goes beyond purely commercial values, persists in this particular contemporary context, explicitly in the drawing of a distinction between the values of ‘community’ and those of ‘business’. Furthermore, we have seen in this context how claims over the appropriate forms of exchange and the recognition of reciprocal obligation can become politically charged – playing a part in the formation of FC United as a ‘community’ football club.

The next two chapters will pick up on and extend some of the key themes that have been discussed here. Chapter Five will look at the ‘football in the community’ projects run by FC United, which were one of the chief manifestations of the club’s commitment to being of benefit to its ‘local community’ discussed in this chapter. Chapter Six will look further at how Manchester as a place is imagined by supporters of FC United, a subject touched upon in this chapter where I discussed how Manchester had been imagined as a city of
immigrants, by looking at the idea of Manchester as a ‘radical’ city which was common to many of my informants.
Chapter Five: Community Policies

Introduction

The last chapter looked at how FC United came to have a constitutional and manifesto commitment to be of benefit and service to the Manchester ‘community’. This chapter builds upon this by analysing one of the principal ways in which this commitment manifests itself – through the club’s community football initiatives. In analysing FC United’s community football programme I highlight how the form and scope of the club’s initiatives are both a product of the motivations of those in charge of FC United’s programme and also of a wider political context within the UK. In doing so, this chapter adds a new perspective to recent studies of community football programmes (Brown et al 2003, 2006, 2007; Mellor 2008; Tacon 2007) which have focused on the regulatory and policy context for such programmes. In particular, I focus on how community football initiatives at FC United are underpinned by a particular instrumental understanding of football, as being capable of meeting wider policy objectives and in so doing helping to re-build ‘communities’, that is shared both by recent governments and those running such schemes at FC United. I then utilise an ethnographic approach to explore the social practice of FC United’s community programme that has emerged in the light of this instrumentalisation of football. Further to this, the chapter also critically assesses how the initiatives carried out by FC United come to interact with, and are part of, new de-regulatory forms of governance within the UK. In particular, my analysis focuses on how the community football initiatives conducted by FC United interact with an increasingly liberalised model of public sector provision in which the state, particularly at a local government level, no longer acts as a direct provider of many services but rather funds a range of non-state bodies to deliver public policy goals. Finally, this chapter looks at how these de-regulatory models of governance have led FC United to become an integral part of the economic and social regeneration strategy within Manchester by analysing Manchester City Council’s financial and political support for FC United’s plans to move to a new purpose built stadium.

First, though, I begin by describing and explaining the key features of FC United’s political economy and situating FC United’s community work within this political economy.
The Political Economy of FC United

In understanding FC United’s political economy it is useful to make a distinction between three distinct spheres of the football club’s activities - the club’s football operations, the raising of finance for the club’s stadium build and the club’s community football programme. I will discuss first the political economy of the club’s football operations before discussing the other two spheres.

The principal costs faced by FC United are the part-time wages of the players and management, the wages of the general manager and club secretary (the club’s only two full-time members of staff) and payment of rent for hire of Bury FC’s Gigg Lane ground and for the club’s offices. Further smaller costs include things such as playing kit, training equipment and ticket printing. FC United generates the income to meet these costs through a number of means, firstly through the sale of tickets to watch the team play. As I have already noted in Chapter Three, one of the central motivation for the formation of FC United was the feeling of increased exclusion due to rapidly rising ticket prices at Manchester United and this was reflected in ticket prices being set deliberately low with a ‘pay what you can afford’ season ticket scheme and adult single match tickets at £7.50. Interestingly, in the 2009-2010 season when I was carrying out my fieldwork the average price paid for a season ticket was £160 (FC United 2010d), £70 greater than the suggested minimum price, and I heard stories of supporters who paid an equivalent price to what their season ticket would have cost at Manchester United. The sale of season tickets in the following 2010/2011 season were anticipated to raise £115,000 (ibid). Furthermore, membership of the club was £10 during the season I conducted research and with near 3000 members, that represents a further income of £30,000.

Clearly then the sale of tickets and membership is a significant source of revenue to the club but it is not the only source. Sponsorship and merchandise also represent significant, though somewhat more contentious, sources of revenue to FC United. In the case of sponsorship, the decision not to have a sponsor’s name printed on the FC United football shirt was for many fans a symbolic rejection of the commercialised and profit-driven model under which Manchester United is run. As noted in the introduction to the thesis, the article proposing the setting up of FC United in Red Issue suggested the club should be ‘untainted’ by the pursuit of profit and that the rejection of shirt sponsorship would be central to this (Anon, Red Issue: 2005). Furthermore, Jane told me ‘we refuse to have
sponsors on the team shirts ... it’s too commercial, it’s selling your soul’ (Interview: 7/7/2009). However, while shirt sponsorship was seen by FC United fans as representing an unacceptable level of commercialisation, other forms of sponsorship are intrinsic to the club’s operation. For instance, FC United does have a main club sponsor, which in return for a fee gets to have pitch-side advertising at games, the company logo displayed in newspaper adverts for upcoming FC United games and the logo printed on the club programme and website. Other forms of sponsorship include companies (or individuals) sponsoring the match day programme, individual players and the matchball – all of which allow the company to advertise through the club website and match day programme. In a similar vein, the sale of merchandise at Manchester United had often been contentious. As set out in Chapters Three and Four, there had been a significant perception amongst many of the fans who formed FC United that they had been excluded by Manchester United in favour of ‘new’ and ‘out of town’ fans due to the latter’s greater propensity to consume merchandise. In turn, the consumption of Manchester United merchandise, particularly the wearing of replica shirts, was often seen by FC United fans to signify a supporter was an inauthentic ‘new’ fan. One way these feelings were commonly expressed was through giving the Old Trafford ‘Megastore’, in which Manchester United merchandise was sold, the nickname the ‘Megawhore’. The implication of the nickname being that through the sale of merchandise Manchester United was prostituting itself to these ‘new’ ‘out of town’ supporters who were perceived to be seeking a purely commercially orientated relationship to the club. However, FC United merchandise was both produced and consumed in significant quantities by supporters, providing a further important source of revenue to the club. Merchandise was sold both through the club’s website and through a portacabin set up outside Gigg Lane on home match-days. Merchandise sold included replica shirts, other replica items of kit, casual FC United branded clothing (e.g sweatshirts, coats etc), scarves and hats and other miscellaneous items such as FC United branded mugs. Replica shirts were worn to a much lesser degree amongst adult fans at FC United matches than at matches involving West Ham United or Manchester United I have attended but other forms of merchandise were widely worn at matches – particularly FC United scarfs and hats.

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69 Full details on the various forms of sponsorship at FC United available here http://fc-utd.co.uk/m_sponsorship.php
The above could be read as showing that FC United actually has a very similar political economy to Manchester United, only on a smaller scale and with some, largely symbolic, minor differences. Certainly it is important to acknowledge that FC United is a commercial operation with a need to generate revenue sufficient to meet the costs associated with running a semi-professional football club but there are also some highly significant distinctions between the political economies of the respective clubs. The first important distinction is about the place of profit within the respective political economies and the extent to which profit or revenue maximisation are primary goals which the club’s political economies are orientated towards. In the case of FC United, it was set up as a not for profit organisation. Its industrial provident society co-operative ownership structure means that legally if revenue exceeds expenses the surplus must be re-invested back into the club (FC United Undated b: 3). Furthermore, FC United’s founding manifesto commitment to affordable ticket prices and to avoiding ‘outright commercialism’ mean the club is explicitly committed to being run according to goals directly contrary to profit and/or revenue maximisation – as reflected in the ‘pay what you can afford’ season ticket and the rejection of shirt sponsorship. Within the former PLC structure of Manchester United profit was distributed as dividends to shareholders proportionate to how many shares they held in the club. In the eleven months prior to the Glazer takeover profit was £46.1m (BBC: 2007), which is strongly suggestive that Manchester United was being run, at least to a very significant extent, as a profit maximiser and, therefore, to increase shareholders’ returns. Within the debt-leveraged model that has followed the Glazer takeover, Manchester United ceased to trade at a profit due to the debt-interest payments the club was now required to pay. For example, in the year prior to 30th June 2007 Manchester United paid out £82m in interest payments on its debt of £667m leading to a loss of £58m (Conn 2013). Profit has been transformed into debt-interest payments, by 2013 c. £350m had been paid out of Manchester United on debt-interest payments (Andersred 2013). In order for the Glazer family to ensure such large debt-interest payments could be met, while maintaining Manchester United’s on-pitch levels of success, it has been necessary to take steps to maximise Manchester United’s revenues principally through significant ticket price increases (50% since 2005) and by increasing commercial revenues by creating new sponsorship deals with companies across the globe (Andersred 2013; Conn 2013).70

70 As King (2010: 888) has observed, while those opposed to the Glazer takeover feared it would lead to the sale of the club’s best players (an asset strip) to finance the debt interest payments, such a policy would have been irrational - as a poorly performing team would damage the value of the club
summary, a key difference between the political economies of FC United and Manchester United is that the latter’s has been extractive, with money flowing out in dividends or debt-interest payments, while no such process can occur within FC United’s co-operative ownership model. Furthermore, Manchester United has been run according to goals of profit or revenue maximisation in a way that FC United specifically is not. A second important difference is that FC United’s political economy, as a result of the club being fan-owned in a mutual co-operative structure, is both transparent and, unlike that at Manchester United, amenable to fan/member control and alteration. Both the revenues and costs involved in running FC United are clear to the members of the club, with full accounts published for the membership. As such, the salary of the club’s two full-time members of staff and the wages of all part-time staff are fully transparent to the club’s members and this transparency also applies to all other costs and revenues. Furthermore, as outlined at the beginning of the thesis, the club is governed on a one member one vote basis with votes held on any significant issue. This gives members democratic control over the club’s political economy. For instance, the raising of ticket prices is subject to a member’s vote. While if, for example, a member wished to end pitch-side advertising on match days they could propose a resolution to that effect and, providing they found five co-signers, the proposal would be voted upon at a members’ meeting and if passed would be enacted by the club. Of course, in practice the scope members have for changing the club’s political economy is restricted by the desire to maintain a semi-professional football club and the need to raise revenue to support this. Nonetheless, a key feature of FC United’s political economy, in contrast to that of Manchester United, is that it is subject to democratic member/fan control.

Having outlined the political economy of FC United’s football operations, I now briefly outline the key details of the financial arrangements of the two other spheres of FC

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71 The reason I have given only outline details of the FC United’s revenue and costs rather than specific figures is due to the club’s accounts only being made available to members of the club and, therefore, it would be a breach of privacy to place specific details in the public domain.

72 See: FC United Undated b: 7 for full details on the mechanics of proposing member votes at FC United.
United’s activities— the stadium build and the community football initiatives— which will be the subject of analysis within this chapter. In April 2010 it was announced that FC United would be constructing a purpose-built 5,000 person capacity stadium at Ten Acres Lane in the Newton Heath area of Manchester. The stadium build was supported by Manchester City Council who were to provide a £650,000 capital development grant towards the project. The build was also to be funded by a development fund of supporters’ donations, which had started in 2006 when FC United began to consider plans for a ground of their own and was planned to contribute £500,000 to the stadium build. Furthermore £1.5m was to be raised from a community share scheme, an innovative method of borrowing which involves individuals rather than banks’ lending money for the build to the club. What was particularly significant about this method of borrowing was that it allowed the club to maintain its one member one vote co-operative governance and ownership structure, as regardless of how much share capital one placed in the scheme you remained an ordinary member of the club with the same voting rights as any other. Finally the build would be funded through £700,000 grants from Sport England and the Football Foundation. What is important to note here is that the financial arrangements of the stadium build are separate, to a very large degree, from that of the club’s football operations as the build is to be financed through separate grant and share funding rather than through revenues generated through playing football matches. Grant money, such as that from the local council, cannot be transferred to the club’s football operations and must be used for the stadium build.\textsuperscript{73} A similar point can be made in relation to the final sphere of FC United’s activities – the community football initiatives. While the community football initiatives did receive some small cross-subsidisation from the club’s operations – for instance through the buying of small bits of equipment or the printing of free tickets to give out to participants on initiatives or through the provision of space and computer equipment within the club’s office – they were not primarily funded from the club’s revenues. Instead, FC United’s community football initiatives were financed by bidding for external funding for each initiative or set of initiatives. Again the money from these grants could not be transferred to the club’s football operations and had to be used for the specific initiatives. This separation between the financial arrangements of the club’s football operations and

\textsuperscript{73} It is important to note that while the council had financially committed to supporting FC United’s stadium build, the money was only to be handed over to the club once other sources of stadium financing, such as the raising of £1.5m through the community share scheme, had been fully secured.
that of the stadium build and community football initiatives is a key point. In this chapter, I will analyse the specific funding mechanisms through which the different community football initiatives are financed and in so doing reveal how this funding is tied up with wider de-regulatory changes in the UK political economy. I will also discuss how the funding of the new stadium by Manchester City Council was tied up with FC United’s community initiatives and these de-regulatory processes. However, in the next section I wish to situate FC United’s community football programme within a broader history of football in the community initiatives in England.

History of Community Football Initiatives

The first community football initiatives are generally traced to the mid-1970s and are understood as being attempts to reverse problems specific to football at that time, in particular, falling attendances at English football matches and rising levels of football hooliganism and disorder at matches (Brown et al 2003: 10; 2007: 10; Watson 2000: 114). These problems were seen as both contributing to and evidencing a loss of connection between football club and community, and in the mid-1980s a national football in the community programme was launched amongst English football clubs (Brown et al 2007: 10). These initial community programmes involved little more than the provision of children’s coaching courses and were not aimed at meeting wider social policy agendas (ibid). Furthermore, they came at a time when football, due to problems of hooliganism, racism and high-profile stadium disasters at Heysel and Bradford, was held in particularly low esteem by the non-football watching public and politicians. This was reflected in much of the press coverage at the time, for example, the Sunday Times, described football as ‘a slum game played in slum stadiums watched by slum people’ (Sunday Times: 19th May 1985 as cited in Goldblatt 2006: 542). For Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government in the 1980s the hooligan behaviour of some fans was both an embarrassment to the country’s reputation on the international stage (Williams et al 1984: 2) and also to the government’s law and order rhetoric in the domestic sphere. Kenneth Clarke, a cabinet member in the Thatcher government, has reflected how ‘Margaret Thatcher regarded football fans as the enemy within’ (Kuper 2009).

However, as described in Chapter Two, the popular standing of football was dramatically transformed in the early 1990s with a rapid period of commercialisation and mediatisation,
the re-building of stadiums, a decline in football hooliganism and a growth in attendances. This led to a consequent shift in the political rhetoric surrounding football. In particular, in 1997, the incoming New Labour administration that was led by Tony Blair was keen to use football for political ends. Firstly, Blair was keen to publicly display his own football enthusiasm as a way to identify with the electorate and build political capital (Stanyer and Wring 2004: 4; Millward 2011: 187). Secondly, and crucially for my analysis here, the New Labour administration identified football as having an instrumental power which they believed they could utilise to meet particular policy goals (Tacon 2007: 1-3). To set this second point in a broader context, the New Labour administration under Tony Blair saw the re-vitalisation and re-invention of communities as one of its core political goals. Sport was seen as particularly amenable to this task and consequently there was ‘a shift from the traditional welfare approach of developing sport in the community, to seeking to develop communities through sport’ (Coalter 2007: 18 emphasis original). In other words, a shift from simply ensuring that all communities had access to sporting facilities towards an instrumental view of sport as being capable of helping to create and develop functioning communities. For instance one policy document from the early years of the New Labour government reflected that ‘sport can contribute to neighbourhood renewal by improving communities’ performance on four key indicators – health, crime, employment and education’ (DCMS: 1999 as cited in Coalter 2007: 15). Football in particular, as the most popular sport, was identified as being able to engage ‘socially excluded’ groups and tackle a range of social problems and therefore re-build ‘communities’ (Tacon 2007: 3; Brown et al 2007: 12).

At the same time that the New Labour government was asserting the potential ‘community’ building powers of football it came under pressure from those who felt that the increasingly commercialised form that football was taking meant that the government needed to intervene in order to ensure a relationship between football clubs and their local communities, that were increasingly priced-out (Mellor 2008: 318). To that end, it formed a ‘Football Task Force’, whose members included Adam Brown, to report on whether the football club was meeting its ‘social obligations’ and, if not, what consequent intervention, if any, was required (Mellor 2008: 318). The task force split around the question of whether British football should have an independent regulator. The solution to this impasse by the New Labour government was to pursue one of the central logics of ‘the third way’ philosophy that underpinned much of their policy strategy – that of a mode of governance
between state intervention and unfettered market behaviour. One of the rationales of ‘the third way’ was that the world was now too complex to be managed by a central state and what was needed was to foster a change in values and the building of a stronger civil society in order to restrict the worst excesses of the unregulated market (Mellor 2008: 316). Giddens, one of the architects of the ‘third way’, wrote that the aim of government was to utilize ‘the dynamics of markets but with the public interest in mind ... [this] involves a balance between regulation and de-regulation ... and a balance between the economic and non-economic in the life of society’ (1998: 100). In essence, ‘the third way’ accepted the neo-liberal principles of free-markets and competition as central organising motifs of government but also sought ways to bring about more socially progressive outcomes than such neo-liberal principles had previously allowed. In this context the outcome of the Football Task Force was that the government allowed football clubs to remain without independent regulation but they were to be increasingly ‘asked to engage in the work which was previously the preserve of local and national government’ (Mellor 2008: 319). So in the early 2000s the scope of football in the community initiatives expanded beyond the children’s coaching courses of previous years to using their assumed instrumental social power to become deliverers of schemes that were designed to meet government policy objectives around improving health, lowering drug use, and improving employment prospects, amongst others (Mellor 2008: 319). It is important to note that this belief in the ‘social power’ of sport and, specifically, football has not waned amongst the governments that followed the Blair administration. The Conservative MP Jesse Norman has suggested that it is now viewed as self-evident by those in government that sport can deliver a wider societal good: ‘It has seemed obvious to ministers that sport ... can help us engender a happier and more inclusive society’ (Norman 2010: 211). While David Cameron recently stated ‘football has this incredible power for good and we need to do everything we can to harness that’ (Daily Mail 2012).

Football, in the form of community programmes, has become governmental. Nickolas Rose, building from the work of Michel Foucault, has argued that governance should be understood as the ‘conduct of conduct’ and that studies of governance should focus on the ‘more or less rationalized schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct so as to achieve certain ends’ (1999: 3). Furthermore, Rose argued that both the Blair and Clinton governments incumbent at the time he was writing were committed to a model of ‘governing through community’ which involved ‘new forms of authority of
this new space of natural association, and the instrumentalisation of new forces in the
government of conduct’ (1999: 189). Rose argues that within the political programmes of
Blair and Clinton this commitment to ‘governing through community’ was ‘infused with
notions of voluntarism, of charitable works, of self-organized care, of unpaid service to
one’s fellows’ (1999: 171), and such virtues were to be cultivated within a ‘third-sector’
between market and state. Rose’s insights on the nature of governmentalism can
unhesitatingly be applied to the rise of football community programmes. Such programmes
clearly represent the ‘instrumentalization of a new force’ – football - to achieve the
‘conduct of conduct’, for example through a community football scheme lowering a
person’s propensity to take drugs or commit anti-social behaviour. Such an
instrumentalisation of football represents a shift in the understanding and purpose of
football for those in positions of political power – football is understood by policy makers
and politicians as a source of social and ‘community’ good and its purpose is seen not
simply as a game that people may enjoy playing but as an instrument for achieving
particular social and policy objectives. Furthermore these schemes explicitly identified the
‘community’ as the space in which they would work and, while those football clubs carrying
out the schemes were clearly market organisations, in delivering the schemes they had
taken on the values of the third-sector in return for remaining unregulated.

It is this transformed context, where football has become governmental and is now
understood as having an instrumental power for achieving societal and community good by
politicians, in which FC United’s community football initiatives have been enacted.

FC United’s Community Football Programme

Volunteering on the community programmes constituted much of my ‘field’ research. It
bought me into regular contact with Adam Brown, Andy Walsh and Robin Pye who were
chiefly responsible for the direction of the community work. The next section is based
around interviews I carried out with them at the end of my research and the participant
observation I conducted on the community programme. Andy Walsh did not have day to
day involvement with planning and implementing community work but, as club General
Manager, he was involved in overseeing the strategic plan of the community work. Adam
Brown was the board member responsible for community work, and therefore reported to
the rest of the board on work in this sphere, as well as liaising with Robin Pye, FC United’s
Community and Education Manager, on funding bids and the overall direction of the
community work. Robin had become FC United’s Community and Education manager two years previous to my fieldwork. Robin was a founder member of FC United, he had previously worked in a pupil referral unit for children excluded from mainstream education and had taken a group of pupils from the unit to work with the FC United manager Karl Marginson. Having been impressed with the impact this football engagement activity had on the children he worked with, Robin later decided to give up his job in order to manage FC United’s community work full-time. Robin’s role involved the day to day managing of the community work – such as ensuring the right number of community coaches went to each initiative, liaising with delivery partners, putting funding bids together for future work – as well as using his teaching skills to help to deliver some of the community activities. All three - Adam, Andy and Robin - saw football as having the ability to tackle wider social problems. For example in interview I asked Andy Walsh why he felt a football club should have a community programme:

Because football is nothing without its community ... Whether the game likes it or not the public look to football and start to impose their own moral and social expectations on the game, so whether the game likes it or not it has a wider community impact. Also because of that wider community impact it has an ability to attract attention from people who otherwise would be difficult to reach. Young people who might be disaffected from home life or work life, from school life, education – feeling isolated or misunderstood – they can connect with sport, they understand sport and they are attracted to it. So sport can be used to engage with those young people in ways that would be difficult to do otherwise and football being the biggest sport in this country, biggest participation sport in this country, biggest spectator sport in this country therefore has an important role to play (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010).

Adam Brown shares a belief in the ability of football to tackle social issues but extends it to a more general belief in the ability of cultural activities to meet social objectives:

GP: What are the social Issues football, or FC United, is placed to address?

AB: Well it’s football more generally I think, it’s not unique to football, it’s certainly not unique to FC United. It’s about in the broader sense using culture to achieve things more than just cultural aims. So whether that’s Cornerhouse doing work on their livewire programme on film with 16 year old kids or the Arsenal
Football in the Community scheme doing work with socially excluded kids in London or our work with NEET’s [someone ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’] in Manchester. It’s all about using culture as a means of engagement from which you can deliver wider social objectives and they range from education or lack of it to just participation in organisations and events, to more focussed work around health or training, to sports participation. [It] is all premised on the same thing that we can use the attractiveness of this club or this activity to deliver a whole load of social outcomes because people will be interested in it because of what it is (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

Both Adam and Andy, following the governmental discourse I identified in the previous section, position football as not just a game to be enjoyed but one that through playing a wider social good can be achieved. It is worth noting here that the idea that FC United was attempting to utilise football to tackle social problems through its community football initiatives was important to their identity as FC United fans for many supporters who were not directly involved in delivering the schemes. As outlined in the previous chapter the stress put on FC United giving back to the ‘community’ resulted from a feeling that Manchester United had become disengaged from the local community and many FC United fans expressed to me pride in the club delivering such schemes and saw it as an important part of FC United. For example Sarah told me how ‘people [at FC United] are putting a lot of energy into community work and youth work, which are good in themselves and are important ... it’s a really important thing that the club does is a lot of community work’ (Interview: 3/8/2009). While Robin Pye told me:

Time and time again I get people saying to me ‘that [FC United’s community work] is what makes our club different’. People need things to latch onto, like no shirt sponsors, ticket prices, democratic control, the fact it is a laugh at our matches and you don’t feel like you’re being herded around by a bunch of stewards working on behalf of a bunch of rich people. But especially in the last couple of years, our community work is a symbol of why they feel an attachment to the club. (Interview: 5/11/2010).

These discourses outlined above about football as a provider of wider social good and about the FC United initiatives as an important part of the club’s identity are critical for

74 Cornerhouse is an independent art-house cinema in Central Manchester.
understanding the justification and rationale of the club’s community football programme. However to fully understand the community football initiatives carried out by FC United it is necessary to go beyond these discourses and look ethnographically at the form these initiatives come to take in practice. To do this I want to begin with an account of my first day of participant observation on the club’s community schemes:

17th January 2010

Having met Robin Pye for the first time shortly before Christmas at a FC United match, where we had discussed the possibility of me conducting participant observation on the club’s community football schemes, he had invited me to begin my research by attending a few meetings with him so I could get an understanding of the scope of the club’s community work. I did not have many details about how these meetings would work but I was pleased to be getting involved and getting on with my research. I got up early to head to the Longsight area of Manchester, where Robin had asked me to meet him, for a 9.30 meeting with Burnden Road football club, a club largely made up of East African immigrants to Manchester.75

The street on which the football club’s offices were located was largely made-up of terraced houses turning into a row of take-aways, small shops and cafés, which reflected the diverse ethnic make-up of this area of the city, at one end of the street. A small Burnden Road football club sign was placed above a doorway to the side of an Ethiopian café. Having arrived early and been stood outside on my own for around ten minutes Robin, who was smartly dressed in a suit compared to my casual clothing, arrived and we entered the football club offices together. We entered via a narrow stair case and the office consisted of a desk and a few chairs along with a table displaying trophies and photos of different age-group sides of the club. Robin was greeted enthusiastically by the three club members who were present, all of whom were males of East African descent – one was aged in his mid-30s while the other two were around 16 years of age. The older member was introduced to me as the club chairmen and all three of them greeted me warmly. Robin and the two club members began by filling me in on how the club were

75 In this account significant details, such as names and locations, of all organisations mentioned have been changed.
planning to run a khat awareness day to discourage the taking of Khat. The chairman of the club spoke of how they wanted to run an event involving a football tournament, as well as basketball and athletics events – sports also popular in the East African community – and invite a music artist in order to attract a large number of local young people to spread an anti-khat message to. The meeting was relaxed and I felt able to ask questions and suggest ideas for organising the event. Much of the meeting was composed of a discussion of how such an event – where facilities needed to be hired, equipment paid for and prizes purchased - could be funded and Robin took the lead talking through the different possibilities available. Particularly he talked of the possibility of receiving funding from a private body, which sponsored small initiatives led by young people to tackle social problems and, therefore, Robin suggested this body would be an ideal funding partner for this project. Furthermore, Robin suggested the possibility to access further funding through Manchester City Council or Greater Manchester Police. The meeting drew to a close with a plan for a further meeting in which we would all begin work on the funding application to the private funder while in the meantime Robin would look further at the possibility of additional public sector funding.

On the drive to the next meeting at a high school in the Whitefield area of Manchester, Robin told me how FC United had come to be involved with Burnden Road football club. He told me how a local Manchester MP, who was also a member of FC United, had wanted the club to work with Burnden Road through its community football programme. Robin spoke of how the East African immigrant community was often identified at national and local government level as a ‘problem community’ due to it experiencing economic and social deprivation, the risk of Islamic extremism, ethnic tensions with other immigrant groups and other social problems. Therefore, he suggested, it was important that FC United engaged in their community work with a group like Burnden Road football club who were attempting to use football to tackle social problems within their community but needed help from partner organisations with the experience of negotiating the financial and bureaucratic steps needed for such schemes.

76 Khat is a drug prevalent within East African communities.
The area in which the high school was situated, a leafy outer-suburb of Manchester, contrasted sharply with the surroundings of Burnden Road’s offices in the inner-city. Robin and I were taken through by a school receptionist to a meeting room within the main school building. We were greeted by a young female PE teacher from the school and an older smartly-dressed man who was from a local squash club. The meeting, which lasted around half an hour, was concerned with the setting up of a joint football and squash scheme for girls. Unlike the previous meeting at Burnden Road, I felt something of a spare part at this meeting, perhaps due to the more formal school setting, and just sat and observed the meeting rather than trying to contribute. Again, much of the focus within the meeting was on how the scheme could be funded – with the possibility of drawing from either public sector funding, either local government funding or central education funding, or from sports bodies. In particular, it was discussed how funding a sports scheme aimed specifically at girls would be popular with potential funders because it was targeted at ‘minority’ participants in sport.

After the meeting, me and Robin headed off and got some lunch from a small curry cafe in the Cheetham Hill area of Manchester. I took the chance here to ask Robin some questions about how he came to be involved with FC United’s Community work [Discussed above]. The final meeting of the day was with a social enterprise organisation, called New Paths, which assists people from Manchester who have recently been released from prison to access accommodation and employment. New Paths were based in a small building shared with several other organisations in the Ardwick area of Manchester, just outside the city centre, and the meeting took place in New Paths small office within the building. At the beginning of the meeting it was just me and Robin and the two men who ran New Paths. Again I was something of a spare part in this meeting, with little to contribute as Robin and the New Paths workers discussed the possibility of FC United providing volunteering opportunities as football coaches on the clubs other community football initiatives to two young people recently released from a youth offenders institute. Towards the end of the meeting the two young people turned up and were introduced to Robin and me. Robin then talked to these young people about the football coaching opportunities that would be available working with FC United and how he could support them in working with FC United’s community team and
they seemed enthusiastic to become involved with this work. Following the end of the meeting Robin gave me a lift back to my flat in the centre of Manchester and on the drive he discussed how I could involve myself further in the community work by helping out at ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments and other initiatives run by FC United. I was keen to become involved with this more direct volunteering, as while the day of attending had been very useful in understanding the scope of FC United’s community work I had often felt myself to be something of a conspicuous spare part in these meetings with little to contribute. Just before he dropped me off, Robin spoke to me about how he often felt that the work carried out by the football in the community team seemed to be on the periphery of the FC United community in which he suggested the match going fans were central.

This account reveals several important points for understanding the community initiatives carried out by FC United. In the previous chapter, I set out how the FC United’s community football initiatives arose, in part, out of a political and moral claim that a football club had obligations to the ‘local community’. The notion of ‘community’ in that claim was relatively abstract and ambiguous – who precisely made up the community and where the boundaries of the ‘local community’ lay was not specified. What can be seen in this account is that carrying out the actual community football initiatives requires a process of identifying and engaging specific groups of people at particular locations that FC United’s community programme then acts upon. The groups and locations are heterogeneous, ranging within that one day from male East African immigrants living in a poorer inner-city district of Manchester to girls attending a school in the affluent outer suburbs of Manchester to young offenders drawn from across Greater Manchester. During my fieldwork FC United was carrying out different community initiatives right across the city of Manchester and Greater Manchester – including Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale and Bury – and indeed one initiative took place in Stoke. The community programme took place in schools, parks, sport centres and prisons and engaged a diverse range of groups including school children, careleavers, young offenders and refugees. However, importantly, the above account also reveals that in order for the community initiatives to engage such different groups it is necessary that funding is generated and specific delivery partners found, and that which people are engaged where by FC United’s community work is dependent, to a very large extent, on these two factors. As can be seen from the meetings with Burnden Road and the North Manchester school, described above, when a new initiative is proposed
much of the planning is taken up with how to access funding to run it. Indeed, throughout the fieldwork period I found a significant amount of the day to day practice of FC United’s community football programme was taken up with both planning what sources of funding the community programme could access and then writing the grant applications. This focus on funding is a result of the financial arrangements of the community initiatives that I set out previously in this chapter, where the initiatives are not financed through the club’s revenue directly but rather through accessing external sources. Given the need for external funding sources, FC United’s community football initiatives are therefore focussed on groups that funding agencies – state, private or third sector - consider to be in need of intervention to tackle particular social problems within that group. As Brown et al. have noted, since the Blair government identified football as being capable of tackling social problems football clubs’ communities are increasingly constituted as ‘agency defined ‘communities of disadvantage’ or ‘social problem communities’” (2008: 310). This point is supported within my account of my first day’s fieldwork with the community team, where the girls sport scheme is considered viable precisely because a funding agency would consider females a ‘minority participant’ group within sport and therefore would be willing to finance an intervention to rectify this disadvantage. Furthermore, Robin suggested that it was important to engage with Burnden Road football club due to the East African community having been identified at a local and national governmental level as a ‘problem community’ and the Khat awareness day was considered fundable because it was identified as tackling a specific ‘social problem’. It is important then to understand that those who FC United’s community programme comes to engage are, to a highly significant extent, those groups of people which can be defined in terms such as ‘communities of disadvantage’ and as experiencing social problems which are recognised by external funding agencies. This is not to say that moral reasons for FC United engaging with particular groups were irrelevant: as already set out, the leaders of FC United community programme had a sincere belief in the ability of football to tackle social problems and much of the motivation for the club’s programme lay in the wider memberships belief that a football club had enduring obligations to its ‘local community’. But the ability to attract external funding was central in determining the specifics of what initiatives were carried out by FC United. A further important factor in determining with whom and where FC United’s community programme is enacted is the delivery partners that the programme engages. All of the community initiatives I came across during my fieldwork involved FC United, to a greater or lesser degree, working with partner organisations. The above account gives clear insight into the
range of partnerships involved and the different forms they could take. So, the first meeting involved FC United working with a recently-established immigrant football club, while the second involved a partnership with a part of the state – a school – and another sports club, while the final meeting saw FC United developing a partnership with a third sector organisation who in turn were themselves in partnership with the probation and prison services. FC United’s role within such partnerships was often to provide certain forms of expertise and skills – so in the case of Burnden Road football club partnership FC United, through Robin, provided expertise in accessing funding, while for the girls football scheme FC United would provide skilled football coaches. In turn, the partner organisation became joint bidders for funding and also often acted as the recruiter to the schemes. For example, those attending the girls’ football scheme were to be recruited through the school, while Brunden Road football club would recruit young people from the East African immigrant community to attend the Khat awareness day.

In summary, through the account of the opening day of my research on FC United’s community work, I have highlighted that the FC United community programme involves a process of engaging a diverse set of groups at heterogeneous locations across Greater Manchester. Furthermore, I have shown that a significant determinant of with whom and where FC United’s community programme takes place is what partner organisations can be engaged and the ability to access external funding. Finally, the account revealed how those who FC United’s community programme engaged were those who funding agencies recognised as belonging to ‘communities of disadvantage’ or suffering social problems. I will explore further in the next section of the chapter the dynamics of funding and look at the relationship between FC United’s community programme and a liberalised model of public sector provision but first I want to reveal more of the social practice of FC United’s community programme by ethnographically exploring the two main initiatives – the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments and the ‘Making it Work’ careleavers scheme – with which I spent considerable time during fieldwork. I also look here at my role as a researcher on the community initiatives.

The first initiative that I was closely involved with during fieldwork was the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments that the FC United community team organised and hosted. In order to give insight into this initiative, I wish to begin with an account of one of the tournaments I was present at.
Today FC United were playing Durham City at Gigg Lane and, as had become my normal routine for Saturday matches over the previous two months, I was helping out at the Community Cohesion Tournament at Goshen Sports Centre in Bury. The tournament was due to start at 12pm, three hours before the FC United match kicked off, and I set off on the tram to Bury from the centre of Manchester at 11am. Upon disembarking at Bury Tram stop around 11.30 I set off on the, now familiar, twenty minute walk to Goshen Sports Centre. My route to Goshen walking along the busy Manchester Road took me right past Gigg Lane ground. At this time the pubs close to the ground were empty and, I noted, there were no signs that FC United would be playing a game that afternoon at Gigg Lane. I carried on along Manchester Road for another ten minutes before turning into the small housing estate in which the Goshen centre was located. The centre was located behind the estate, at the end of a road of terraced and semi-detached housing and was comprised of a number of grass football pitches, a roughly tarmacked car park in which a small sport centre building was situated containing changing rooms and toilets and beside this a fenced-in astroturf pitch. On the astroturf were 30 lads of around 16 years of age who were playing in the tournament and they were kicking footballs around amongst themselves. Robin Pye, Nick, a FC United fan volunteer who helped to run the tournaments and Martin, who was a FC United community coach, were stood at the side. All three I had met several times through my volunteering in the last couple of months and I went over to them to say hello. I then began my, now familiar, task of collecting registration details from all of the participants. This involved asking each player to fill in a form giving their name, age, postcode and self-defined ethnicity. Having completed this task in around 15 minutes the tournament was ready to kick-off. Today there were three teams taking part – one from a refugee group based in Bury, a team comprising participants in the ‘Making it Work’ careleavers scheme run by FC United and finally a team from a north-Manchester housing estate who had been working with FC United community coaches over the last year in a scheme run in conjunction with a housing association following problems of anti-social behaviour on the estate. The teams from north-Manchester were entirely white, while the refugee team was drawn from a diverse set of ethnic backgrounds and the ‘Making
it Work’ team, while largely white, also included participants from other ethnic backgrounds.

With registration complete a series of 7-a-side football games between the different teams began with Martin acting as the referee. While the games were in progress I took a series of photos for a report I would write for the FC United website on the tournament and also chatted to Nick, the volunteer who helped to organise the tournaments. Nick inquired how my research about FC United was going and in the course of talking to him about this, I mentioned how I had found that several FC United fans not directly involved with the community work had expressed to me pride in the community work carried out by FC United. While acknowledging this to be true, Nick suggested that from his position as a volunteer directly involved, the community work often seemed ‘peripheral’ to the club. Particularly he spoke to me about how the Goshen sport centre was ‘desolate’ and the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments seemed far-removed from the bustle of the match-day – a sentiment with which I agreed. Particularly he spoke to me about how he felt FC United building their own ground would provide an opportunity to change this, as tournaments could take place within the club’s own facilities prior to the match and would be visible to the wider fan base.

The tournament drew to a close at around 2.15pm and Robin invited all of the participants to attend the FC United matches free of charge, something that the members of the team from North Manchester and the ‘Making it Work’ participants took up and we headed off on the ten minute trip to Gigg Lane ...

As can be seen from this account, the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments were held regularly before Saturday home FC United games and involved a series of 7-a-side matches between teams of young men around the age of 16 and then the opportunity to attend an FC United match free of charge. The teams invited were ones that did not take part in any formal league, and therefore did not get to play competitive football against other teams, and were often drawn from other initiatives that FC United were involved in. The ‘Making it Work’ scheme participants played in every tournament and the refugee group in Bury, referred to in the above account, played in most tournaments. Most teams, such as that from the North Manchester housing estate, only played in the tournaments on a one-off or
occasional basis. The participants were drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds and the ethnic make-up of the teams described in the account above is representative of the ethnic make-up at most tournaments – with at least one team normally being entirely or predominantly white and at least one team being wholly or predominantly non-white. This ethnic diversity was something the community team attempted to monitor through the registrations process I described above. The aim of tournaments was that through playing football and attending a football match together cross-cultural understanding could be furthered and racial and inter-ethnic tensions could be overcome and in so doing community cohesion within Manchester could be furthered.

The participant observation on the community cohesion tournaments was an important development in the process of conducting ethnographic research about FC United. As I reflected in Chapter One, a central motivation in looking to become a volunteer on the community initiatives was that it would help to overcome my concerns about my outsider status at FC United by giving me a defined role that would legitimate and structure my presence around FC United as a researcher. However, the account from my first day of research on the community football programme reveals that merely sitting in and observing meetings was not enough to do this. Indeed they testify that sitting in on the meetings left me feeling myself to be a ‘spare part’ and unable to contribute anything valuable. The participant observation on the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournament was the first step in the research in which I felt I had a role that legitimated my research presence. As noted above, I took on the task of carrying out registration and of photographing and writing up the tournaments for the FC United website and this was a role I performed regularly throughout the fieldwork and became confident in performing these tasks. I referred in Chapter One to how early interviewees told me they found volunteering for FC United ‘empowering’ and, in a distinct way to these fans, I also found volunteering within the community team as ‘empowering’ as it allowed me to see myself as a valuable part of the team as well as a researcher. For example, the FC United website report I wrote of the tournament described in the account above was posted by a fan to the FC United unofficial fan forum and several fans commented positively upon the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments. This gave me a feeling of pride that I had contributed to the community work by successfully publicising the tournaments to the wider fan base. It was these experiences where I felt through my volunteering role that I was contributing something of value to the community work which were central to allowing me to perceive myself as a legitimate
participant researcher and, therefore, to feel confident and happy conducting the research. Furthermore, by performing roles which others in the community team, particularly Robin Pye, saw as being of value also allowed them to accept me as a long-term research presence. These experiences in which I felt I was performing a role of value continued throughout the fieldwork, such as when I took on new tasks such as conducting monitoring and evaluation of the ‘Making it Work’ scheme or writing funding bids, but it was the carrying out of registration and writing of website reports for the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments that was the key first step in this process.

Nick’s comments to me, recounted above, about the community work being ‘peripheral’ to the club and the community cohesion tournaments seeming removed from the wider match-day are revealing and worthy of further analysis. Certainly my experiences of the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments tallied with Nick’s comments, as these tournaments were never attended by general fans and while Goshen sports centre was only a ten minute walk from Gigg Lane you felt totally removed from the wider match-day. Furthermore, as recounted in my account of the opening day of my research with the community team, Robin also made a similar observation about the work by the FC United community team being on the periphery of the FC United community where he saw match-going fans as central. Certainly, it was true of other initiatives that they were not attended by fans and only a small amount of the delivery was by fan volunteers, with most by paid for community coaches. Indeed, one of the reasons I was asked to write reports on community initiatives was to make the wider membership more aware of what the community initiatives actually involved - as it was noted to me that while the membership often expressed pride in the community work carried out by the club there was not a high level of understanding of the specifics of the initiatives being conducted. This raises the interesting point that while in the previous chapter I set out how the initiatives arose out of a moral claim that football clubs should meet obligations to the ‘local community’, which was central to many fans motivation for setting up FC United, and I have highlighted in this chapter that the initiatives were important to many fans identity as FC United supporters, within the actual social practice of the community programme there is a separation between these initiatives and the wider fan base. In effect, that the club conducts community initiatives is very important to many fans in the abstract, as evidence that FC United, unlike Manchester United, is a ‘community club’, but most fans are rarely directly involved in these initiatives.
It’s important to also understand that the social practice of the ‘Community Cohesion’
tournaments, which I described above, was taking place in the wider context of a set of
discourses at governmental level and amongst leaders of the community programme about
community and the relationship between football and community. These discourses are
key to understanding how FC United came to run these specific football tournaments. So,
Robin Pye set out to me why he felt that football was particularly well place to achieve such
community cohesion:

The reason why football is good for it [creating community cohesion], is there is
now hardly any culture in the world that is not familiar with football, so football is
as an activity like English is a global language. Just imagine if we were trying to do
this with rugby or cricket or lacrosse? Straight away you can see big chunks of the
community wouldn’t be turning up but with football we’ve seen everyone, we’ve
seen every ethnic group in Manchester. So first of all you’re going to get everyone
in and the second thing is there isn’t a Pakistani way of playing football or a Somali
way of playing football. It’s just football, football, football. But if you compare that
with activities that are more culturally specific – singing, drama, dance, cooking –
you’ve got more cultural translation issues. Now those activities precisely because
of those advantages could lead to a deeper understanding of what people have in
common but as a first step, and for a lot of the groups we’re working with a first
step is where we’re at, football is excellent (Robin Pye, interview: 5/11/2010).

Alongside Robin’s ideas on the ability of football to build cohesive communities amongst
different ethnic groups, the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments match up with
governmental discourses on the need to create community cohesion and the role sport can
play in this. For instance, Department for Communities and Local Government papers (2006,
2007) have stressed that working to build more cohesive communities is one of the
essential duties for local authorities and they also argue that sport offers a particularly
good mechanism to engage people of differing backgrounds and foster cohesion. It can be
seen then how the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments emerge in the wider context of
football [and sport], being instrumentalised, by both leaders at FC United and recent
governments, as being capable of tackling specific social problems.

The second community initiative that I was very involved with during my research was the
‘Making it Work’ project. This was a project in conjunction with Barnardos, the children’s
charity, which worked with sixteen and seventeen year old young men who had been in care during their childhood and were now unemployed and not in education or training (‘NEET’ in government terminology). I will begin my analysis of this initiative with an account of the first 'Making it Work' session I attended:

27th May 2010

Robin had asked me to come along to one of the ‘Making it Work’ weekly sessions to conduct a quantitative evaluation of the project. In the week before, in conjunction with Robin via email, I had designed a tick box questionnaire [see appendix 1] based on the government ‘every child matters’ framework for children services. I had printed out a set of paper questionnaires and brought pens along with me to allow the young people to fill in the forms during the session. The session was held in a small sports hall just off a busy main road heading into Manchester city centre. Entering the sports hall I was greeted by Robin and Martin and five participants, all males around 16-17 years of age, on the ‘Making it Work’ scheme. I had met all of the scheme participants previously at the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments and therefore felt relaxed joining the session. The session began with a four-a-side game of football which we all joined in with – including me, Robin and Martin. This lasted an enjoyable half an hour, with everyone fully committed to the game. Following this game, Robin got one of the participants to lead us all in a football skills exercise. When the exercise was complete, Robin got the other participants to comment on what the participant leading the exercise had done well and how he could improve his leadership of such exercises. This process was then repeated for another of the participants. I was struck throughout these exercises by the supportive environment which Robin created for the participants, one in which they seemed relaxed and confident taking on leadership roles and giving and receiving constructive feedback from one another. Following the end of the second participant’s turn at leading the exercises and receiving feedback a break was called in the session. I took the opportunity at this time to hand out the quantitative evaluations to the participants, explaining that the community team wanted their feedback on their experiences of participating in the ‘Making it Work’ scheme. The participants quickly filled out the evaluations with no fuss and, it seemed to me, little interest and returned them. With the sun shining outside, we moved from the sports hall to the single grass football pitch
outside. The final half hour of the session was taken up with another four-a-side game and a penalty shoot-out competition. While I had turned up to the session expecting to do little more than hand-out the evaluations and watch from the side lines, it had been great fun to join in and just to play football.

So the key features of the ‘Making it Work’ project were that these young people met every week at a sports centre in south Manchester with community coaches from FC United and they played football together and practised football coaching skills. Through developing these football coaching skills they worked towards a sports leaders award. Furthermore, the young people on the scheme also took part in the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments and attended FC United home games together. Towards the end of the scheme the young people worked as volunteer coaches on play schemes that FC United ran for younger children during school holidays. Indeed a week after this first visit to the ‘Making it Work’ scheme I attended a holiday play scheme where the first young person I observed practicing leading a football skills exercise was now leading a group of young children in the same exercise. The aim of the scheme was to use football as a means through which to engage young people who were disengaged from mainstream education and employment, to build up skills such as team working and leadership through playing football together and volunteering, as well as achieving a formal qualification. By building up confidence and skills through the project it was hoped this would help the young people to either return to mainstream education or find employment and in the year I was involved all of the young people went on to return to education following the project.

Much like the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments the social practice of the ‘Making it Work’ project, which I described in the above account, emerges within the context of a set of national and local government objectives and policies. On a national level, youth unemployment (as opposed to unemployment in general) is something that governments have targeted through explicit interventions – for instance the last Labour government introduced the ‘future jobs fund’ in an attempt to lower youth unemployment while the present coalition government has created a ‘work programme’ to tackle what they perceive to be a problem ‘that has held back our country for too long’ (HM Government 2011). Manchester City Council has also placed a significant strategic policy focus on young people who are NEET, since 2003 it has had a specific NEET strategy as well as a specialist co-

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ordinator to oversee attempts to lower the number of NEET’s within Manchester (LGID 2008). Furthermore, NEET care leavers have also been understood by governments to be a political problem, for instance the last Labour government identified care leavers as one of four priority socially excluded groups with a key priority being to improve their access to education, training and employment (LSC 2009). Here it can be seen that the ‘Making it Work’ scheme is specifically aimed at tackling a local and national government recognised social problem within a ‘community of disadvantage’.

A key point this section reveals is that FC United’s community scheme in many ways fulfils the Blair government vision for football in the community schemes. The leaders of FC United’s community programme, as the Blair governments did, understand football instrumentally, as having the ability to tackle social problems and to strengthen ‘community’ ties. Furthermore, they have been willing to use this ‘social power’ of football to design schemes which meet specific government policy objectives, in the cases I have described here, around ‘community cohesion’ and youth unemployment. As such these schemes are clearly governmental – they are about the ‘conduct of conduct’ for particular social ends – for example teaching care leavers football coaching skills to try and help to reduce unemployment within this group. Furthermore, the projects specifically identify the ‘community’ as the space in which they govern. Firstly, they do so in the general sense of a scheme working towards ‘community cohesion’ and the schemes being managed by a community and education manager and delivered by community coaches. Secondly, they do so in the specific sense of the schemes working with funding agency-recognised ‘communities of disadvantage’ or ‘social problem communities’. Finally FC United, as a not-for-profit industrial provident society, is exactly the kind of third-sector organisation that the Blair government envisioned taking on responsibility for reviving ‘community’. As such, while in the previous chapter I showed how a central motivation for the setting up of FC United lay in the expression of ‘community’ as a particular moral claim about a football club’s obligations, this section shows how in fulfilling these obligations, through the social practice of the club’s community football programme, ‘community’ comes to be manifest as a governmental phenomenon at FC United.

In the next two sections I will look further at this relationship between FC United’s community football programme and recent developments within UK governance. Firstly, I will examine how the funding of FC United’s community programme, which as I have shown ethnographically in this section is intrinsic to the social practice of the initiatives,
interacts with recent de-regulatory changes in public sector provision. In the final section of the chapter I draw on further fieldwork observations to show how the community initiatives which I have ethnographically described in this section, played an important part in securing council funding for FC United’s new ground. Furthermore, I situate this council support within new modes of local government-led economic and social regeneration.

Community Football Within a Changing Model of Public Provision

I argued earlier in this chapter that the rapid advancement of community football schemes from the late 1990s onwards was in part the result of a ‘third way’ governing philosophy that sought socially progressive solutions to social problems through means other than the top-down state. This ‘third-way’ philosophy had potential implications for the way in which community football programmes could be funded and their relationship to public sector provision. Within ‘third-way’ governance there was no automatic commitment to state provision of public services and there was great enthusiasm for opening up the public sector to charities, third-sector organisations and the private sector (Driver and Martell 2000; Mellor 2008: 321). I have already shown ethnographically that the need for external funding was intrinsic to the FC United community programme and I look here at how this need for external funding leads the club to interact with this liberalised model of public sector provision.

During the time I was carrying out my research FC United received funding from a wide range of sources for different initiatives. This included funding from the private sector, local councils, other public sector bodies such as schools, from charities and from third sector bodies such as housing associations. For example, the ‘Community Cohesion’ tournaments received private sector funding from the Co-operative group while the ‘Making it Work’ project was funded by the children’s charity Barnardos. Holiday play schemes run by FC United received funding from schools, housing associations and local councils, while work that FC United carried out in a young offenders institute was funded by the prison service. However, the liberalisation in public sector provision discussed above means that determining what initiatives are funded by public money is more complicated than is self-evident. For instance, housing associations are nominally third-sector non-profit organisations funded through tenants’ rents but they also receive significant public funding through governmental bodies. Meanwhile, Barnardos receives over half its funding from
local and national government.\textsuperscript{77} Within a liberalised public sector the appearance of the state has become ambiguous with chains of funding between different organisations to deliver public policy goals. For example, in the case of the ‘Making it Work’ project, Barnardos received money from the government in return for the charity providing certain services, such as the provision of educational opportunities for NEET care leavers, and they then commissioned FC United to fulfil this service. The state’s role becomes obscured by a chain of money and it comes to appear as if FC United is working with Barnardos towards a public policy goal, of lowering unemployment amongst care leavers, without the intervention of the state when the reality is somewhat different.

However, it was not only through chains of funding that FC United delivered public services, it also received direct local government funding to deliver public services. In September 2010, towards the end of my research, I was involved in helping to put together a series of, largely successful, funding bids to Manchester City Council for FC United to run football schemes aimed at replicating the ‘Making it Work’ project with other NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET, young people in Manchester. In line with my earlier ethnographic analysis of the role of funding in FC United’s community programme, these funding applications saw FC United bidding to carry out work across Greater Manchester and with a number of partner organisations. These partner organisations included schools, churches, youth clubs and football clubs and their roles varied across the funding bids but included recruiting participants to the schemes and providing volunteering opportunities and additional educational support for the participants. Brown et al (2006: 19) and Coalter (2007: 19) have described how public investment and funding has become increasingly evidence based, this in a context where the government’s role within public services is less frequently as a direct provider of services but more often as guarantor of standards (Mellor 2008: 317-318). In applying for funding from Manchester City Council it was necessary to engage with this ‘evidence based’ governmentalism. This involved providing both evidence of competency to deliver a particular service and showing that FC United would be able to provide metrics which would demonstrate the project’s ‘success’. The evidence of competency to deliver the service was provided by a quantitative evaluation I had carried out of the ‘Making it Work’ initiative with participants alongside a record of how many participants from the ‘Making it Work’ initiative had gone on to employment or education. As revealed in my account in the last section of the first ‘Making it Work’ session I attended

\textsuperscript{77} See: http://www.barnardos.org.uk/fundraisingpromise/fundraising_standards_board_faq.htm#q2
during my fieldwork, the ‘Making it Work’ evaluation (see: appendix 1) took the form of a short survey based on the ‘every child matters’ framework for children’s services. The ‘every child matters’ framework was introduced by the Blair government in the 2004 Children’s Act, and set out five key goals which children and youth services should work towards – improving health, ensuring and improving child safety, encouraging enjoyment and achievement, encouraging children to make positive contributions and helping to achieve economic wellbeing. The evaluation questionnaire asked the participants to what extent they felt the ‘Making it Work’ project had allowed them to achieve all of these outcomes apart from ensuring safety. In answer to question three, which asked to what extent the participants felt the ‘Making it Work’ project would allow them to go on to the job or further study programme (achieve economic well-being) they wanted, 100% of participants stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme meant it was likely they would be able to fulfil their ambitions in this regard. This response, along with a record of the number of former participants now in employment or education, provided the evidence base to demonstrate competency of delivery to the council. It was also necessary within the funding application to state quantitative outcomes which would emerge from the scheme. These outcomes included the number of young people who would be engaged by the initiative, the number of young people who would achieve a formal qualification and the number of young people who would carry out volunteering during the project and FC United would report back to Manchester City Council at the end of the project on whether these outcomes were achieved. Such a process can be understood as part of an ‘audit culture’, which Strathern (2000) has described as being increasingly prevalent across different institutions and different societies, in which ‘rituals of verification’ take place to ensure accountability. So, these quantitative outcomes provide a measure against which Manchester City Council, in its role as a guarantor of public service standards rather than direct provider, could measure whether FC United was a satisfactory deliverer of public service and in so doing hold the club accountable for meeting particular policy goals.

Alongside this process of providing evidence of competence to deliver and providing quantitative outcomes against which the initiatives could be held to account, the funding applications also required FC United to demonstrate how the proposed schemes fitted within Manchester City Council priorities and to evidence the need for the schemes. These two tasks were the central ones I took on in writing the funding applications. Specifically
the application required it to be stated how the schemes proposed would address the
council’s children and youth services commissioning criteria. In particular, I set out how
these schemes would primarily meet the criteria of improving economic well-being while
also matching criteria around health and developing young volunteers. Furthermore, it was
a requirement of the funding application that proposed schemes would take place, at least
in part, in specific priority areas for Manchester City Council’s children and youth services.
In order to evidence the need for the proposed schemes I utilised Manchester City Council
statistics based upon the index of multiple deprivation, showing how the areas in which the
initiatives would take place suffered from high levels of deprivation in education, skills and
employment which would be addressed by the proposals. 78 These observations further
elucidate the issue raised in the previous section of this chapter about the important role
that the need for external funding plays in shaping the community initiatives carried out by
FC United. Here it can be seen that within a liberalised model of public sector provision, FC
United initiatives are shaped, both in terms of their form and where they take place, by the
priorities of local government which it must address in order to receive their funding.
Furthermore, in order to gain such funding it was necessary to demonstrate how the
schemes would act upon a council recognised ‘community of disadvantage’ by evidencing
that those who will be engaged by the scheme are experiencing quantifiable forms of
disadvantage.

Under the coalition government elected in 2010 the liberalisation of public sector provision
seems likely to increase further. Amongst the Conservative wing of the coalition
government a key philosophy underpinning their governance strategy is that of the ‘Big
Society’. One of the key elements of the ‘Big Society’ is the desire to see a shift from state
to social action and part of this involves a further expansion of the role of the private,
charity and third sectors within the public sector (Mycok and Tonge 2011: 1; Norman
2010). One of the flagship policies in this shift towards social action has been the setting up
of ‘free schools’, which are state schools run by not-for-profit groups. Everton in the
Community, the official charity of Everton Football Club, has become one of the first bodies
to set up a free school. 79 This represents a significant growth in the role of football in the
community schemes within the public sector. Whereas, football in the community schemes

78 Index of multiple deprivation is a government measure of deprivation based on seven indicators –
Education, health, employment, income, crime, living environment and housing.

have previously delivered public services on the margins of the welfare state, for example through drugs awareness work or alternative skills training, the setting up of free schools sees football clubs delivering one of the core functions of the welfare state. On the subject of whether FC United community activities should extent to the provision of mainstream schooling Robin Pye told me:

Should FC United set up a free school? I would argue no, FC United should not set up a free school but FC United should work very closely with a school and be much more embedded in a school than we currently are. I suppose if a group of people came and said we all live in Newton Heath and we want to set up our own school in Newton Heath, well how do we respond to that? There are other questions around free schools, such as every time someone sets up a free school what impact does that have on a school down the road, that’s another reason why we would want to support existing provision (Robin Pye, interview: 05/11/2010).

For those in charge of FC United’s community work this expansion of the potential role of football clubs, into the very heart of state provision, necessitates decisions about how far they wish for FC United’s community programme to be extended with regards to public sector provision.

Sam Dubal in his work has briefly touched upon FC United’s community programme, suggesting through the schemes ‘FC [United] directly addresses the local cultural and leisure voids that the neo-liberal state has left to private enterprise’ (2010: 137). What I have discussed in this section, and also the previous one, has shown a more complicated picture than FC United simply stepping into places from which the state has withdrawn, rather it highlights how the community schemes are shaped by an engagement with the neo-liberal state. In particular, public sector provision, particularly at local government level, since the Blair governments has been re-shaped by an acceptance of the neo-liberal principles of competition and de-regulation such that an increasing number of state services and public policy goals are delivered by non-state bodies and are subject to competitive tendering arrangements in which private, third sector and charity bodies bid for state money to run public services. FC United, through its football in the community schemes, engages and becomes part of these new modes of governance as it bids for state resources – both directly and in-directly – and in return for receiving such money the club becomes a deliverer of public policy goals. From this I would suggest an interesting paradox
emerges. In the last chapter I argued it was precisely an objection to the adoption of commercial practices by Manchester United in line with the wider neo-liberal free-market reality of English society that led FC United fans to vote for a manifesto which contained specific obligations to the ‘local community’. Here though it can be seen that the community football policies, one of the central ways in which these obligations are met, are made possible by, and are part of, the neo-liberal de-regulation of public provision which provides much of the finance through which these initiatives can be enacted and leads FC United to be a deliverer of public policy goals. This, of course, does not mean that FC United is straightforwardly a ‘neo-liberal’ organisation. Its structure and organisation, in which it is collectively organised and explicitly committed to goals (such as low ticket prices) opposed to profit and revenue maximisation, are informed by a critique of the commercial practices that have emerged at football clubs in the light of the neo-liberalisation of English football. Nonetheless, in order to fully understand FC United’s community football programme, it is important to appreciate how it is bound up with the neo-liberal de-regulatory changes in public sector provision.

In the next section I will look at FC United’s plans for a ground of their own and will look further at the relationship between FC United, its community programme and recent changes in public sector governance

The Move to Ten Acres Lane

As noted earlier in the chapter, in April 2010 proposals for FC United building their own ground in the Newton Heath area of Manchester were announced and these were to be supported, in part, by a grant from Manchester City Council. Much of the local newspaper coverage of the announcement of proposals for the new ground focussed in on FC United’s community work (See: North and East Manchester Advertiser (NEMA) 2010 and 2010a) with one report talking of how FC United had ‘a reputation of being a club with a strong community ethos’ (NEMA 2010a). Furthermore, both reports contained extensive

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80 In April 2011, following cuts to Manchester City Council’s budget, the council withdrew funding from the Ten Acres Lane site and instead offered funding for FC United to build a stadium in the Moston area of Manchester in a joint development with Moston Juniors football club. However, I will only discuss the move to Ten Acres Lane in this chapter because this change happened following the end of my fieldwork and because my analysis of the Ten Acres Lane build holds for the Moston build as well since the financial arrangements (including the level of council grant) are broadly the same for both stadium build plans.
quotes from Robin Pye and Andy Walsh respectively on the community work that could be delivered from the new stadium. Additionally, local politicians also focused upon the community work in their response to the stadium build announcements. For instance, councillor Mike Amesbury, the executive member for leisure in Manchester City Council, spoke of how ‘under these plans there will be a clubhouse for community use and the club’s extensive community outreach programme which is successful now will be even better if it is brought into the local community’ (NEMA 2010a). While Adam Brown in a fanzine piece recounted how Richard Lees, the head of Manchester City Council (MCC), ‘was very clear that the reason they were doing the deal was because of our community work and commitment to that’ (a fine lung: 2010). I have set out in this chapter how popular and political discourses around football have shifted over recent decades towards the game being seen as a source of societal good. This is further evidenced in the press and political response to FC United’s plans to move to Ten Acres Lane, which are framed not around potential for disorder and disruption but rather around the chance to expand FC United’s role as a provider of ‘community’ good. Furthermore, I have also set out previously in this chapter how FC United’s community programme involves initiatives that explicitly attempt to use football to tackle government recognised social problems and, indeed, have bid for local government resources to do this. These quotes from senior figures in Manchester City Council make clear that it was FC United’s community programme, which I described ethnographically earlier in this chapter taking place at heterogeneous locations across Greater Manchester and attempting to meet wider social policy objectives, which was crucial in creating the political will at local government level to commit to financially supporting the stadium build. The role that the community initiatives played in securing local government support for the stadium build was further evidenced to me by my fieldwork experiences just after the announcement of the new stadium plans. I attended two different community initiatives in Newton Heath on the 7th and 9th April 2010, during the school Easter holidays, in order to take photos and publish these along with a written story (authored by me) on the FC United website. The first event was a banner-making workshop at Newton Heath library. FC United were holding their annual ‘Youth United Day’ in mid-April, this was a day in which attendance to an FC United home match for all under-18s was free and various activities were also held for children around the ground. FC United were going to run buses from Newton Heath (amongst other locations) for the game and at this event around 20 children (aged between 6 and 10) attended in order to make a banner which they would display on the pitch before the game kicked-off.
The second event was held at a Newton Heath youth club and involved two FC United community coaches delivering a football activities day to about twenty boys and girls aged from seven to twelve years old. Two weeks later at an evening FC United match I spoke to Adam Brown about these two events and the reports I had written for the FC United website. Adam told me how in meetings with local council members these kinds of events were frequently mentioned and they were very enthusiastic about such community work (fieldnotes: 21/4/2013). Adam’s comments again show how for local council members it was FC United’s community work that was important in influencing their view of the club and their decision to commit to financially support the building of the ground.

However, to fully understand the political support for FC United ground it is important to look not just at the role of previous initiatives carried out by the club but also at how the stadium, and the community programme, was seen as holding the promise of helping regeneration in Newton Heath. The adoption of neo-liberal market-centred policies in the UK, particularly the withdrawal of direct government support for manufacturing, resulted in rapid de-industrialisation and severe social hardships and, in response, policy makers have looked for new modes of urban development and regeneration over the last twenty years (Brown et al 2004: 10; Coalter 2007: 135; Harvey 1989). One prominent response has been the promotion of culture and cultural industries as a means to achieve economic and social regeneration (Brown et al 2004: 10; Coalter 2007: 133; O’Connor and Wynne 1996). Brown et al (2004: 10) have pointed out that in the context of Manchester, sport has been used as one of the primary drivers for regeneration; in particular the staging of the Commonwealth Games and the subsequent move of Manchester City to the Commonwealth Games stadium formed the crux of a major regeneration project in East Manchester. The regeneration of East Manchester remains on-going and has been managed by New East Manchester Ltd, a government regeneration agency established in 1999. Newton Heath falls within the auspices of the regeneration project and the stadium build was supported by New East Manchester and Manchester City Council as a driver for regeneration in this area of East Manchester (MCC 2010, FC United 2010). Indeed the business and community use plans that FC United submitted to the council in order to agree a deal to build at Ten Acres Lane, and receive council funding for this, explicitly framed how the stadium could fit into the regeneration plan for the area. Thus the business plan set out how the scheme would deliver benefit to Manchester City Council by providing new investment, job creation and increased footfall and spending in the area, and that ‘the
development will mark the first major new investment in that area and can act as a catalyst for the regeneration’ (FC United 2010: 23). However the stadium was not only positioned as a catalyst for purely economic regeneration of the area in these documents but also as a catalyst for social regeneration. So, the Community Use plan (FC United 2010a) utilised indices of multiple deprivation to set out how Newton Heath was a ‘community of disadvantage’ not only in a purely economic sense but also in terms of poor health, low educational attainment, low levels of skills and high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. The plan suggested that FC United’s community programme could act, partially, counter these problems and in so doing could be ‘part of a broader regeneration strategy’ (FC United 2010a: 10). It can be seen here as a further example of football’s instrumentalisation - a football stadium build is the means for Manchester’s urban policy makers to bring about the economic regeneration of an area and, through the club’s community programme, work towards social regeneration. In addition, this account allows further understanding of how FC United’s community programme interacts with, and is part of, new de-regulatory forms of governance in which non-state bodies become the means of delivering public policy goals. Specifically, FC United, in the light of receiving council funding for a new ground, are expected to further utilise its community programme - particularly once the stadium was built - to meet public policy goals of social regeneration in the Newton Heath area. This is a point further evidenced by Andy Walsh’s comment to me in interview that the city council had told him that ‘they want us [FC United] to concentrate more and more of our effort [community programme] in the north and east of the city’ (interview: 3/12/2010). While at the point I was conducting research FC United drew upon external funding to carry out community initiatives across Manchester, indeed the funding applications for local government money I helped with in September 2010 (five months after the announcement of the proposal for the new ground) were not focussed only on North and East Manchester, Andy’s interview remarks indicate the long-term strategic expectation at council level was that, in return for financial support for the new ground, the club would focus on bidding for local government resources for community initiatives aimed at meeting public policy goals in the Newton Heath area.81 However, as I

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81 To be absolutely clear then, at the time I was conducting participant observation, the stadium build had yet to have an effect on the social practice of the community programme, which I have described ethnographically in this chapter, with the club bidding for resources to run initiatives across Manchester. The point, which Andy makes, is that in the future as the stadium build came to fruition the local council expects the club, in the light of the council’s stadium funding, to
have argued previously in this chapter, such an instrumentalisation of football for governmental ends is not only something driven by policy makers but also by those involved with the club’s community initiatives. All of those in charge of FC United’s community programme shared a sincere belief in the ability of these initiatives to tackle social problems in the areas surrounding the new ground. For example, Robin Pye speaking in the local press presented the stadium build as an opportunity to create social regeneration within the area, stating ‘we [are] very interested in running projects which tackle problems in areas, whether that is anti-social behaviour or kids which have left school with no qualifications, we’ll help them get their lives on track. We believe football can be used to be a solution to many problems and we are keen to do that. We want to concentrate our community work around the stadium as much as possible’ (NEMA 2010).
Conclusion

This chapter has explained a key aspect of FC United’s current form – the club’s community football programme. While the previous chapter focused on the processes that had motivated FC United fans to commit the club to being of benefit to the Manchester ‘community’, this chapter has revealed how an important feature of this commitment, the community football initiative, manifested itself in practice. In doing so I have highlighted an important further distinct element in how ‘community’ is expressed within the context of FC United – here as a particular governmental phenomenon. In particular, I have shown how FC United’s community programme is shaped by a wider political context and the specific motivations of those running the club’s schemes, both of which have instrumentalised football in the service of ‘governing through community’ (Rose 1999: 189). Further to this, I showed how this instrumentalisation of football led FC United to design schemes aimed at meeting particular government social policy objectives and to work with funding-agency recognised ‘social problem communities’. Crucially, though, I have highlighted how the need for external funding, which I showed ethnographically was central to the social practice of the club’s community programme, led FC United’s initiatives to engage with, and become part of, de-regulatory forms of (particularly local) governance instituted by the New Labour and, now, coalition governments. In particular, I highlighted a context in which UK public sector provision has been increasingly liberalised and opened-up to non-state bodies and FC United, whether directly or indirectly through chains of funding, has become part of these new modes of governance drawing on state money to deliver public policy goals. Further to this, I showed how through the club’s stadium build FC United, in return for local council support, was expected to utilise its community programme to meet local government policy agendas of bringing about social regeneration in the Newton Heath area. This chapter then adds important further understanding of the relationship between FC United and the wider political, economic and historical context in which it was formed. Over the last three chapters I have shown how Manchester United’s adoption of commercial practices, in the light of a ‘neo-liberal turn’ within football and wider society, led to many of the issues which motivated support for FC United and a negative reaction to these practices shaped much of FC United’s current form. However, this chapter has shown that equally such a ‘neo-liberal turn’ at the level of local governance has created opportunities for FC United. It has done so both in terms of providing funding for the club’s community initiatives, which I have shown in this chapter
are important to many fans identity as FC United supporters, and for the building of FC United’s own ground. This conclusion is important in relation to my later analysis in this thesis of the relationship between support for FC United and wider political ideas. In particular, in Chapter Seven I will look at how some supporters of FC United identify the club as explicitly socialist or ‘left-wing’. Importantly, this chapter’s analysis nuances this rhetoric by showing how the club, through its community initiatives, is also part of contemporary neo-liberalised de-regulatory modes of governance.

In the next chapter, I will return to one of the issues raised in Chapter Four by looking at how FC United supporters have imagined Manchester as a place and how this has impacted upon their support for the club.
Chapter Six: Imagining Manchester

Introduction

It is an oft-made claim within social science research that notions of ‘place’ and the ‘local’, rather than disappearing, have been reshaped and given heightened importance within the current epoch of neo-liberal globalisation.\(^{82}\) So, for example, Doreen Massey and Pat Jess reflect ‘the current age is one in which globalization is posing a serious challenge to the meaning of ‘place’’(1995: 1), while David Harvey has argued ‘the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication’ (1993: 4). Furthermore, Harvey (1993: 14-16) has argued that this increased desire to express place-bound identities, often as part of a desire to seek ‘authenticity’, has the potential to provide the basis for both progressive political mobilisation and reactionary exclusionary politics.\(^{83}\)

These debates have a particular salience for understanding FC United. It was the particular neo-liberal model of globalisation that English football is enmeshed within that created the conditions out of which FC United was born. De-regulated capital markets, allowing the ‘flexible accumulation’ that Harvey (1990, 1993) sees as an intrinsic feature of neo-liberal capitalism, made possible the transnational leveraged buy out of Manchester United by the Glazer family. Further to this, as discussed in Chapter Four, Manchester United’s ascent to becoming one of the world’s leading leisure brands was facilitated by the ‘space-time compression’ (Harvey 1990, 1993, 2005) of contemporary globalisation which allowed the club to target consumers throughout the world and led to feelings of exclusion amongst locally based supporters. Chapter Four also showed how issues of place and locality had become heightened within many fans’ consciousness as Manchester United became an

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\(^{82}\) Contemporary neo-liberal Globalisation is ‘unequal, uneven and disjointed’ (Massey and Jess, 1995: 1) in terms of its effects on different countries and peoples and in terms of these countries and peoples participation within the global economic system. Football provides a good illustration of this uneven, unequal and disjointed nature of contemporary globalisation where we see the flow of players, financial capital and fan attention across national boundaries from many different countries, at differential rates, into major European leagues, particularly the English and Spanish League. The opposite, for example the movement of English players to African countries, is not occurring. Neither are these movements occurring, for example, between African and South American countries.

\(^{83}\) See also: Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 13) for a similar argument.
increasingly large commercial concern within the new globalised and free-market economic model of English football and I showed how this had manifested in FC United’s explicit commitment to a localist agenda. This chapter then attempts to understand the politics of ‘place-bound’ and ‘local’ identities and the processes of ‘place-making’ within early 21st century globalised neo-liberal capitalism through the articulations of what it means to come from Manchester and to be a ‘Mancunian’ in the context of FC United. In doing so I make a contribution to an anthropology of place that goes beyond simply seeing place as the taken-for-granted locality in which anthropological research is conducted but rather looks at the way places are ‘made, imagined, contested and enforced’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 18). I now give an outline of how my argument will proceed within the chapter.

The chapter begins by looking at the way Mancunians have been imagined amongst FC United fans as possessing a certain ‘radical’ or ‘anti-establishment’ attitude and explores how this understanding is built on a particular framing of Manchester’s political and social history. I argue that this understanding of Manchester and Mancunianness has a performance element as it provides a guide for action when negotiating political decision making both within and outside of a footballing context. I then discuss how understandings of Manchester and being a Mancunian amongst FC United fans are conceptualised and enacted in relation to supporters of their biggest rivals, Liverpool FC and Manchester City, and assess what implications this has for the progressive political potential of FC United supporters’ ‘place-bound’ identity. Finally, I argue that this particular articulation of what it is to be a Mancunian and from Manchester is not the only possible ‘place-bound’ identity that may be expressed by people within Manchester and neither is it a fixed and stable understanding of place. Here I look at the way some dispute and call into question notions of Mancunians as ‘radical’ and ‘anti-establishment’ and in so doing reveal the open-ended and multiplicitous nature of place construction. Throughout my argument I draw on the work of David Harvey and Doreen Massey, to elucidate the wider theoretical implications of my ethnographic material for understanding processes of ‘place-making’ and ‘place-bound’ identities.

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84 For critiques of the idea of place as taken-for-granted locality see Rodman (2003), Gupta and Ferguson (1992) and Hastrup and Olwig’s (1997) edited collection.
Radical Manchester

I am an FC fan,
I am Mancunian,
I know what I want,
And I know how to get it
I wanna destroy Glazer and Sky,
Because I wanna be at FC.

FC United fan song – Tune: Anarchy in the UK by The Sex Pistols.

James Donald has argued ‘we do not just read the city, we negotiate the realities of cities by imagining ‘the city’. This suggests a broader lesson: that imagination precedes any distinction between fiction and truth, between illusion and reality.’ (1999: 18). This is a crucial point when we look to understand contemporary place-making within urban communities. Once we move beyond the level of primordial communities and face to face relations between all members of a given bounded community then imagination becomes a necessary feature of any claim of belonging to any particular community. As Benedict Anderson points out, communities and places cannot be distinguished ‘by their falsity/genuineness, but only by the style in which they are imagined’ (1983: 6). Therefore in the case of FC United supporters, the point is not to assess the truth or otherwise of the claims they make about Mancunianness and Manchester but to understand the processes through which they create a particular sense of Manchester and what it is to be Mancunian. The role of imagination in these processes, given the dispersed and amorphous nature of the FC United supporter community discussed in Chapter One, is particularly crucial. The circulation of texts, fanzines, internet forums, blogs and fan diaries play a particularly important role in place-making as will become clear throughout this chapter. One final point to consider with regard to the role of imagination within place construction is that place is produced through interrelations (Massey 1993: 66; 2005: 188). A particular imagination of what it is to be a Mancunian does not simply exist but rather is constantly and actively negotiated amongst FC United supporters through both the circulation of texts and face to face relations.

When I carried out my initial interviews with FC United supporters in the summer of 2009, I asked the following question ‘Why did you decide to support FC United?’ The replies I
expected to elicit were ones relating to the debt placed upon the club by the Glazer family, rising ticket prices and the economic exclusion of supporters and issues relating to declining atmosphere and match day enjoyment. While informants gave answers that conformed to this, two interviewees gave responses that surprised and intrigued me:

When I first heard the idea of FC United I thought it was a bit daft, people could go around creating loads of different alternatives to [Manchester] United. But then a friend started emailing me about FC [United] saying how it lay in the radical tradition of Mancunian protest and that really appealed to me and convinced me to go along to the first game at Leigh (Steven, interview: 13/8/2009).

It feels in the tradition of Mancunian protest to me, but that’s an emotional response isn’t it? But then what else is there? It’s all subjective. To me it ties into the sorts of things in this library. There’s that great quote, you’ve seen the quote which has been made into a T-shirt? Which was something about FC United fans, ah how does it go? It sort of that peculiarly Mancunain way of looking at the world … that goes ‘nah bollocks this is how we’ll do it’ and it’s a great quote and it does feel like it sits in that ‘nah bollocks’ tradition. Which is all around this library. I mean Mancunians like to feel they’re special … I think we’re rather proud of the stroppy side of what we see as being part of our city (Sarah, interview: 3/8/2009).

Sarah worked in a library for the memorialisation of working-class political and social movements in Manchester, particularly trade-union and socialist movements alongside other forms of radical agitation.\(^5\) The quote she refers to being made into a T-shirt comes from a Time Out magazine piece about FC United (written in 2005) which says ‘FC United nonetheless stands as living testament to that peculiarly Mancunian talent for gazing at the world in all its wonder, thinking for a minute, and then muttering: ‘Nah, that’s bollocks. This is how we’ll do it …’ (Thompson, 2006). When I began to read through the fanzines and other texts during my fieldwork I found other narratives of people’s initial experience of FC United which chimed with Steven’s and Sarah’s understanding of FC United lying within ‘the radical tradition of Mancunian protest’. For example, Mike Duff writing about FC United’s first game at Leigh, in Robert Brady’s fan diary of FC United’s first season, wrote:

\(^5\) The interview was conducted in the library.
An a look around me an a see this movement. This is about right an retainin wot is ours. It’s about not givin in to oppression. It’s about everythin Manchester’s about ... Today I’d recaptured a belief in my city, today I seen a spirit that a thought had long since gone. Manchester sayin ‘fuck it’ to the world (Duff 2006: 76-77).\textsuperscript{86}

This understanding of Manchester as having a ‘radical’ tradition and ‘spirit’ is built on a particular historicity of Manchester, one which sees Manchester’s history as being comprised of a series of anti-establishment movements which went against the grain of received political opinion in the nation at large – a ‘genealogy of dissidence’ as it is described in the Time Out article (Thompson 2006). As with any historicity it inevitably involves ‘imagination’ since practices of exclusion and inclusion of particular strands and events in history are necessary in order to make the historicity coherent and meaningful. For example, in response to the Manchester record producer Anthony ‘Tony’ Wilson describing FC United as a ‘bunch of moaning miserable bastards’ the editor of UTB responded: \textsuperscript{87}

Personally I hope he is playing devils advocate and deep down he knows that we are the latest manifestation of Mancunian radical thinking ... Joseph Wroe, John Johnson, John Baguley, Samuel Drummond, Peterloo, Archibal Prentice, Richard Cobden, The Free Trade Movement, Ernest Jones and The Chartists, The Outcasts FC, Sir Matt Busby, Factory Records ... I suspect you know what I mean Tony ... But if you don’t you really should read more ... (Wolfie, UTB: 2005).

Similarly an FC United fan quoted in a Guardian newspaper blog about FC United cites the place of particular radical social movements within Manchester’s history as the reason for his pride in FC United. ‘I love what we’ve built here, I’m really proud of it. I like to think it’s in the best Manchester tradition of protest, along the lines of the suffragettes and the Trades Union movement, which have their roots here’ (Conn 2007). This particular

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{86} Mike Duff is a poet and author who makes use of an idiosyncratic style of spelling and punctuation. The quote above is transcribed as it appears within the book.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Anthony Wilson was a news reporter for Granada television and head of Factory Records the leading record label in the ‘Madchester’ music scene of the late 1980s. His life formed the basis for the film ‘24 hour party people’ where he was played by Manchester born comic and actor Steve Coogan.
\end{itemize}
Historicity of Manchester has a particular history of its own within the group I carried out my research with. For example, following the defeat of Rupert Murdoch’s BSkyB’s attempted takeover of Manchester United in 1999, after extensive campaigning by fan groups (involving many people who would go on to be key figures in FC United), a writer in the Manchester United fanzine *UWS* said:

> And there’s no reason why the incredible tenacity and mobilisation of IMUSA’s members in the weeks prior to that glorious decision by the secretary for trade and industry can’t sit comfortably on the same page as those most famed institutions of Manchester’s radical past: Chartism, Trade Unionism, John Bright’s reformers, Richard Cobden’s anti-corn law league, Emeline Pankhursts suffragettes, C.P Scott’s Manchester Guardian and even the revolutionary influence of Friedrich Engles. IMUSA did it the Mancunian Way (Manky John, *UWS*: 1999).

What can be seen from these examples is how a similar set of historical events are repeatedly held up as explaining the ‘radical’ temperament which is seen as the defining characteristic of Manchester and Mancunians. Massey argues that places do not have a single coherent identity which everyone within such a place shares - ‘if it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places’ (1993: 65). It is important to realise that this notion of Manchester and Mancunians as ‘radical’ and having a ‘tradition of protest’ is not something shared by all, or even a majority, of those who lay claim to being from Manchester or being a Mancunian. Rather it is a place-bound identity constructed through social relations amongst a specific group, FC United/Manchester United supporters, at particular moments in time.

What is particularly interesting about the construction of place amongst FC United supporters is that it has effects, it provides a guide for political action and behaviour, and it necessitates performance. So, in 2005, when some FC United fans were faced with accusations of having ‘betrayed’ or ‘turned their backs’ on Manchester United (see: Brown 2008: 348) by setting up a new club in the wake of the Glazer takeover, the idea of Mancunians as ‘radical’ and of Manchester’s history being one of ‘protests’ provided both a

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88 For instance Camilla Lewis and Katherine Smith who both conducted ethnographic research in Manchester at a similar time to me did not come across these ideas during their fieldwork (Personal Communications: 2012).
guide for this action but also political justification in the face of these accusations. For example, ‘Two Mowers’ in Robert Brady’s fan diary describes how some fellow Manchester United fans saw him as a ‘traitor’ for following FC United he concludes by saying ‘I’m reassuring myself that I’m doing the right thing. Isn’t it what Mancunians do when faced with injustice and the choice to conform or rebel? We question and protest? Isn’t this the Mancunian way?’ (Two Mowers 2006: 86). Similarly in response to UWS fanzine printing an article attacking supporters of FC United for ‘betraying’ Manchester United a writer in UTB argued ‘What’s more important, sticking true to your long-held principles, uniting Reds and, in true Mancunian style saying ‘fuck you’ to those who seek to take away what’s ours or getting a page filled and selling a few fanzines?’ (Ogden-Street, UTB: 2008). Furthermore this understanding of Manchester and Mancunians as ‘radical protestors’ does not only carry effects for FC United fans within the sphere of football but also provides, for some, a model for political action outside of football. For example, the socialist FC United fanzine a fine lung ran an article on its blog about the impending government public spending cuts. Set against an image of FC United manager Karl Marginson holding a red, white and black-the colours of Manchester United and FC United - tricolour flag emblazoned with the legend ‘Openshawe Solid’ it concluded with the following statement:89

We hail from a city of rebellion, of people who stand up for what is right and refuse to be battered down by the people who make our laws without our consent.

Therefore it is apt that the most important TUC [Trade Union Congress] Congress of recent times has just taken place in the place where it was born. Manchester – we have a crucial part to play in the fight. Don’t lie down and die, we never have before. We’re built on strong foundations and our souls cannot be bought. Support the protests, the strikes and above all else, each other, and we’ll do alright (Midjmo, a fine lung: 2010).

David Harvey has argued that ‘to write of ‘the power of place’, as if places ... possess causal power is to engage in the grossest of fetishisms’ (1993: 21). I think he is right in this argument. What I am suggesting here is not that Manchester in and of itself carries political effects but rather people’s imaginings of Manchester, inter-subjectively created, open up

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89 Openshaw is an area in the east of Manchester.
models of action, both within and outside of football, which have political effects and at least hold out the possibility of radical political action and change.

It is worth noting that this intertwining of support for a football team, imagination of a particular place and the construction of a ‘place-bound’ identity is not unique to supporters of FC United. Gary Robson (2001) looks at the development of ‘Millwallism’ as a distinctive supporter identity amongst fans of Millwall football club in south-east London. He argues that folk taxonomies of south-east London often associate the area with a history of crime and plebeian entrepreneurialism and he argues contemporary accounts of the area are inevitably informed by these themes to ‘support an iconography of working-class gangsterish masculinism’ (2001:68-69). He goes on to argue ‘elaborations of Millwallism are invariably situated in these broader networks of understanding, sentiment and attribution’ (2001: 69). Therefore for Robson (2001), supporter articulations of south-east London as having a particular ‘tough’ and individualistic identity necessitates performance and carries effects in the kinds of dispositions and patterns of behaviour amongst Millwall supporters. However, much of Robson’s ethnography (2000) is caught between two competing ideas which I cannot share. Firstly that ‘Millwallism’ as a supporter culture drawing on a particular ‘place-bound’ identity is under-threat and may disappear due to the commercialisation of the game, and secondly, that Millwall fans are enacting a ‘fundamentally unchanged’ working class habitus (2000: 148). My ethnographic experience would seem to find something quite different amongst FC United fans, first the particular imaginations of Manchester amongst FC United fans provide a way to comprehend, justify and motivate their involvement in a collective action that looks to directly counter the intensifying commercialisation of the game in the current era. Second, as I have argued in this section, ‘place-bound’ identities do not simply exist, frozen in-time and space, they are always actively negotiated through inter-relations and therefore are never ‘unchanged’ but instead are constantly being re-imagined in the light of changing circumstances. I will return to this second idea in greater depth later in the chapter, but for now it is sufficient to point out that the danger with Robson’s view of ‘place-bound’ identities as unchanging is that it obviates any radical political potential they may have as ways to negotiate the changing contours of the political economy of football and wider society. To further explore the political potentiality of the processes of place construction and imaginings of Manchester discussed in this section I will now look at the way FC United fans relate these processes and imaginings to supporters of rival teams – Manchester City and Liverpool FC.
The ‘Scousers’ and the ‘Bitters’

East Manchester where we [Manchester United] were born, and Trafford park where [we] are are [sic] today, fired the industrial revolution. From the trainworkers who founded us, through the outcasts campaigning for [a] players’ organisation to Brian McClair campaigning for socialist ideals, ours is the history of a cosmopolitan city with its working class identifying itself and fighting back with dignity and honour. The TUC was born on Princess Street and gelled on the principles of knowledge is power and an injury to one (usually Robson) is an injury to all. It’s no coincidence that our red shirts are the colour of our industrial industries, the white shorts for the bandages and the black socks our gangrene and consumption of earlier, tougher years. city on the other hand wear Tory blue (Abbey Hey, UWS: 1994).

In Chapter Eight of this thesis I will discuss two competing understandings about what it is to be an FC United supporter amongst FC United fans. One is that it is important to move beyond football rivalry and that fans of all clubs should campaign together to change the way English football is run and governed and bring about supporter ownership at all clubs. Conversely, I discuss how many FC United fans hold the identity of still being Manchester United supporters as important, especially in a context where many have had their authenticity as Manchester United supporters called into question. One way this manifests itself is through expressions of rivalry with supporters of Manchester City and Liverpool FC (and, to a lesser extent, Leeds United). As I noted in the introduction, Harvey (1993: 14-16) has argued that territorial place-bound identities, such as FC United supporters’ elaboration of a particular Mancunian identity, have the potential to form the basis of both reactionary exclusionary politics and progressive political mobilisations. Furthermore Harvey has argued ‘the denigration of others’ places provides a way to assert the viability

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90 Scousers is a term commonly used to refer to someone from Liverpool and is often used by FC United/Manchester United supporters in reference to supporters of Liverpool FC as well as Liverpudlians in general. A ‘Bitter’ is a derogatory term for a Manchester City supporter amongst FC United/Manchester United supporters implying that they are jealous or ‘bitter’ about Manchester United’s success.

91 Brian McClair was a Manchester United player between 1987 and 1998.

92 Robson referred to here is Bryan Robson Manchester United’s best player of the 1980s who was noted for being highly susceptible to injury.
and incipient power of one’s own place’ (1993: 23). Given the contradictory impulses within FC United supporter culture I identified above, I will now look at how FC United supporters’ conceptions of Liverpool FC and Manchester City fans, their desire for supporter ownership at all clubs, and their ‘place-bound’ identity around being a Mancunian, enmesh. In doing this I will assess how Harvey’s (1993) arguments about the danger of ‘place-bound’ identities leading to reactionary exclusionary politics and the denigration of others’ places as a way to assert the viability of one’s own place apply to the particular situation I am discussing.

Manchester City fans provide a particularly interesting case in relation to FC United supporters’ imaginings of Manchester, both because the clubs they support share the same geographic location - ‘Manchester’ - but also because many Manchester City fans have shown a markedly different reaction to trans-national takeover of their club facilitated by the ‘flexible-accumulation’ of the contemporary capitalist era. The takeover of Manchester City first by the former Thai prime minister and billionaire businessmen Thaksin Shinawatra in 2007 and then the Abu Dhabi United Group (ADUG) led by Sheikh Mansour, a member of the ruling family in Abu Dhabi, in 2008 were greeted enthusiastically by most Manchester City fans (Millward 2011: 149-160) in stark contrast to FC United fans’ reaction to the takeover of Manchester United by the Glazer family.93 This difference in reaction is understood by some FC United fans through the notion of Manchester as a ‘radical’ city; a post on the FC United fan blog It’ll be off is particularly interesting with regards to this and worth quoting at length:

city have been bought not once, but twice. Firstly by Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai PM with an appalling human rights record (outlined here), and more recently by Sheikh Mansour. And what do the city fans do? Nowt. First of all they make a banner saying ‘We Support Thaksin’ and anyone who has read the link posted up there will know what a diabolical thing to say that is.94 And then, after Shinawatra

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93 In Chapter Eight I will look at how Manchester City fans’ positive reaction to the takeovers were shaped by the possibility of increased financial investment in the club and, therefore, the opportunity for success and to compete with Manchester United. However, in this chapter my focus is on how FC United fans utilised the idea of Manchester as a radical city to understand Manchester City fans’ positive reaction to the takeover.

94 Thaksin Shinawatra had been described by the NGO ‘Human Rights Watch’ as a ‘human rights abuser of the worst kind’ (as quoted in Millward 2011: 109-10).
sold up, they make a new banner, the appallingly snivelling ‘Manchester Thanks You Sheikh Mansour’, which they all sit under in keffiyeh made out of tea towels. city fans, it seems, are delighted their club is traded like a pannini sticker. They love it.

That isn’t right. That isn’t what Manchester was built on. There’s a long history of revolution and rebellion in Manchester; industrial, cultural, footballing. When the Glazers first visited Old Trafford, were they welcomed by half a dozen spazzy fans dressed in fake ginger beards and high waisted jeans? Were they fuck. They were barricaded in the ground, whilst angry protests made it clear to the world that these chancers, these carpetbaggers were unwelcome. There were marches, meetings, chants. There was a strong and staunch belief that Manchester United didn’t belong to any one person, but to the people of Manchester. You can’t buy and sell generations of history, tradition, and shared experiences. And to sit back and not only watch it happen, but wave in the likes of Glazer, Shinawatra and Mansour is a disgrace and an insult to Manchester and Mancunians everywhere …

So far from representing Manchester and Mancunians, city have been embarrassing them for over forty years now. The spirit of arrogance, soul, rebellion and revolution that helped form the city has long lived in the heart of Manchester United, and we at FC United are the logical conclusion to that (it’ll be off: 2009).

The author of the blog uses a similar imagining of Manchester to that I described earlier in the chapter, Manchester as having a ‘long history of revolution and rebellion’, as a way to assert superiority to Manchester City fans by virtue of the latter displaying non-Mancunian behaviour - ‘This isn’t right. This isn’t what Manchester was built on’ and ‘So far from representing Manchester and Mancunians, city have been embarrassing them for over forty years now’. A similar point was made to me by another FC United supporter, Mike, when discussing Sheikh Mansour’s takeover of Manchester City: ‘I find Manchester City’s fan culture really schizophrenic, one minute they’re crawling up to the sheikh and the next they are celebrating themselves as a Mancunian people’s club’ (fieldnotes: 11/5/2010).

Mike interprets Manchester City fans’ behaviour, of accepting gladly the takeover of their club, as being at odds with any claim to Mancunianness. Two related points emerge from this, firstly it reaffirms my earlier point about a ‘place-bound’ identity amongst FC United supporters being about particular types of behaviour and actions, secondly, it shows that
while a ‘place-bound’ identity is related to a geographic territorial entity it is not reducible to one – Manchester City fans are seen as non-Mancunian by FC United fans here not because they are thought of as not being from Manchester but rather because their behaviour and ways of being are perceived as at odds with what it is to be a Mancunian.95 This point can usefully be elaborated in relation to the argument Anthony King made about the role of place amongst the Manchester United fans he studied which I discussed in Chapter Three. King suggested ‘the locale refers not primarily to birth or residence within Manchester, though they are certainly not unimportant, but rather to the adoption of the central forms of practice of this group such as the wearing of designer clothing which are seen as properly Mancunian’ (2003: 201). Amongst FC United supporters, a less overtly masculine grouping than the supporters King worked with, one of the central forms of practice which marks a legitimate Mancunian is not the wearing of designer clothing but rather the adoption and appreciation of particular ‘radical’ or ‘anti-establishment’ ways of being and the perceived failure of Manchester City fans to adopt this mode of practice leads them to be denigrated as not proper Mancunians. Furthermore, the focus on particular ways of being and forms of practice, rather than strictly birth or residence, within the imagination of what it means to be a Mancunian allows a fan such as Mike, who was born and raised in the south-east of England, to take part in the process of constructing this particular ‘place-bound’ identity.

The above description of the denigration of Manchester City fans for their perceived failure to act in ways considered appropriate to Mancunians could be read as adding credence to Harvey’s ideas of the danger of ‘place-bound’ identities leading to exclusionary politics. However, it is necessary to appreciate the complexity of FC United supporters’ imaginings of the relationship between Mancunianness, Manchester City fans and supporter politics before reaching this conclusion. Andy Walsh, who as I will describe in Chapter Eight has been one of the foremost advocates of the setting aside of supporter rivalry to jointly campaign for supporter ownership, speaking on a podcast with Andy Mitten (editor of UWS), specifically referred to the idea of FC United lying in the Mancunian tradition of protest:

95 This in a context where over the last two decades, as Manchester United has become a global leisure brand, there has been an increasingly intense cultural battle between supporters of Manchester’s two clubs over whether each of the respective clubs support ‘comes from Manchester’ – as discussed in Chapter Four.
We’re giving people the opportunity to watch football with fellow [Manchester] United fans, but actually do something to change the way the game is going, actually be active about something, not just sitting in the pub griping and complaining about the way things are, actually get out there off their backsides and fighting for change, and that’s the tradition of Manchester, we don’t sit around and wait for people to do things for us, we get up and do it for ourselves (UWS Podcast: 2010).

However when I asked Andy in an interview about why Manchester City fans had reacted in such a different way to Manchester United fans to their clubs’ respective takeovers he responded as follows ‘I think there was a more serious approach at [Manchester] United than there was at [Manchester] City otherwise you would turn round and say it’s a Manchester thing but why has it happened at [Manchester] United and not [Manchester] City, well because the debate and the discussion wasn’t there’ (interview, 3/12/2010). Andy, while on the one hand he understands his Mancunianness through a similar set of ideas to the writer of the It’ll be Off blog above, still holds out the possibility of Manchester City fans bringing about political change if ‘the debate and the discussion’ were to take place to the same level as they have amongst Manchester United fans. Another FC United fan writing in UTB put forward a similar, but slightly different, argument in relation to Manchester City fans acting to bring about supporter ownership ‘Maybe if it’s true, as many have suggested, that it was in the finest traditions of Manchester that [Manchester] United fans took this stand against exploitation and greed, then the spirit of Peterloo will eventually bring us a real supporter owned Manchester derby’ (Anon, UTB: 2007). For the writer of this piece, in diametric opposition to the It’ll be Off blog writer, it is precisely because Manchester City fans share the same place and history of place that they may be able to bring about political change within their own club. It seems to me that it is necessary to go beyond a dichotomy between ‘place-bound’ identities either leading to progressive political mobilisation or reactionary exclusionary politics. I would suggest from my research that they can do both simultaneously. It is precisely because understandings of place are always inter-subjective, under-construction and multiplicitous that different FC United fans can utilise a fundamentally similar imagination of what it is to be a Mancunian and put it to effect with differing political consequences. There is not a singular pre-given way in which FC United fans will relate their imagination of Manchester to Manchester City fans, rather it is continuously carved out in relation to other FC United fans’ views. To
expand upon this further I now look at how FC United fans have imagined Liverpool, Liverpudlians and fans of Liverpool FC.

Amongst FC United fans there are conflicting views as to whether Liverpudlians and Liverpool FC supporters share a similar history of place and sense of place to Mancunians and how Liverpudlians’ sense of place affects the forms of political action they take within football. For example, Sarah, who I quoted earlier discussing the ‘tradition of Mancunian protest’, sees Liverpudlians as having a very different sense of place and history of place to Mancunians:

It feels different. I mean I am very anti-scouse so I’ll try not to be, the way Liverpudlians define themselves seems different, it doesn’t seem like a positive ‘right lets sort this out’ kind of thing. Whereas Mancunian groups do seem to just have that dynamic, that goes “right we’re not going to stand for this”. I mean going back to the slave trade, Liverpool built on the slave trade, Manchester very strong anti-slavery tradition – it just feels different (Sarah, interview: 3/8/2009).

Sarah relates her own sense of place as a Mancunian in opposition to her imagination of Liverpudlians by contrasting respective historicities of the two cities. Her argument also implies that (imagined) differences in modes of behaviour - ‘it doesn’t seem like a positive ‘right lets sort this out’ kind of thing, whereas Mancunian groups does seem to just have that dynamic’ – both in history, Liverpudlians not taking an anti-slavery stand, and in the present, Mancunians forming FC United, can be explained by the two cities’ citizens respective senses of place. However, while Sarah sees Liverpool and Manchester as having very different senses of place and histories of place, others see a similarity between Mancunians and Liverpudlians in this regard. For example, ‘Duns’ in a fine lung fanzine argued the following:

A city built on immigrant labour can never become insular and a city enlightened by revolutionary thought could never kow-tow to a received establishment. It will inevitably espouse an ideology based on brotherhood, inclusiveness, equality and progress. These are things we all believe in and things that I can see writ large in this city. Manchester, along with Liverpool, remains one of the last bastions of what true socialism was always about and not the plastic version invented by Blair and his acolytes (Duns, a fine lung: 2010).
For ‘Duns’, unlike Sarah, Manchester and Liverpool share a fundamentally similar ‘radical’ sense of place – ‘last bastions of what true socialism was’ – built upon what the author sees as a shared history of immigrant labour and revolutionary politics. Much as with my discussion of Mike earlier in the chapter, it can be seen here how the process of imagining what it is to be a Mancunian is not restricted to those born within Manchester – ‘Duns’ is an FC United fan from Ireland. Furthermore, in tying his imagination of Manchester to a conception of the city as a site of immigration (an idea also discussed in chapter four), Mancunianness becomes a ‘place-bound’ identity that could never be reduced to birthplace alone.

The differing understandings of Liverpudlians’ sense of place, as exemplified above by Sarah and ‘Duns’, can be seen in the way that FC United supporters relate to the possibility of Liverpool FC supporters taking political action to change the way football is run and governed. Many Liverpool FC supporters spent the first half of 2010 campaigning vociferously against the ownership of their club by the American businessmen Tom Hicks and George Gillett (Millward 2011: 134-139). They had purchased the club in a leveraged buy-out in 2007, a takeover which had been broadly welcomed by Liverpool FC fans at the time (Millward 2011: 119-122). For some FC United fans the acquiescence to the initial takeover was proof of the falsity of any claim for Liverpool being a radical city – ‘Scousers claim to be from the last true working class city but when Hicks and Gillett took over there was no protest’ (Dean, fieldnotes: 14/10/2010). For Dean, protest is intrinsically related to class, to be working class is to protest, so for him Liverpudlians’ claim to being from a ‘working class’ city is undermined by the lack of political action during the takeover of their club. However for other FC United fans it is a shared sense of place and history of place which holds out the possibility of Liverpool FC fans taking political action to change the way in which football is run:

I think in lots of ways Liverpool [FC] fan culture has some similarities with [Manchester] United in a way which is different to Man City, part of which is the politicising, part of which is probably linked to working class histories and movements and all that kind of thing (Adam Brown, interview 10/11/2010).

We [Mancunians] shouldn’t get too parochial about our socialist history though, as it wouldn’t surprise me if that other northwest city [Liverpool] whose people have
a proud history of standing up for their rights, produced the next team of red rebels, but when that might be is anyone’s guess (Anon, UTB: 2007).

Both of these FC United fans contend that it is Liverpudlians’ ‘place-bound’ identity and history of place that may allow them to take political action within football. From this discussion emerges more evidence of the argument I made about FC United fans’ imaginings of Mancunianess and how they relate it to Manchester City fans. There is no single coherent way in which FC United fans imagine Liverpool and Liverpudlians and how they relate these imaginings to football politics. Rather, they put to use a similar conceptual framework – ideas of protest, socialist thought and working-class history – to dispute and debate what it means to be a Liverpudlian and how this relates to the possibility of political action amongst fans of Liverpool FC.

Not so Radical Manchester?

I have argued in this chapter that notions of place are never fixed and are always open to change. As Massey has argued place should be understood ‘as open … as woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, as in process, as unfinished business’ (2005: 131). Part of those ‘ongoing stories’ and ‘processes’ of place amongst FC United fans involves those who challenge notions of Manchester and Mancunians as ‘radical protestors’. An article in Red Issue fanzine which appeared in 2010 begins by sketching out a similar historicity of Manchester to that which many FC United fans utilise in their imaginings of Manchester.

Manchester’s is a reputation built on many different aspects of its past, from the industrial revolution to the birth of the computer; from the political radicalism of the chartists to the suffragettes and events at Peterloo; it includes the birth of the Trade Union and Co-Op movement … When the perceived contrariness, independence and propensity for violence of so many of the city’s inhabitants are factored in you begin to understand why Manchester has come to be viewed as it is by outsiders. But in 2010 is that reputation really deserved?

In answering the question rhetorically posed at the end of the above quote the writer concludes:
Politically the last government saw the modern Mancunian public as so pliant and malleable that its ID card pilot scheme was launched here, with good citizens encouraged to sign and pay up to save themselves a few quid as and when. The wankers. Long gone are the days of self sacrifice and solidarity that saw Mancunian mill workers refuse to trade in American cotton produced on the back of the slave trade....Working together and suffering short-term hardship to ensure universal long-term benefit and the defeat of a trans-Atlantic foe, there’s a lesson in there somewhere (Anon, Red Issue: 2010).

What is particularly interesting is the way the writer uses the exact same historical issue, Mancunian mill workers opposing slavery, which Sarah used as proof of Manchester having a ‘radical’ sense of place to argue that Manchester is now a place of de-politicised compliance. The final line of the quote is a sarcastic riposte to those Manchester United fans who did not boycott (‘working together and suffering short-term hardship’) Old Trafford in order to bring about the removal of the Glazer family (the ‘trans-Atlantic foe’). It is this failure of action that the author takes as symptomatic of contemporary Mancunianness. A similar argument was put forward by an FC United supporter on the fan forum in relation to the Time Out magazine quote I cited earlier:

The quote from a few years ago ("but FC United nonetheless stands as living testament to that peculiarly Mancunian talent for gazing at the world in all its wonder, thinking for a minute, and then muttering: ‘Nah, that’s bollocks. This is how we’ll do it ...‘") at least had some boldness to it which might sound good on a T-shirt, even if it was smugly self-congratulating and self-deluding as a description of a city whose historic political vanguardism has paled today to little more than an aggressive "fuck you" bolshiness (FC excepted) (Commented articulated: 1/12/2010).

Much like the author above, the fan quoted here sees any history of protest (‘historic political vanguardism’) as having dissipated amongst modern Mancunians. FC United is interpreted by this fan as not so much lying in the ‘tradition of Mancunian protest’ but as its last outpost. Both these accounts offer very different imaginations and constructions of Manchester and Mancunians to those that I have discussed in the rest of this chapter. What is particularly interesting is the way in which both authors here frame their construction of Manchester in relation to the dominant historicity and imaginations of
Manchester within the group. It reveals, again, the inter-relational nature of place construction – these supporters directly relate their imaginings of Manchester to how other supporters construct Manchester and Mancunianness in order to reject these constructions and ‘re-imagine’ Manchester. This inter-relational aspect can be understood as part of the ‘process’ of place and the reason why a sense of place is always open-ended, if we make our understandings of place in relation to others’ understandings, it offers up the potential of change in the way we imagine any given place in response to others’ imaginings and as such place remains, to borrow Massey’s apt phrase, ‘unfinished business’ (2005: 131).

Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on an important element of FC United, which is how Manchester is imagined and mobilised by FC United supporters as part of their ongoing collective action. I have highlighted that a particular imagination of Manchester as a radical city, in a similar way to issues of high ticket prices at Old Trafford or the feeling that Manchester United ignores its ‘local community’ discussed in Chapters Three and Four, provided supporters with a further motivation and justification for their support of FC United. Further to this, I showed that the belief that FC United was a particular manifestation of this radical Mancunian tradition was a significant feature of many fans’ relationship to the club. Through this chapter I have also made a series of claims about the nature of place and ‘place based’ identities, based on my research with FC United fans. I have suggested that understandings and imaginations of place necessitate performance, they not only provide a way of understanding action taken but also provide a model for action. In the case of FC United fans their understanding of Manchester as a radical city was a model and motivation both for collective action within football and also, for some, outside of the game. Place, then, emerges (in line with arguments made in Chapters Three and Four) amongst FC United fans not as self-evident location, represented by the football club and for which, through support for the club, fans feel increased attachment, but rather as a set of ideas about appropriate action and ways of being in the world mobilised by fans, including those who are not born and raised in Manchester. Further to this, I have argued that understandings of place are always multiple and inter-relational – that FC United fans’ understandings of Mancunianness and how they relate this to political action are not fixed and given but always worked out in relation to others imaginings, in a state of ‘process’ and subject to challenge. Such points are consistent with Gupta and Ferguson’s argument on
the need for anthropologists to focus on how places are ‘made, imagined, contested and enforced’ (1992: 18). Finally I argued in this chapter that understandings of place amongst FC United fans are built around particular historicity of Manchester and I would like to conclude by offering some thoughts about the role of history in place-based collective action under contemporary neo-liberal capitalism. David Harvey has argued ‘the assertion of any place-bound identity has to rest at some point on the motivational power of tradition. It is difficult, however, to maintain any sense of historical continuity in the face of all the flux and ephemerality of flexible accumulation’ (1990: 303). This argument seems to fly in the face of all that I have discussed in the chapter, for many FC United fans it is precisely the sense of historical continuity that is the means through which they contest what they perceive to be the egregious consequences of ‘flexible accumulation’. I would suggest that Harvey’s argument is based around precisely the kind of static reading of ‘place-bound’ identities I wish to reject, as Massey has argued ‘traditions do not only exist in the past. They are actively built in the present also’ (1995: 184). Traditions and understandings of the past are always in a state of becoming and it is the active, always in process, inter-subjective, multiple nature of FC United fans’ imaginations of both the past and present of Manchester and being Mancunian which opens up the space of political action.

In the next two chapters of the thesis I look more closely at the ‘politics’ of FC United and in doing so pick up on some of the themes that have been touched upon within this chapter. In this chapter I have discussed examples both of how the imagination of Manchester as a radical city has been conceptualised in terms of the city having an explicitly ‘socialist’ past and of where this radicalism has been couched in more general terms such as ‘Manchester sayin ‘fuck it’ to the world’(Duff 2006: 76-77) . In Chapter Seven I look in-depth at the extent to which FC United fans relate support of the club to wider political ideologies. In particular, I discuss a division between those fans who see the club as having an explicitly socialist politics and those fans who see the club’s politics as restricted to the sphere of football. I also looked in this chapter at how the imagination of Manchester as a radical city amongst FC United fans provides a way for them to both work out the possibility of supporters of Manchester City or Liverpool FC taking political action to bring about supporter ownership and to express notions of club rivalry. In Chapter Eight I build upon this by looking at the possibility of joint campaigning amongst fans of different clubs to change the system of club governance and ownership within England.
Chapter Seven: The Politics of Football Activism: The Contested Political Meaning of FC United

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis I discussed how a view of sport, and particularly football, amongst some social theorists is that it is an activity which helps to maintain the wage-labour and capitalist system by producing a false consciousness amongst the working class which acts to de-politicise them and ensure their acceptance of the status-quo. I suggested that such a view of the political potential of football had largely been assumed a-priori, without recourse to primary evidence. Interestingly, during my fieldwork Doreen Massey, in a comment piece in The Guardian, made a mirror opposite argument to those socialist theorists about the relationship between football fandom, politicisation and the bringing about of political change. Her article was focussed upon the campaign by Liverpool FC supporters to remove Tom Hicks and George Gillett as owners of the club and it was written in response to another article in The Guardian by Martin Kettle (2010) which argued that the ownership of football clubs, and Liverpool FC in particular, was of no wider social importance and that football needed to be put into perspective as ‘just a game’. Massey suggests Kettle is mistaken in this view and that the ownership of football clubs is an important issue because it pertains to the ‘neoliberalism and financialisation’ of the economic system which Massey sees as a crucial political issue. Furthermore, Massey claims that in facing up to and challenging the model of club ownership football fans become politicised to the general issues at stake ‘it is through such specifics that people encounter, and learn to address, the more general political issues. If we are to build opposition to this society in which everything is for sale and everything has a price, then it has to start at ground level, from the myriad concrete ways in which people are affected. The ownership of our football clubs is one of them’ (2010). Massey sees football fandom as a potentially conscious raising activity and in raising political consciousness fandom creates the conditions in which people may challenge the totality of the current capitalist system ‘the arguments learned here could be carried into a wider movement against a form of economy in which nothing has value, everything has a price, and all that matters is short-term gain’ (2010). While Massey holds a very different understanding of the political potentiality of football to those theorists discussed in the introduction to this thesis, much
like them Massey makes her argument without utilising any empirical evidence. My aim in this chapter is to explore FC United fans’ self-understandings of the wider political value of their support for a club set up in response to the current model of football club ownership, and the extent to which support of the club is linked to a wider critical awareness of the contemporary economic and political system and an attempt to change that system. Through exploring FC United fans’ own understandings of the club’s political value I go beyond those a-priori arguments and unpack ethnographically the relationship between football and wider politics.

As I discussed in the thesis introduction, Sam Dubal in his comparative article on Corinthians football club and FC United addressed the relationship between these fans’ wider political views and their views on the governance of football. Dubal constructs a similar argument to Massey on the potential for football fandom to lead to a wider critical awareness of the neoliberal political system at large. With regards to Corinthians’ supporters, Dubal (2010: 129-133) describes how the club has been transformed into a for-profit corporation and fans are faced with rising ticket prices and a wider commercialisation of the club and he interviews members of a fan organisation, ‘Gavioes da Fiel’, who are involved in resisting such changes. Dubal argues that ‘while a Marxist analysis might approach sport as a capitalist tool, a form of superstructure distracting fans from realizing their class relations, the reality seems quite different for many fans. Through their education as citizens of the Corinthians Nation, fans gain political awareness of neoliberalism’ (2010: 133). Dubal’s claim is that support for Corinthians acts to create a wider political consciousness of the negative impacts of neoliberalism. He suggests such a relationship between football fandom and political awareness could also be observed amongst FC United fans: ‘Like Corinthians fans, many FC [United] fans’ understanding of neoliberal politics is informed by the neoliberalisation of football, and vice versa’ (2010: 137). In support of his argument Dubal cites three informants who made a connection between the situation at Manchester United and wider political issues associated with neoliberalism. While Dubal’s article is admirable in its use of comparative ethnography to start to unpack the possible relationships between football fandom and wider political engagement, I show through this chapter that the relationship between football fandom and wider politics is more complex amongst FC United fans than his relatively thin ethnography allows.
In this chapter, I highlight a range of views held by FC United fans on the relationship between the club and wider political issues. To do this I begin by discussing how many people formerly involved in radical leftist politics are now involved with FC United. The chapter then discusses how some fans understand FC United as reflecting ‘socialist’ values and therefore see FC United as demonstrating a larger point about how things should be owned and run in wider society. Furthermore, I show how many of these fans were critical of those fans who they perceived as seeing FC United as ‘non-political’. However I contend that this ‘mis-represents’, to some extent, the view of other FC United fans on the relationship between the club and politics. I suggest that other fans disputed the nature of FC United’s political values, believing it was restricted to a political impact within football, rather than believing the club was non-political per se. Further to this, I argue that even fans who came from a background in socialist campaigning did not all share a common view of the political value of the club and the extent to which the club demonstrated a wider political message. Finally, the chapter shows that while some FC United fans see FC United as carrying an explicitly ‘socialist’ value, a rival interpretation that emerged during my fieldwork was of FC United as fitting in with the ‘Big Society’ rhetoric of the present British government.

From Socialist Activism to Football Activism

When I began my research in summer 2009, I looked to make contact with and carry out interviews with FC United fans. One of the first supporters I contacted and interviewed was Neal who I came across through a listing of FC United as an interest on his personal website. I met Neal at his house, and before the interview began he told me how he was ‘not really’ an FC United fan. At the time, this remark sent me into a state of unease given the purpose of the interview for me was to talk to an FC United fan. When the interview began I asked Neal how he’d come to be involved with FC United and he told me ‘I have known Andy Walsh a long time … now I am not a Manchester United supporter … but I supported Andy’s work, which is of a political nature, which is trying to get justice for the fans and respect for the fans’ (interview: 25/7/2009). Neal had known Andy Walsh as both had been members of Militant Tendency, a Trotskyist socialist group which had adopted an entryist strategy into the British Labour Party between the 1960s and 1980s.  

96 Entryism is a political tactic whereby members of one political organisation join another with the aim of enacting their political programme through that political organisation.
drawn on Neal’s political expertise during both his earlier fan campaigning against the Murdoch takeover of Manchester United and then the anti-Glazer campaign and the setting up of FC United. Later in the interview Neal told me how there was a common trajectory from leftist campaigning into football activism:

Another thing that has happened is because of the bankruptcy of the Labour Party and the current failure of the Left in politics for the last 10-15 years is some of the radical element have undoubtedly found a home in football, in terms of wanting to have a say. So [word unclear] being diverted into there and I notice quite a few ex-socialist activists at FC United and you’ll find them at a lot of the different clubs. The head of the European fans’ congress is an ex-militant full timer. There’s a lot of the Left involved in this politics because it has a democratic element, it has an inclusive element and if you’re a football fan – and just because you are a Marxist doesn’t mean you aren’t a football fan, you don’t have a club you support – people get drawn in to it. One of the reflections across Europe, across Britain, has been this push, it’s added to this push for more fan control (Neal, interview: 24/7/2009).

So Neal sets out how at FC United there are ‘quite a few ex-socialist activists’ and he attributes this to the rightward drift of the British Labour party which has squeezed out much of the ‘radical element’ from mainstream political activism. Interestingly, Michael Crick in his book on Militant notes ‘many who eventually leave the tendency are burned out and never again become involved in politics’ (1986: 3).97 If we extrapolate this to a wider claim, that those that leave leftist organisations tend to also leave political activity, the involvement of former socialist activists at FC United suggests rather than ex-leftist activists leaving politics all together there has been a move by some into new forms of political and social movements which aim towards bringing about change in specific niches within society, such as football.98 Certainly, while I was doing my research I met several FC

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97 Michael Crick, whose book on Militant was essentially an expose of the inner workings of the secretive organisation, is also a Manchester United fan and, as discussed in chapter two, worked closely with Andy Walsh in the campaign to prevent the BSkyB takeover of Manchester United.

98 Chris Harman’s (1998: 343) work supports the idea that such a movement out of radical socialist organisations into new social movements has occurred on a wider scale. He suggests, from his position as a long-term activist in the Socialist Workers Party, that from the mid-1970s there was a drift of activists away from revolutionary socialist groups into new social movements such as the feminist, gay rights, anti-nuclear and ecology movements.
United fans who had been involved with radical socialist organisations. For instance, another informant, Nick, had also been a member of Militant Tendency during the 1980s where he had met both Andy Walsh and Neal – indeed Nick, like Neal, suggested it was a personal relationship with Andy that was part of the reason for his involvement with FC United. Another informant, Dean, had been an activist in the Socialist Workers Party during the 1990s. A further informant, Paul, while noting that he himself was ‘not really committed to politics’ told me that there were ‘lots of leftists’ amongst FC United’s support (fieldnotes: 31/10/2009). Indeed the presence of a significant number of leftists is reflected in the broader fan culture at FC United, for instance the fanzine and fan blog site *a fine lung*, as noted in Chapter One, positions itself as an explicitly socialist fanzine. This presence of a significant number of former socialist activists amongst FC United supporters is not only explained by the rightward drift of the Labour Party but may also be explained by the internal characteristics of far-left organisations:

I’m a socialist and I’ve been a socialist all my life. I’ve been campaigning for social change since I was 15 years of age but I respect other people’s point of view and I’ve always [done so] in all of my campaigning whether it be as a trade unionist or political – I’m not involved in any political organisation at the moment and I’ve not been for a number of years because I get fed up of the infighting and sectarianism that you see within political organisations either between political organisations or even internally. So I’ve spent all the time I’ve been working in campaigning amongst football supporters, I’ve spent all my time building consensus and finding common ground with people. Whether that has been common ground within my own football club, so bringing the fanzines together and bringing IMUSA and Shareholders United together or whether it’s between other clubs and establishing networks of independent supporters groups or the Football Supporters Association ... I believe you can achieve far more by bringing people together than you can by seeking disagreement (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010).

Andy Walsh had ceased involvement in formal leftist organisations, while still considering himself a ‘socialist’, due to their ‘infighting and sectarianism’ which has led him to channel his political energies into football campaigning where he looks to build ‘common ground’ between football supporters. Further to this, Dean (fieldnotes: 25/11/2010) suggested to me that an additional reason for the prominence of former socialist activists within FC
United was due to the campaigning and organisational skills within a sometimes hostile environment that were gleaned from involvement in these organisations. This point was further expanded by a fanzine commentator:

> It should be no surprise to any of us that there are people involved in the setting up of our club who have a history of political activism to put it mildly. It stands to reason that the sort of people with the balls to stand up for what they believe in, put in all the work involved in setting up the club and be the public target of a lot of mither would be people who hadn't spent their previous lives as shrinking violets (Felonious Manc, UTB: 2010).

Both Rex Nash (2001: 51) and Anthony King (2003: 174) in their respective works on Independent Supporters Associations in the 1990s have also noted the presence of former and current left activists within the leadership of these organisations. I would suggest at FC United the involvement of former and current leftist activists is not confined to the leadership but rather is present amongst the broader membership, such as Dean and Nick. Furthermore neither King nor Nash offered an explanation for the presence of former leftist activists within football activism, which I have attempted in this section in terms of the rightward drift of the British Labour Party, the internal characteristics of Leftist organisations and the political skills learned from involvement in conventional leftist activism. Having highlighted here the presence of a significant number of current or former leftist activists at FC United, in the next section I wish to explore how some of FC United’s support who hold leftist political views argue that FC United can be understood as an explicitly socialist or left wing organisation.

**FC United: A Socialist Football Club?**

When interviewing Adam Brown at the end of my fieldwork I asked him ‘Do you see FC demonstrating a political point that goes beyond football?’ His reply to this question was revealing:

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99 Interestingly, Rogan Taylor (1991: 116) has suggested that one reason why a popular supporters’ movement did not emerge pre-world war two was that those supporters with sufficient organisational skills to lead such a movement were engaged instead in conventional political and trade union activism.
Yeah, lots of FC [United] fans would disagree with me, but I certainly think that. In some ways you think if none of this has any resonance beyond football, it’s like so what, football can organise itself how it wants but I think to some extent it’s a mirror to things going on elsewhere and in that sense you can change that image a bit by changing things in football. I think FC United is set up on fairly clear socialist principles which are about common ownership, democratic structures, objectives that are around community benefit – it’s fairly Clause Four. Having said that there are lots, lots of FC [United] fans and board members who would run a mile at the description of the club as socialist (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

Here Adam raises three key points for my discussion. Firstly he suggests, in line with Massey’s earlier argument, that the issues that led to the formation of FC United have a wider resonance, ‘a mirror to things going on elsewhere’, and that in bringing about change within football you can bring about wider political change. Secondly, he then suggests that FC United is a ‘socialist’ organisation due to its collective democratic model of ownership and communitarian objectives. Finally, Adam also suggests that some other supporters, and board members, would ‘run a mile’ from his description of FC United as ‘socialist’ and as having a political point that went beyond football. The description of FC United as ‘fairly Clause Four’ is particularly interesting. Clause Four was a part of the Labour Party constitution which committed the party to attempting to achieve collective ownership of the means of production. However, in 1995, under the leadership of Tony Blair, this section of the constitution was replaced, an act that was seen as highly symbolic of the party’s rightward drift, with a statement that no longer committed the party to achieving common ownership.100 It is pertinent, in the light of my earlier observation about the movement of socialist activists into football activism due to the movement rightwards of the Labour Party, that Adam would choose to associate his understanding of FC United as ‘socialist’ with precisely the vision of socialism that was cast aside in this rightwards shift. Adam is

100 The original clause four read: ‘To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service’ and was replaced with a statement that read: ‘The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.’
not alone in his understanding of FC United as a left-wing organisation. For instance one commentator in an anonymous opinion piece in the club match-day programme reflected ‘The nature of the anti-capitalist, all-inclusive and community friendly orientation of FC United means that we are undoubtedly a left-leaning organisation and I think we should be proud of that in a country that is in danger of vying to the dangerous, selfish right in many quarters’ (Anon, FC United Programme: 2010). While a poster on the a fine lung blog, reflecting upon other FC United fans who they suggested saw FC United as ‘non-political’, argued ‘FC United is political and by its founding principles, manifesto and organisational structure is left wing. Get over it’ (Midjmo, a fine lung: 2010). The principal reasons why these fans understand FC United as ‘left wing’ or ‘socialist’ are then because it is owned and organized collectively and because it has explicitly communitarian objectives. Further to this, other fans also made the connection that Adam did between FC United as a ‘left-wing’ organisation and the club as having a political value that extended beyond issues directly pertaining to football. This connection was made most strongly, perhaps unsurprisingly, by writers for a fine lung. For example, an online article which was used to advertise a forthcoming edition of the fanzine suggested that FC United could play an important part in resisting the spending cuts of the coalition government being made in the wake of the financial crisis. The article was entitled ‘Jonathan Spector is haunting Europe’, a play on words between the opening line of ‘The Communist Manifesto’ – ‘A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism’ (Marx and Engels 2002 [1888]: 218) – and the former Manchester United defender Jonathan Spector. The article began with a further quote from ‘The Communist Manifesto’ – ‘Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers’ (Marx and Engels 2002 [1888]: 229) – before outlining the different articles that would be appearing in the fanzine. It concluded with a rhetorical flourish:

The challenges we are presented with, in the face of the latest assault on the working classes, will not be ducked. FC United of Manchester’s position in the grander scheme of what is about to happen across the world cannot be underestimated [sic]. Let the bosses and the cultural thieves tremble at the revolution. We have nothing to lose but our chains. We have a world to win. Reds of all countries unite (Anon, a fine lung: 2010).
The final four sentences of the article are a paraphrasing of the final lines of The Communist Manifesto, ‘Reds’ playing on both the colloquial term for a socialist and for a Manchester United/FC United supporter.\textsuperscript{101} The writer combines the notion that FC United have a political meaning and role beyond football, which should not be ‘underestimated’, with an explicitly Marxist understanding of the current economic and political predicament. Others, while adopting a less explicitly socialist argument, have also suggested that FC United has an important wider political value:

To my mind, if the wider lessons of FC United and other such ventures in England could be applied to other spheres of life, political, social and economic, then perhaps in part, people could just send a little message to these corporate shills, that really some things in life really are not for sale (JK, UTB: 2008).

JK’s argument bears a strong similarity to Massey’s claim that supporter campaigns can be carried into wider campaigns against ‘a form of economy in which nothing has value, everything has a price, and all that matters is short-term gain’.

Many FC United fans were also critical of those supporters who they perceived as seeing FC United as non-political. For example, one fan mobilised the imagination of Manchester as a ‘radical’ city, which I discussed in the last chapter, to critique those fans he saw as seeing FC United as ‘non-political’:

I hate to be the bearer of such earth shattering news, but this club is a political entity. Saying you don’t participate in politics is akin to saying you don’t breathe. I’m not about to deliver a diatribe here, polemic though I am, but would urge anyone who considers themselves apolitical to look into it further and consider Manchester’s great tradition of rebellion and political insurgency before casting asides peoples hard work and hard won victories (Cobden Sez, UTB: 2008).

Dean also voiced to me an antipathy towards FC United fans who he perceives as seeing FC United as non-political:

\textsuperscript{101} The final lines of ‘The Communist Manifesto’ which the a fine lung blog paraphrased read as follows: ‘Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries unite!’ (Marx and Engels 2002 [1888]: 258).
There seems to be a certain set of fans who seem to be completely and utterly unconcerned about any kind of social obligation or political morality beyond FC United and I cannot for the life of me work out why they even care about the club in that case. If you are happy for FC United, I don’t know, to take sponsorship from companies who pay Bangladeshi children £2 an hour, not saying that has happened, but I think there are certain fans who would say “fucking hell that’s politically correct” [to object to taking such sponsorship]. Clearly the whole point of FC United is that it shows you can’t divorce, the whole idea of lets keep politics out of sport, the very existence of FC United proves that’s bollocks. [FC United shows] that sport is inherently political just like everything else in our society, eating food, fucking, everything we do is political whether we choose to acknowledge it or not and what’s interesting about FC United is that it is almost like an open acknowledgment that there has been a political failing. That there wasn’t a proper persons test in terms of the Glazers taking over. It is a political failing that American venture capitalists can come in and rip what is I would say indisputably the nations most treasured sporting asset from peoples’ hands. That’s a failure of politics and the very existence of FC United proves that sport cannot not be political, so when you get a certain section of our fan-base saying oh it’s political, [of] course it’s fucking political, if it wasn’t why the fuck are you here, why didn’t you stay in the pub watching big United [Manchester United] on the cheap satellite (Dean, interview: 10/12/2010).

Dean perceives there to be a section of the fan-base who are not interested in the ways in which FC United impacts upon wider issues, ‘social obligation or political morality’, and he suggests this fails to recognise that FC United was a product of a ‘political’ failing and therefore proves ‘sport cannot not be political’. Dean therefore questions why those who see FC United as non-political follow the club as opposed to staying ‘in the pub watching big United on the cheap satellite’. However in the following section I wish to suggest that what I found was not so much people claiming that FC United was non-political per-se but rather that people questioned the nature of FC United’s political impact, with some fans suggesting that its politics was restricted to the sphere of football and was not political in a wider sense.
Politics or politics? Contested Understandings of FC United

In looking to understand the differing views that FC United fans have on the political value of the club a discussion thread that appeared on the fans’ forum is particularly interesting. The discussion thread initially discussed sectarianism within Scottish football but developed into a debate about the political value of FC United and I reproduce that part of the discussion here:

*Comments articulated on May 13th 2011*

FCUM fan [1]: Football, religion and politics shouldn’t mix.

FCUM fan [2]: don’t agree. The formation of FCUM was a political act in itself. We have some banners & flags at our matches that feature the Red Star & quotes from Che [Guevara]. If football shouldn’t mix with politics, we might as well call it a day here at FCUM.

FCUM fan [3]: This old chestnut...it was politial [sic] decision within the narrow confines of football governance. No more.

FCUM fan [4]: What narrow minded Tory bullshit. FCUM was set up in the wider context of capitalist power, money and class shafting what’s dear to us for profit.

FCUM fan [3]: Give the party political bile a rest hey? We have a group of people (a colalition [sic] if you like) who believe in a better way to run a football club. A group of people supporting a club being run as a not-for-profit social enterprise (a structure supported by all three main political parties). Why try and split this group of people along party political lines? It is divisive and does the club no good.

FCUM fan [5]: Well said FCUM fan [4]. We’re a political club (small p) not a Political club (big P)

FCUM fan [7]: Me too.

Football is football to me, & nothing to do with politics, religion, or anything else.

I follow FC [United] because I was a life-long Man Utd supporter who was shit on by his club & saw an alternative in a newly formed club called FC United.

It certainly had nothing to do with 'politics'

Within the discussion three distinct lines of argument emerge. Firstly FCUM fan [2] and FCUM fan [4] argue that FC United is inseparable from a wider set of leftist politics. FCUM fan [2] notes the presence of particular types of socialist symbolism amongst FC United’s fan culture ‘We have some banners & flags at our matches that feature the Red Star & quotes from Che [Guevara]’ as proof of FC United’s political nature. While FCUM fan [4] suggest the club is inseparable from a ‘wider context of capitalist power, money and class shafting what's dear to us for profit’ which they see as key to the club’s formation, and as such to suggest that the club does not have a political value beyond football is ‘Tory bullshit’. However other fans within the thread, most noticeably FCUM fan [3] and FCUM fan [5], suggest that FC United’s political value is restricted to the sphere of football. FCUM fan [3] begins by rejecting the association between FC United and wider (leftist) politics describing the formation of FC United as a ‘politial [sic] decision within the narrow confines of football governance’ and they go on to argue, in their second post, that FC United as a ‘not-for-profit social enterprise’ has political support from all three main political parties and attempts to align FC United with one particular ideological bent are unnecessarily ‘divisive’. This argument was met with support from two other posters on the discussion thread, FCUM fan [5] and [6]. The third line of argument, as exemplified by FCUM fan [7], was to disassociate FC United from any form of politics, in or away from the context of football, so the poster argues that their reasons for following FC United were due to being ‘shit on’ by Manchester United and ‘had nothing to do with ’politics’’. From the discussion of this thread two points emerge: firstly understandings of the political value and potentialities of FC United are not fixed but are actively in debate and flux and, secondly, that there is not a simple division between those who see FC United as ‘political’ and those who see it as ‘non-political’ rather there is debate about the type of political value FC United holds and how far it extends beyond football. Perhaps the most common trope from those who questioned the extent of FC United’s political value was the idea expressed by FCUM fan [5] that FC United was a ‘political club (small p) not a Political club (big P)’. For
example, a fanzine writer in *UTB* utilises this trope at length to discuss the political value of FC United:

I think we have to draw a distinction between politics with a small ‘p’ and Politics with a large ‘P’. The politics of FC [United] ought to be about fan rights, fan ownership, community involvement, opposing bigotry and prejudice. Essentially standing up for fairness. Then you have Politics which I would define as national Politics, party Politics. The problem with Politics is that almost by definition they are about divisiveness. How much effort is wasted in Politics by the constant need to define and position yourself not as ‘this’ but as ‘not that’? Effort which could have been better put towards building a better society. If we allow FC [United] to get involved in Politics, then we allow the agenda of other people to dictate the direction of our precious, hard-won club ... A labour voter shouldn’t feel unable to stand on the MRE next to a conservative voter or vice versa. Someone who believes that selective education is a good thing shouldn’t feel unable to sit in the Main Stand next to someone who believes that selective education is a bad thing ... We live in a pluralistic society where we accept that not everyone thinks the same and we deal with those differences by debating arguments and then by voting in elections. We don’t deal with differences by retreating into ghettos of people who agree with us, comforted by the belief that those who think differently are less than we are. There’s a place for big ‘P’ Politics and it isn’t football (Felonious Manc, *UTB*: 2010).

For ‘Felonious Manc’ FC United is about small ‘p’ politics which they sees as being about ‘fan rights, fan ownership, community involvement, opposing bigotry and prejudice’. They defines these politics as being in opposition to big ‘P’ politics which they define as national or party politics. It is interesting that ‘Felonious Manc’ uses the same set of characteristics of FC United, collective fan ownership and communitarian objectives, as those fans who viewed FC United as socialist to reject the club as being political beyond football. Adam Brown also notes how some supporters are wary of connecting FC United with big ‘P’ politics:

I think some people just don’t like the idea of it being political, this is about football and I suppose the bigger the P in the political the more wary people are of being involved and I think that’s right to some extent. If we’d started by saying we
want to set up a socialist football club it might of had a lot less appeal and to me it reflects that but to others it doesn’t it’s just about them having ownership and influence over their football club, so it’s able to operate on different levels (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

Adam suggests that for some supporters his idea of FC United as a ‘socialist’ football club would be unappealing as it would connect the club directly to big ‘P’ politics when their concerns were restricted to ‘having ownership and influence over their football club’ which they do not associate with wider political concerns. As Adam perceptively points out, in terms of the political values and potentialities that people invest in FC United, the club is ‘able to operate on different levels’ to different people. All fans may be collective owners of a football club with communitarian aims but there is no consensus amongst them as to what the political meaning of this is, particularly as to whether it carries political meaning beyond the sphere of football into ‘big ‘P’ Politics’ or whether it simply represents a model for how a football club should be run and owned – ‘small ‘p’ politics’. Interestingly, even those who shared leftist and socialist political beliefs did not necessarily believe the club’s political meaning was socialist or left-wing. For instance when I asked Andy Walsh ‘Does FC have a political point that goes beyond football?’ he replied as follows:

Yeah, I think that’s self-evident – in saying yes we can’t forget that we are a football club – but if you mean by political message, do we have a social impact, because politics is about social interaction and social networks and social structures as much as anything else, then we do have a social impact. We have an impact on people’s social networks, we have an impact on people’s attitudes to others around them, people they live with, people they interact with and people they go to football with – yes we do have a wider impact – and I think there is a mature understanding of that within FC United. What tends to happen is within FC United people tend to impose their personal views and emotions on the club – they see the club as a manifestation of their personal views and emotions – and that’s a great strength to the club that people feel so committed to it but it also can be a quite destructive force because we’re a democratic organisation, you can argue for your views and your standpoint but then what happens when your argument is defeated, what happens when you’re in the minority and not in the majority, so then that tends to change people’s attitudes so we have quite heated debates about issues that have nothing to do with football and nothing to do with
the football club and that’s a great challenge for us to manage that. I think if we tried to say were only a football club, we just concentrate on the football then we do ourselves a disservice, cause if we’re just a football club then there’s hundreds of them so what makes us unique? And what makes us unique is that people have a belief in what they’re doing and they’re not just creating a football club to cheer on 11 blokes in a football shirt – what makes them so committed to FC United as opposed to another club is their belief in their ability as a collective group to have an impact on their lives and the lives of others, that for me means we have a wider political impact, not party political but impact on peoples’ lives and that’s what politics is about, it’s about impacting on peoples’ lives (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010).

Andy sees FC United as having a clear wider political point, but he does not suggest that political point is socialist and explicitly rejects the idea of it being ‘party political’, rather he sees FC United’s political value as contained in its ability to impact on supporters’ lives and their relations with others. Furthermore, he suggests that while supporters often see FC United as a ‘manifestation of their personal views and emotions’ this has the potential to be a ‘destructive force’ within a democratic organisation such as FC United.

In this section I have argued that there is no consensus amongst FC United supporters as to the political value and potentiality of the club. Furthermore I have suggested that many FC United fans do not dispute that FC United is political per-se, rather they suggest its political scope is restricted to the sphere of football, and finally I have shown that even amongst supporters who are ‘socialist’ they do not necessarily believe the club reflects these values. In the final section of this chapter, I wish to look at a further possible interpretation of the political value and potentiality of FC United as being, far from ‘socialist’, an example of, and in accordance with, the current coalition government’s rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’.

**FC United: A Vision of the ‘Big Society’ in Action?**

One of the central ideological planks of David Cameron’s vision for the Conservative party, and by extension the coalition government formed in summer 2010, is the idea of the ‘Big Society’ (Mycock and Tonge 2011). In Chapter Five I suggested one central aspect of the ‘Big Society’, and coalition government policy more broadly, was a desire to see a shift from state to social action and part of this involves a further expansion of the role of the private, charity and third sectors within the public sector. Furthermore, while the idea of
the ‘Big Society’ has been critiqued for its lack of definition, government documents suggest some of its key themes include community action, volunteering and support for mutual organisations and co-operatives (HM Government 2010; see also: Green et al 2011: 21). Further to this, Conservative MP Jesse Norman, one of the central advocates of the ‘Big Society’, has argued that co-operatives, though traditionally regarded as ‘intrinsically left-wing’ (Norman 2010: 172), are in fact a ‘clear and important extension of the overall Big Society project’ (ibid: 174) due to the principles of self-help, entrepreneurship and community participation underpinning them. It is perhaps unsurprising then that some commentators have noted the potential synergy between FC United and notions of the ‘Big Society’. Jules Coman, an FC United supporter writing in The Guardian, noted how:

FC [United] are fan-owned. Each of the members has a vote on all important matters. Tickets are kept inexpensive. A commitment to community work is written into the club’s constitution. Manchester City Council has been so impressed with the activities organised by the club in some of the most deprived areas of the city that it is expected to grant FC [United] a lease to build their own ground in Newton Heath – where what was to become Manchester United was founded by railway workers in 1878. More than 300 of the club’s members volunteer in vital tasks to help keep the costs down. If David Cameron wants a vision of the “Big Society” in action, he can find it at FC [United]. (Coman 2010)

For Coman it is the ownership structure, community work and supporter volunteering that mean that FC United can be considered a ‘vision of the “Big Society” in action’. Coman’s argument shows how the very same features of the club, its ownership model and communitarian objectives, that some supporters had interpreted as features of FC United as a ‘socialist’ club can be understood to have a very different political and ideological value. When interviewing Adam Brown I suggested this interpretation of FC United as being in line with the ‘Big Society’ and he responded as follows:

I think yeah there is clear stuff in ‘Big Society’ that relates to what FC United is doing. You know they’ve talked about co-operatives being a form of what they want to see developed, as a means of people being involved and controlling but you know the Conservative Party aren’t exactly, you know, they have never been big supporters of the co-operative movement and I’m sure that they don’t fully understand lots of things about co-ops. On the other hand you’ve got to take
some of it at face value and say if you want this thing to work, here’s some ways of making it work and FC [United]’s an example of that but the problem for me about the way the government has gone about is they’re saying they want to support these kinds of organisations, at the same time as cutting most of the funding that actually keeps those organisations alive and it’s contradictory. Social enterprises, charities, co-ops are all going to find it much harder with the spending cuts that they’ve bought in and lots will go to the wall (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010)

While Adam voices clear reservations about the ‘Big Society’, in terms of the implications of government spending cuts and a lack of understanding of the way in which co-operatives function, he does suggest ‘there is clear stuff in ‘Big Society’ that relates to what FC United is doing’ and that FC United may serve as an example of how the ‘Big Society’ may function. It is worth noting that the notion of the ‘Big Society’, alongside a growing awareness of the financial instability of the current model of football club ownership which will be discussed in the next chapter, has created an environment in which supporter owned clubs may receive favourable legislation. As noted in the thesis introduction the 2010 coalition agreement contained a pledge to reform football governance in order to promote supporter ownership, while David Cameron spoke in parliament of how ‘many of the honourable members will have football clubs in their constituencies that do sometimes struggle financially, and I think seeing one owned by its supporters is a very positive move’ (as cited in Marshall and Tomlin 2010: 4).

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the relationship between FC United and wider political engagement, in particular focussing on the extent to which supporters’ relationship to the club is influenced by broader political ideas. As such it has added a further dimension to Chapters Three, Four and Six which looked at the significance of ideas of community and place to supporters’ relationship to the club. My findings suggested that for some FC United fans a key aspect of their support for the club was that they saw it as expressing particular leftist or socialist political views and as potentially playing a part in producing political change beyond the realm of football. However, I also highlighted that other FC United fans were keen to distance their support for the club from any wider political issues and, furthermore, that an additional possible interpretation of FC United’s political value was as an expression of the current government’s vision for the ‘Big Society’. As such this
chapter suggests that the relationship between FC United and wider political ideas is chiefly defined by debate and differing interpretations amongst supporters. Such findings have significant implications for existing arguments about the relationship between football support and wider political engagement. I discussed in the introduction to the thesis and at the start of this chapter two distinct understandings of the political potentiality and value of football fandom. The first understanding, stemming from a Marxist analysis, saw sport and football fandom as an essentially mystified activity creating de-politicised subjects and ensuring the continuation of bourgeois capitalism. I would suggest that this chapter has shown that the division employed between sport and politics is simplistic and I have shown how FC United supporters are engaged, from a range of perspectives, in actively and critically seeking to understand and define a relationship between sport and politics. Furthermore, the idea that sport serves as a distraction from wider political issues is overstated. This chapter has shown quite clearly it is possible to be both a football fan and engaged with how to build a better world. This is evidenced both by the movement from Leftist politics into football activism and from how supporters, such as Adam Brown, saw FC United as part of a wider context and as an attempt to change conditions in society away from a free-market model of capitalism. However if this strand of argument did not bear up to empirical scrutiny and assumed a false unity of outlook amongst football supporters the same line of critique could be applied to Massey’s claims that football supporters can stand at the vanguard of a movement that challenges the neoliberal and financialised socio-economic system at large. I have shown in this chapter that there is no singular interpretation of the political meaning of FC United, and while some supporters connect the club to these wider struggles in the way that Massey envisages, others believe FC United’s politics are contained within attempts to bring about change within football and see attempts to link the club to wider political ideologies as ‘divisive’. Similarly, Sam Dubal’s (2010) claim that FC United fans come to have a critical awareness of the wider implications of neoliberalism through support for the club fails to recognise this significant section of the club’s support that wishes to actively distance its support for FC United from any wider political significance. Such supporters are not a minor appendage to the club but rather form one of the core aspects of FC United’s fan culture. As Adam Brown observed the club is ‘able to operate on different levels’ in terms of how supporters understand the club’s politics and this allows the club to have an appeal to a broad section of supporters, in terms of political views, and therefore an alignment with one particular ideological struggle seems unlikely. Such a conclusion is also supported by my earlier analysis in Chapter Five.
which showed that while a ‘neo-liberal turn’ within football had created many of the conditions which FC United was formed in response to, equally such a ‘neo-liberal turn’ at the level of local governance had created opportunities for the club in terms of the club’s community programme and the building of its own ground.

In the final chapter of the thesis I will look at the possibility, in the light of financial uncertainty and upheaval within football, of a broader movement emerging amongst supporters to challenge the present system of club governance and ownership.
Chapter Eight: ‘Football Consciousness’: Supporter Politics, Rivalry and Success

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis I noted that the period in which I conducted my fieldwork – between June 2009 and December 2010 – was one of financial uncertainty and upheaval both within the wider global economy, resulting from the global banking crisis and emerging sovereign debt crises, and within English professional football. I noted that through 2009 and 2010 a number of high profile crises of ownership, potential bankruptcy and unsustainable debt occurred at a number of elite-level clubs – in particular Portsmouth FC, West Ham United, Liverpool FC and Manchester United – and I noted that the crises emerging at West Ham United and Manchester United could be directly linked to the wider financial crisis. Moments of crisis within English football are not new, anymore than crises within the wider economy are new, what is of interest is what outcomes occur from such moments. The late 1970s and 1980s are often identified as a period marked by ‘crises’ within the game (Triessman 1981; I. Taylor 1984; King 2002: 73-86) and the outcome of these crises, as discussed in Chapter Two, was the adoption of a free-market model for the English game. As set out in the introduction to the thesis, Anthony King (2010) has looked at the possibility of a top-down regulatory shift in response to the current crisis; my intention in this chapter is to look at the attempt by some supporters to bring about a particular solution to this critical moment within English football. To that end, this chapter seeks to analyse the response of supporters, particularly of FC United supporters but also fans of other clubs, to this period of crisis and uncertainty within football. I now outline how my argument in this chapter will proceed.

This chapter begins by setting out how prominent figures within FC United, particularly the general manager Andy Walsh, alongside others heavily involved in supporter politics at a national level, have advocated, in response to this period of crisis within the game, supporters setting aside inter-club rivalry to campaign together to overturn what they perceive to be a mutually inequitable structure of club ownership and football governance. This set of beliefs is discussed through an account of a supporter rally, ‘Beyond the Debt’, hosted by FC United in February 2010 at which Andy Walsh and a number of others involved in supporter campaigning spoke. I contend that the position advocated by Walsh et al can be understood as a form of ‘football consciousness’, analogous to a Marxist
understanding of class consciousness, where football supporters are called to recognise themselves as a common ‘class’ facing a shared structural oppression. I then look at how forms of this ‘football consciousness’ can be seen amongst the larger body of FC United support and the broader mass of politicised Manchester United fandom represented through UWS and, most noticeably, Red Issue fanzines. Following from this, I look at the relationship between FC United fans, Manchester City supporters and ‘football consciousness’. I suggest that, in a context where many FC United fans continue to view themselves as being Manchester United fans, one way in which this manifests itself is through the continued expressions of rivalry with supporters of Manchester City and in particular celebrations of Manchester United’s success viz-a-viz Manchester City’s lack of success. Furthermore, I look at Manchester City fans’ (and fans of other clubs) celebration of what they perceived to be the potentially destructive impact of the Glazer family ownership for Manchester United alongside their celebration of Manchester City’s takeover by Sheikh Mansour. In doing so, I discuss some of the limitations and difficulties with achieving a ‘football consciousness’ and cross-club fan campaigning to try to change the current system of club ownership and governance.

‘Football Consciousness’ and the Beyond the Debt rally

In January 2010, the British press broke news of the Glazer family’s plans to refinance the debt which had been leveraged onto Manchester United in 2005 (Millward 2011: 108). These press reports followed the release on the 11th of January of a bond prospectus for future buyers of Manchester United debt which laid bare full details of Manchester United’s financial arrangements. In particular, it was revealed that Manchester United total debt stood at £716.6m and that from August 2010 part of this debt would be switched to being financed by ‘Payment In Kind’ (P.I.K) loans which accrue interest at 16.25% (Gibson 2010). Furthermore, the re-financing of the debt also included provisions for the Glazer family to take £127m out of Manchester United, including a one-off transfer of £70 million from the club’s reserves (Conn and Gibson 2010). The release of these details sparked anger amongst many Manchester United fans. One response emerging from the Red Issue internet fan forum was for fans to wear green and gold (the original colours of Newton Heath LYR from whom Manchester United were formed), in preference to Manchester United’s present day red in opposition to the Glazer family ownership, and this idea was quickly picked up and supported by much of the club’s fan-base. The aim of this protest
was to unite all those opposed to the Glazer ownership in a symbolic protest, which would be visually apparent when Manchester United games were televised around the world:

The simple ideas are often the best and the green and gold has been picked up globally, the cause highlighted every time a green and gold scarf is on television. It’s an embarrassment to a club conscious of its image as a global brand and it gives fans a degree of power (Andy Mitten, UWS: 2010).

Peter Millward (2011: 108-113) in his recent wide-ranging discussion of supporter movements gives an account, using e-zine data gathered from the FC United internet forum, of FC United fans’ reaction to this re-mobilisation of anti-Glazer protest amongst the Manchester United fan-base at large. It is not my intention here to ponder at length FC United fans’ response to the Green and Gold protest, other than to note that from my experience Millward successfully captures the tension between those who supported the protest (green and gold scarfs were in evidence at FC United home games and were sold outside the ground), believing that any form of protest against the Glazers was positive, and others who viewed the protest as little more than a fashion statement widely worn by ‘tourist’ supporters and ineffective when fans continued to pay to get into the ground while wearing green and gold scarfs – ‘like flicking the Vs at an incoming V2 missile’ (FC United fan quoted by Wolfie, UTB: 2010). The club itself issued an official statement which while welcoming the green and gold protest as a ‘unifying’ gesture noted ‘the only real solution is to starve the Glazers of cash’ (FC United: 2010b). For the purposes of the following discussion of the ‘Beyond the Debt’ supporter rally, it is key to note that the Green and Gold protest and the widespread concern over debt at Manchester United, along with the problems of ownership and debt at Liverpool FC, Portsmouth FC and West Ham United noted in the introduction, provided the context in which the rally took place.

On Saturday the 27th of February, before a home match, FC United hosted the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally from the social club within the grounds of Gigg Lane, Bury. The press release issued by FC United in the run up to the rally noted ‘the debate on football finance and club ownership currently in the spotlight in Manchester and across the country’ (FC United: 2010c) before then arguing there was a need for fans to go beyond concerns about levels of debt and consider that ‘supporter ownership is the only way forward’ (ibid), and it was to promote this solution that the rally aimed towards. The rally was broadcast through FC United’s own narrowcast radio station and was also filmed and re-broadcast on the club’s
It was through the radio and TV broadcasts that I listened to and watched the rally as at the time the rally took place I was helping to run one of the ‘Community Cohesion’ football tournaments that the club’s community team organised before home fixtures, as discussed in Chapter Five. The rally was led by Andy Walsh who gave opening and closing remarks, while in between four speakers gave speeches relating to issues of football governance and ownership, and then questions were taken from the audience. The speakers at the conference were Dave Boyle, the then chief executive of Supporters Direct, Malcolm Clarke, the head of the Football Supporters Federation (hereafter FSF), Barry Dewy, a member of the Portsmouth FC Independent Supporters Association, and Stewart Dykes, a supporter and employee of Schalke 04 a majority supporter-owned top division German football club.\footnote{Supporters Direct is a national body which both lobbies for changes to bring about supporter ownership at football clubs and also provides practical assistance to supporters looking to take control of the clubs they support or clubs like FC United that are already owned by their supporters. The FSF is a national body which seeks to campaign for and represent all supporters interests, rather than just those who are engaged in bringing about supporter ownership.}

David Conn, the prominent journalist and author on issues of football finance, was also due to speak but cancelled due to last minute complications but he did use his blog (2010a) to promote the event. Andy Walsh began his opening address at the rally by noting the wider context in which the rally was taking place, ‘we’re meeting today at probably the most testing time the English professional game has seen’, and then set out the aim of the rally, ‘the reason for calling today’s meeting was to start putting supporters at the centre of the debate for the solution’ (Andy Walsh, Beyond the Debt: 27/02/10). His opening speech then set out the key proposition of his argument, which would be taken on by two of the other speakers, and which also forms the central consideration for my own analysis here:

In a war, and we are in a war, there’s a need to recognise who your enemies are and it’s not fans of other clubs. It’s not even other clubs. It’s the people who run those clubs are the enemies of the fans, the people who regulate the game; the current regulators are the enemies of the game and the enemies of the fans. The very people who should be at the centre of everything are on the outside of everything – the lack of regulation has allowed outsiders to come in and ruin our

\footnote{FCUM Radio is available through the following web address, http://www.fcumradio.co.uk/, while FCUM TV can be found here: http://www.fcum.tv/}
game – it wouldn’t be allowed in any other game but it’s allowed here [in football] (Andy Walsh, Beyond the Debt: 27/02/10).

For Walsh the present situation in football is an extraordinary one, which he describes as a ‘war’, and he sees two sides as being in non-ambiguous structural opposition to each other within this football ‘war’ – the fans in opposition to those who run football clubs and regulate the game. His call is for fans to recognise this shared structural position and see the commonality between each other, ‘there’s a need to recognise who your enemies are and it’s not fans of other clubs’. He concluded this opening speech by identifying a clear solution to the perceived current crisis: ‘Football fans are the only fit and proper people to run football’ (Andy Walsh, Beyond the Debt: 27/02/10). Malcolm Clarke of the FSF then took up the theme of the need for supporters to set aside rivalry and see the shared interest between themselves:

The key message is that we’re in this together, that what unites us as football supporters is far more important than any divisions we have because of the teams we support, however keenly felt some of those rivalries are (Malcolm Clarke, Beyond the Debt: 27/02/10).

Dave Boyle of Supporters Direct then further expanded on the idea of football fans facing a common enemy arguing:

Our [football fans] real enemy is an idea ... it’s the idea that has animated English football for far too long, it’s the idea that they [football clubs] are companies, it’s the idea that they should be owned by small groups of individuals who are free to do with them what they will and if they want to make a quick buck out of it that’s absolutely fine too. I don’t think any part of the proposition works – they’re not companies, it’s not right to make money out of them ... they should be owned by the people to whom they actually matter [the fans] (Dave Boyle, Beyond the Debt, 27/02/10).

Boyle presents a subtly different notion of who the common enemy of football fans is to that suggested by Andy Walsh. For Walsh the enemy is the owners of football clubs and regulators whereas for Boyle the enemy lies in the ‘idea’ of football clubs as private enterprise which empowers the regulators and owners, nonetheless they both share the notion that football fans do share a common enemy and that the solution is for fans to take
ownership of clubs themselves. Andy Walsh concluded the rally with a re-iteration of the call for fans to work together for the mutually beneficial outcome of supporter ownership.

What’s needed is a tranche of shares at every club to give fans and the communities which they serve a real say in the way the clubs are run. Be patient, but through careful campaigning, together with all fans of all clubs – Hasta [la] Victoria Siempre – the victory will be ours (Andy Walsh, Beyond the Debt: 27/02/10). 104

At the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally, a common solution was advocated by those heavily involved in supporter politics to a perceived time of crisis within the game. They see this solution as involving supporters moving beyond inter-club rivalries, to act in the shared interest of bringing about supporter ownership and against a common enemy embodied by football club owners. The advocating of inter-club campaigning to change aspects of the way in which football is run is not new, the FSF’s forerunner the Football Supporters Association had run a successful inter-club fan campaign in the late 1980s to prevent the introduction of compulsory ID cards for football supporters (King 2002: 177). However, the advocacy of this shared campaigning with the purpose of bringing about a radical shift of ownership model, towards supporter ownership and away from private ownership, at a time of perceived crisis within the game represents an important and interesting development. It is my contention that these supporters can be seen as calling for a form of ‘football consciousness’, analogous to Marxist understandings of class consciousness, in response to the perceived emergence of a crisis of capital within the game.

To set out this analogy in a little more depth, Marx saw social classes as the product of historical social relations and, far from being fixed, these social relations could be altered (Morrison 1995: 310-311). Marx believed the contradictions inherent within capitalism would become so great that the proletariat would come to recognise their shared interest and constitute themselves as a class in emancipatory opposition to capitalist social relations:

104 The phrase ‘Hasta la victoria siempre’, literal translation ‘until victory always’, is the last words in Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s final letter to Fidel Castro. A large flag in the design of the Cuban flag but coloured red and black with the phrase ‘hasta la victoria siempre’ is hung in the empty stands at Gigg Lane during FC United matches. During the game that followed the rally the flag was passed over the heads of fans standing in the Manchester Road End of Gigg Lane.
Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests (Marx 1956 [1847]: 170).

For Marx then class consciousness is the moment in which the proletariat recognises itself as a class ‘for’ itself with a common interest to be defended in a struggle against the ravages of capitalism. Penny Green (1990: 180), drawing on Lukacs and Gramsci as well as Marx, sets out a number of necessary features for a Marxist understanding of class consciousness. She argues that for a true class consciousness first the proletariat must identify itself as a class with a common situation and interest and must then recognise that capitalists form a distinctive class whose interests are antagonistic to their own and that this antagonism is the defining feature of class society; finally the proletariat must see the possibility of an alternative society and recognise that they have the ability to bring about this alternative society (Green 1990: 180). I would argue there are clear parallels between all of these propositions and the position advocated by Walsh et al at the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally – they argued that football fans needed to recognise their common situation and the common enemy of football club owners and regulators and suggested that football fans have the ability to bring about the alternative of supporter ownership through campaigning together. It is perhaps unsurprising that a language of ‘consciousness’, in a Marxist sense, would emerge amongst football activists given the significant movement of former radical socialist activist into football activism noted in the previous chapter. Those familiar with Marx’s ideas around class consciousness and political campaigning based on this idea to some extent reproduce an analogous form of this ‘consciousness’ within the transposed context of football activism. This is not to argue that all football activists advocating a form of ‘football consciousness’ will have a background in far-left politics but it is to suggest one reason why such an argument is present within this milieu. The question I wish to answer in the next sections is, in the context of upheaval and uncertainty within football, to what extent this form of ‘football consciousness’ is visible amongst a broader cross-section of supporters?
New Solidarities in a Time of Crisis?

Amongst FC United fans at large there seemed to be desire for other fans to attempt to take control of the clubs they support or form their own supporter owned-clubs. Those FC United fans I spoke to were universally keen that other fans should take political action to change the ownership structure at their own clubs. For example, Dave told me how his ideal scenario would be FC United playing in an entirely supporter owned league and that he hoped Newcastle United fans, who at the time of our conversation had been involved in protracted disputes with club owner Mike Ashley, would try to take control of the club or set up an equivalent to FC United (Dave, fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). FC United fans writing within the fanzines also expressed similar sentiments:

So if a [Manchester] City, Newcastle [United FC] or any other fan wants to sample football how it used to be, full of fun, laughter and raw uninhibited passion then let them come. But I for one would encourage them to go forth, spread the word, and set up their own fan club and scare the shit out of the establishment that has been surreptitiously shafting us for years (Politico, UTB: 2006).

Wouldn’t it be great if the latest revolution to start in Manchester again resonated throughout the country and we one day had a league made up of clubs run by supporters after they turned their backs on the cancerous core of greed that is the Premiership (Tony Howard, UWS: 2005).

It can be seen from these comments that for some FC United fans their experience of taking political action in the wake of the Glazer takeover has led to a desire to see supporter ownership at all clubs and defeat a common enemy of an ‘establishment that has been surreptitiously shafting us for years’ or ‘cancerous core of greed’. At least some of the features of the kind of ‘football consciousness’ advocated by Walsh et al can be found amongst the wider FC United fan base. Furthermore, this ‘consciousness’ was further heightened and increasingly articulated by FC United fans in the context of the perceived crises of ownership within football and the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally. For example, in the week following the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally the a fine lung blog ran an article where the writer, ‘J Stand’, set out how in 2004 he had published an article decrying Portsmouth Football Club:
My feelings for Portsmouth FC were that they, like every club below Stockport on a map, were a shitty little Southern club, watched by curly wig wearing, drum banging knobheads that I hoped would get relegated so we’d never have to go there again. I wrote about the injustice of “proper football clubs” like Sheffield’s or [Nottingham] Forest [FC] having to play in a league undeserving of their history and loyal support. From behind the protective shield of my pseudonym I called for the top tier of English football to be off-limits to small town clubs like Portsmouth [FC] and for “proper clubs” to be reinstated. I pressed ‘submit’ and watched the website’s message board fill up with angry Portsmouth [FC] fans (J Stand, a fine lung: 2010).

However, ‘J Stand’ reveals how in the light of listening to Barry Dewy at the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally and the wider context within football he revised his opinion:

Suffice to say, the situation is markedly different to our Glazer-induced one, as I found out ... by hearing Dewy’s thoughts in Bury, but the collateral damage caused by near-anonymous racketeers is exactly the same at Portsmouth [FC] as it was at Manchester United in 2005. I thought back to my comments in 2004 and with the experience that only time and being bum-raped by foreign aggressors can give you, I was a bit embarrassed, not just by that anti-Portsmouth [FC] rant, but by the collective time and energy that could have been better spent fighting the twats that have had us all over. How daft have we been? We have put our heart and soul into ‘hating’ people on the other side of manufactured divides whilst characters of dubious and / or silver-spooned backgrounds, free from any financial risk whatsoever and with absolute impunity, have been siphoning our money to offshore accounts and management companies as payment for pulling our pants down. I have witnessed firsthand this week that many people, fans of [Manchester] United and Liverpool [FC], would rather see their clubs go out of business than have to side with the enemy for the greater good of our game and our clubs. They should be ashamed because we are being laughed at. But there is hope (J Stand, a fine lung: 2010).

‘J Stand’ is able to see a commonality between his own situation as a Manchester United/FC United fan with that of Portsmouth FC fans, both suffering ‘the collateral damage caused by near-anonymous racketeers’. Furthermore, he now sees the rivalry and
Hatred he had felt for fans of other clubs as a ‘manufactured divide’ which stopped him from seeing the common enemy of the ‘twats who have it over all of us’. In other words, ‘I Stand’ displays a ‘football consciousness’ which he had not previously held. We can see a similar articulation of a form of ‘football consciousness’, in line with that expounded by Walsh et al, amongst other politicised Manchester United fans in the Manchester United fanzines around the time of the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally. So Andy Mitten, the long-time editor of UWS, used his March issue editorial to proclaim:

They [the Glazers] are irresponsible, asset-stripping, carpet bagging leeches who are rightly loathed for their actions. They have no future with [Manchester] United and the sooner they exit the club and swim with the alligators in the everglades the better. And the quicker those other scumbags Gillette and Hicks – deceitful Americans who are tearing the heart out of another proud football club with a rich history – leave Liverpool [FC] the better. Unless you’re a short-sighted knob who would like to see Liverpool [FC] or Leeds [United] – or [Manchester] city – go under, this goes beyond any football rivalries (Andy Mitten, UWS: 2010).

Mitten identifies a common situation between Liverpool FC and Manchester United which he sees as going ‘beyond any football rivalries’. Further to this, the editor of Red Issue had put forward a similar proposition in his February editorial, calling for a joint campaigning between fans of different clubs and drawing a commonality between Manchester United and Liverpool FC’s financial plight:

With Portsmouth [FC] the visitors that day [February 6th 2010] and beset by their own grim ownership problems, the likes of IMUSA and MUST should be getting in touch to organise a joint demonstration against the unrestrained culture of greed which permeates the Premier League in particular and professional football in general. From there the fight should be taken nationwide via the Football Supporters Federation, bringing in fans of clubs from Liverpool [FC] to Newcastle [United FC] to Stockport [County FC] to West Ham [United] – rivalries need to be set aside to achieve what’s required; Liverpool [FC] going bust might be funny in isolation, but not when what happens to them is a forerunner of [Manchester] United’s fate (Veg, Red Issue: 2010).
In the same edition of Red Issue the long running ‘Word on the Street’ column argued that Manchester United fans’ campaign against the Glazer ownership needed to be understood as important for the future of football as a whole, and while removing the Glazer family may have an impact on Manchester United’s on-pitch success it was vital for the good of all football clubs:

There is one possible way out of this impasse for the Glazers, if they cannot find some Arab to get them off the hook in the meantime. It is to break the TV deal cartel and go it alone, possibly in conjunction with a European super league. That would be the death of English football as we have known if for more than a century. Fans would be faced with the choice of following them down that road at the expense of everything else they have always held dear. Better we accept a decade of trophy-free suffering than be the executioners of the English game. The Glazer parasites have to be destroyed, whatever the collateral damage. Let’s go to it (Word on the Street, Red Issue: 2010).

This advocacy of a ‘football consciousness’ within the Manchester United fanzines is particularly interesting when set against the history of these publications attitudes towards cross-club fan solidarity and rivalry. For example, in 1991 the national fanzine When Saturday Comes (which aimed to appeal to fans of all clubs) refused to continue to include Red Issue in its listing of club fanzines due to anti-Liverpudlian material printed in the fanzine, in particular material that portrayed Liverpudlians as pre-disposed to thievery such as the cartoon strip ‘sticky fingers the thieving scouse bastard’ (Haynes 1995: 74-75; King 2002: 170-171). Red Issue writer Richard Kurt’s response to this is particularly telling in revealing the shifting attitudes within the fanzine:

There is, of course, a larger ideological split that underpins this sort of spat [between Red Issue and When Saturday Comes]. All too often, organisations and publications that seek to represent football fans as a whole tend to disparage so-called sectarian forces like Red Ish [issue], accusing them of dividing fandom and thus reducing supporter power in general. The self-styled ‘football academics’ are particularly prone to this kind of Marxist world view: footie fans are the working-classes of the soccer world who should recognise the football establishment and its lackeys as the common enemy. Instead of directing our energies to lambasting fellow supporters from other tribes, we should be acting together as an
internationalist force to overthrow our oppressors, break our chains and carry out a glorious proletarian revolution etc, etc ad-nauseam. Such is the driving force behind all those bespectacled types with sociology degrees who rush around setting up poxy fan groups and spreading the gospel of inter-club love-ins and who find the [Manchester] United/Scouse [Liverpool FC]/Scum [Leeds United] rivalries distasteful in the extreme ... The truth is that in football, as in world politics in general, the working classes are not suffering from ‘false consciousness’ and do not need to be led into international brotherhood by the intellectual elite. What ‘the masses’ know is that nationalism and tribalism are forces far greater than any other and that it is pointless to work against the natural grain. Sure, there may be temporary alliances to halt the more brainless schemes of the senile FA or the cretins in Whitehall but there can be no permanent departure from the natural state of the true football fan – that his support of the club is as much shaped by his hatred of others as by his love for his own team. After all, if there’s one creature even more despicable than the fervent Mickey [Liverpool FC fan] or Bluenose [Manchester City fan], it’s the bloody ‘neutral’ football supporter, for whom When Saturday Comes is the house journal. This is the person who will talk of all fans working together in harmony, who will argue that clubs should sacrifice their interests for the national team, who will demand clubs like ours cough up to subsidise the lower division wasters who play at garden sheds. For any true Red, the correct response is ‘bollocks to all that’. Who cares if 20 clubs go into liquidation, England get beaten by Rwanda, and inter-club bitterness gets so bad that any Scouser entering Manc needs an armed police escort? As long as [Manchester] United beat the unholy trinity and then win the European Cup, so what? (Kurt 1994: 87-88).

Kurt then in 1994, in defence of Red Issue, furiously disavowals the politics the magazine would come to advocate in 2010. He sees rivalry as the ‘natural state’ of a football fan from which there can be ‘no permanent departure’ and indeed he sees the fate of other clubs as irrelevant for as long as Manchester United are successful ‘Who cares if 20 clubs go into liquidation ... as long as [Manchester] United beat the unholy trinity and then win the European Cup’. Indeed he employs a the same analogy as my own to deride those involved in inter-club fan campaigns as ‘Marxists’ and as ‘bespectacled types with sociology degrees
who rush around setting up poxy fan groups and spreading the gospel of inter-club love-ins’.

The prioritisation of Manchester United success and indifference to the outcome of this for other clubs within Red Issue can also been seen in the attitude towards the potential introduction of pay-per-view screenings at the end of 1990s and the distribution of television rights from such screenings. In particular writers were hostile to the idea of a collective distribution of television rights within the Premier League, commenting on such a deal as ‘one where [Manchester]United end up effectively subsidizing the Boltons [sic] and Wimbledons [sic]. Oh yeah? Who asked us? Did you get a letter? It’s bollox: fuck the rest, I say’ (Backbeat, Red Issue: 1997). The attitude towards the collective distribution of television rights within Red Issue in 1997 was the mirror opposite of that which I discussed the magazine showing towards the issue in 2010, by when it was felt that any attempt by the Glazers to end the collective distribution of television rights must be stopped because it would be a threat to the existence of other clubs. It seems, then, that the experience of the anti-Glazer campaigns has seen a decisive transformation in political attitude amongst writers of Red Issue and at a moment of perceived crisis within the game they have come to articulate a form of ‘football consciousness’.

In this section I have shown how a broader section of both FC United’s support and Manchester United’s politicised support have articulated a form of ‘football consciousness’ in line with that advocated at the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally. This ‘consciousness’ was the product of the experience of the Glazer ownership and was often placed in relation to other clubs facing ownership upheavals such as Portsmouth FC and Liverpool FC. As such, shared ‘consciousness’ is most likely to be built out of the common experience, at different football clubs, of emergent crises of ownership. In the rest of the chapter I will discuss some limitations on the possibility of a universally shared ‘football consciousness’ existing amongst all fans. I will show that even amongst FC United fans expressions of inter-club rivalry still persist as a significant feature of their fandom and that, given the uneven outcomes of the neo-liberal political economy of football, fans of clubs such as Manchester City that have benefitted from the present system are unlikely to share in a desire to change the system through which football is governed.

Persistent Rivalry and the Desire for Success

Within the contemporary era, in which English football has taken a de-regulated and transnational form, Manchester United have been England’s most successful football club
winning the Premier League 12 times since its inception in 1992. Manchester City on the other hand, had at the time of my research gone 34 years without winning a trophy and had in the late 1990s fallen to the third tier of English football. However, the years immediately before my research took place had seen an upswing in Manchester City’s fortunes as a result of the club attracting trans-national investment. As set out in Chapter Six, the billionaire former prime minister of Thailand Thaksin Shinawatra purchased a controlling interest in the club in 2007 and then in September 2008 the Abu Dhabi United Group (ADUG), led by Sheikh Mansour, bought out the club. A member of the Abu Dhabi ruling family, Sheikh Mansour’s personal wealth was estimated at £15bn and his family’s wealth at between £400bn and £1trn and Manchester City’s new owners rapidly invested in new players for the club. Millward (2011: 155) sets out how Manchester City fans felt ‘pride’ in this new found wealth particularly because they felt it would give the club the ability to compete with Manchester United. Most FC United fans I spoke to about this celebration of Manchester City’s new found wealth were unimpressed, for example Dean spoke to me in fairly vitriolic terms about Manchester City fans’ reaction:

I think it’s truly predictably and laughably pathetic, I mean when you see them jumping up and down outside Wastelands [derogatory nickname given to Manchester City’s Eastlands stadium] with their teatowels on their head ... They spent years and years going “your trophies don’t count for shit because all the money that comes” - I’ve seen this on countless internet message boards and I’ve heard it said in pubs – “all the money comes from southern fans who aren’t real fans, that’s where you got the money to pay for blah blah blah none of your success really counts because of that” and then to suddenly see them jizzing [ejaculating in] their pants because they’re going to get bankrolled by one guy [sic] from the middle-east. For people who have spent so many years wallowing in this sense of bitter authenticity to be screaming up and down with pleasure because they’re some rich idiot’s play thing, it just shows, they’re just fucking knobs. They are the saddest bunch of pseudo-fans in the world ... They are out there celebrating because after their years and years of authenticity and “it’s terrible that big teams buy trophies” all of a sudden when they get their passport to the big time they are jizzing [in] their pants like the best of them. It’s fucking sad, I

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105 Manchester City lifted their first trophy in 35 years in May 2011 when they won the FA cup.
cannot think of any set of fans I have less time for at all ... I just think as soon as they get a chance, a sniff of a trophy, anything that will help them close that chasm between themselves and [Manchester] United even one little bit they will happily ditch any hint of principles they have clung too, in order to convince themselves they are something special (Dean, interview: 10/12/2010).

For Dean, Manchester City fans’ enthusiastic reaction to ADUG takeover marks them out as in-authentic fans, ‘the saddest bunch of pseudo-fans in the world’, and Dean sees this enthusiastic reaction as the product of their rivalry with Manchester United, ‘anything that will help them close that chasm between themselves and [Manchester] United even one little bit they will happily ditch any hint of principles’. Adam Brown, someone who has been involved in inter-club fan campaigning for twenty years, also suggested, in less vitriolic terms than Dean, that Manchester City fans’ reaction to the ADUG takeover was a product of their rivalry with Manchester United fans, whilst cautioning that this takeover was not in those fans’ long-term interest:

AB: And you know there’s a perpetual inferiority complex at [Manchester] City isn’t there? And they see the only way of challenging that is if some rich individual comes in. It’s highly contradictory because [Manchester] City’s image has been people’s club of Manchester and the local club and a rich man from Abu Dhabi comes in and they [does bowing gesture]. ‘Manchester welcomes you’. ¹⁰⁶

GP: Do you think that’s in [Manchester] City fans’ long term interests?

AB: What, to back the Sheikh? I don’t think it’s in anybody’s long term interests, no.

GP: Why so?

AB: I don’t think football clubs best interests are served either by sugar daddies or by people who are doing leveraged buy outs or even local independent businessmen, you know the guy who bought Middlesbrough [FC]. We’ve got a model of Premiership football now where the only teams that can succeed are either those that are in massive debt or those that are being bankrolled by

¹⁰⁶ ‘Manchester Welcomes You Sheikh Mansour’ is a slogan written on a banner displayed by Manchester City fans within the Eastlands stadium.
billionaires and that’s not a healthy basis for a long-term future – because the ones in debt will get into trouble sooner or later, as Liverpool [FC] have and they may soon go back into debt, [Manchester] United are in debt or you’ve got your Chelsea [FC]’s or your Man City’s and those individuals aren’t doing this in the interests of the football clubs. They’re doing it in their own interests, whether that’s strategic political reasons, whether it’s about investment in UK markets, whatever it is those interests aren’t about the football club, it may coincide with trying to make a football club successful but it will only last a period of time and sooner or later those interests will diverge (Adam Brown, interview: 10/11/2010).

Adam argues that ADUG buy-out is against Manchester City fans’ long-term interests because he believes these individuals are investing in ‘their own interests’ rather than ‘the interests of the football club’ and ‘sooner or later those interests will diverge’. Furthermore he sees this takeover as part of a total system which is against all fans’ interests – ‘we’ve got a model of Premiership football now where the only teams that can succeed are either those that are in massive debt or those that are being bankrolled by billionaires and that’s not a healthy basis for a long-term future’. However what both Dean and Adam identified, in line with the findings from Millward’s (2011) research about Manchester City fans’ reaction to the takeover, is that Manchester City fans’ positive reaction to the takeover is heavily motivated by the success this can bring them within the context of a rivalry with Manchester United fans. This shows one of the core difficulties in bringing about the kind of collective ‘football consciousness’ advocated by Walsh et al in order to bring about structural reform of the whole system. Within a free-market de-regulated system, which football club ownership is, uneven outcomes occur and some clubs may attract those owners wishing to asset-strip or load debt onto the club while other clubs may receive huge investment from incoming owners as in the case of Manchester City. Given the desire for team success and ‘pride’ in relation to rival supporters then it is unlikely that those supporters who are the beneficiaries (certainly in the short-term) of the present system, such as Manchester City fans, are going to push for reform of the system because their immediate interests are aligned with the system.107 The argument I am making here is

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107 Indeed even a Manchester City supporter such as Dave Wallace, long-term editor of the Manchester City fanzine King of the Kippax and one-time fan representative on the board at Manchester City following a fan campaign to remove chairmen Peter Swales in the early 1990s (See: Millward 2011: 147-148), subordinates his belief in supporter ownership to a celebration of the success the ADUG ownership can bring: ‘Look, we'd all like our clubs to be owned by fans, or run like
similar to an argument Anthony King made in relation to the Manchester United supporters he researched in the early 1990s. King suggests that while these supporters rejected many of the commercialising changes for having a negative impact on their match-day experience they were simultaneously accepting of these changes carried out by the club hierarchy because they provided the financial means for Manchester United to be successful: ‘The need for the masculine support to have a successful team, since their own status is informed by that success, drives the lads into alignment with the new directors, despite the fact that the project of the latter threatens the lads’ fandom at another level’ (2002: 168).

So King argues that because of the status playing success gives ‘the lads’ in relation to rival fans they come to share a common interest with the club’s owners and we can see something similar in relation to Manchester City and the macro-structure which (non)governs the English game. This of course does not invalidate Adam Brown’s argument above about the long-term interest of supporters but I think it does explain one reason for the difficulty of bringing about cross-club solidarity, and a ‘football consciousness’, to bring about change within the game. However, amongst FC United fans the relationship between Manchester United’s success, rivalry and political mobilisation is a complicated one and is distinct from both the reactions of Manchester City fans and the Manchester United fans in King’s research described above and I now wish to look at this relationship amongst FC United fans in more depth.

As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Six, most FC United fans, within a context where they have been accused by some other Manchester United fans as having ‘betrayed’ or ‘turned their back’ on the club, consider themselves to still be Manchester United supporters. This continued support for Manchester United was shown through the celebration of Manchester United’s on-field success. For example, Sarah told me about FC United fans watching Manchester United games:

> I’ve got some very anti FC [United], Big United [Manchester United] friends … they have this mistaken belief that we’ve turned our backs on [Manchester] United … I always think if only you could get them to sit in a pub with a whole lot of FC United fans and see the intensity, concentration and celebration and the gloom when an

the German clubs, but that’s not how it is if you want to be successful in this league, and the transformation on the pitch has been amazing’ (Dave Wallace quoted in Vulliamy 2012)
away goal [a goal against Manchester United] goes in ... you just think perhaps it would change their mind (Sarah, interview: 3/8/2009).

Further to this, Manchester United’s successes were celebrated by FC United fans in relation to fan rivalries with supporters of Manchester City, Liverpool FC and, to a lesser extent, Leeds United. The following extract from my fieldnotes demonstrates this persistence of rivalry amongst many FC United fans:

12th December 2009

Following the FC United game, I got the tram back to central Manchester from Bury. There were only a few FC United fans in my carriage and it was a peaceful and quiet journey until we reached Victoria Station. Here Manchester City fans on their way back from their game at Bolton boarded the tram. There were probably around twenty five Manchester City fans in the carriage I was travelling in, relative to about fifteen FC United fans. Immediately upon the Manchester City fans entering the carriage a couple of FC United fans in their late 20s or early 30s began a chant:

‘In 76, now this is true,
A trophy was won by a team in blue,
It’s been a long time, since that day,
So we’ll sing them a song that they fucking hate,
34 years, fuck all’

The ‘34 years, fuck all’ line was repeated over and over again. A group of younger FC United supporters in front of me, who were aged around 14 to 15 started joining in with this chant. When this chant finished the groups of younger fans in front of me launched into further anti Manchester City chants:

‘They’ve got the tallest floodlights in the league, cos’ City are a massive club
They’ve got the widest pitch in the league, cos’ City are a massive club
They’ve got three stars on their badge, cos’ City are a massive club’

‘My old man said be a City fan, I said bollocks you’re a cunt (you’re a cunt!)
I’d rather shag a bucket with a big hole in it,
Than be a City fan for just one minute,
With hatchets and hammers and stanley knives and spanners we’ll show those City bastards how to fight (how to fight!)

‘The Council House (the Council House),
Is Never Full (is Never Full),
The Council House Is Never Full,
Unless they play Man United,
The Council House is never full’

The singing amongst the FC United fans was only brought to an end by the tram arriving at its final destination of Manchester Piccadilly station. As some of the younger FC United fans who had been sat in front of me made to leave the tram, a Manchester City fan made a comment out of my earshot but which clearly questioned whether these lads were from Manchester as one of them furiously responded ‘I’m from Manchester you fucking dickhead- were you even alive the last time [Manchester] City won a trophy?’.

What this incident demonstrates is the continued pertinence of a rivalry to Manchester City fans for many FC United fans, particularly when they share the same physical spaces, such as the Manchester public transport system in this incident, and the way in which Manchester United success viz a viz Manchester City lack of success is a continued source of ‘pride’ to many FC United fans. So the ‘34 years, fuck all’ chant is used to a denigrate Manchester City fans for their team’s lack of success, while another chant sarcastically mocks Manchester City fans supposed pretension to supporting a ‘massive club’ by virtue of having the ‘tallest floodlights in the league’ as opposed to any on-pitch success. Perhaps most interestingly, during the incident I recounted status was claimed by the FC United fans due to Manchester City not filling their stadium – ‘the council house is never full, unless they play Man United’. There is a certain paradox in FC United fans, who are largely boycotting Old Trafford, using empty seats at Eastlands (and implicitly sell-outs at Old Trafford) as a means to assert superiority over Manchester City fans. Many of these

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108 The Chant mockingly refers to the Eastlands stadium as ‘the council house’ in reference to the fact that Manchester City rent the stadium from Manchester City Council.
chants I recounted being sung on the tram were also sung during FC United fans matches alongside songs that denigrated Manchester United’s other rivals, for instance the ‘34 years, fuck all’ chant was often followed by the chant ‘we all hate Leeds scum’ and various anti-scouse chants were sung in reference to Liverpool FC. When looking at this in relation to the idea of a ‘football consciousness’ a certain ambiguity emerges; as discussed earlier all FC United fans I spoke to were keen to see structural change to the way in which the game is run and wished to see fans of different clubs working to bring this about and yet rivalry and a celebration of Manchester United’s success within the current system remain important to many FC United fans. At certain moments then there is still a fleeting common interest between FC United fans and Manchester United’s owners in the desire for the club to remain successful, even if this success takes place within a system they find wholly objectionable, as one informant noted to me ‘it’s a bit paradoxical I suppose, we all still want [Manchester] United to be successful but that success strengthens the Glazers ownership’ (Dave, fieldnotes: 4/8/2009). Interestingly though both Adam Brown and Andy Walsh suggested to me that it was precisely the fact that Manchester United had been successful, in contrast to Manchester City, that enabled some Manchester United fans to take action political action to challenge the way in which the game is regulated and governed:

I wonder if one of the key differences [that explains different levels of supporter campaigning] was that [Manchester] United have been successful so there was never that clamour on the board to spend more money or the need for new owners because the money isn’t there, because [Manchester] United were successful anyway and at [Manchester] City you never had that. (Adam Brown, interview, 10/11/2010).

[Manchester] City fans also their views [are] probably tempered by the fact that they hadn’t had the success and you talk to [Manchester] City fans about why they accepted somebody as plainly inappropriate as Thaksin Sinawatra and it’s because they’ll accept anyone to achieve success. It’s like they know now that the Arabs may turn round and disappear tomorrow but they don’t care, they just want to win, they wanna compete, they want success. Whereas [Manchester] United fans have been to the top of the mountain, seen it all, enjoyed it but then there’s a bit
of a bitter taste in the mouth about the way it’s all been done and want something a bit better. (Andy Walsh, interview: 3/12/2010).

Both Adam and Andy suggest that success opened up the space for political action, the desire for ‘something a bit better’, amongst Manchester United fans while the relative lack of success prevents such political action amongst Manchester City fans. Their arguments suggest it was Manchester United’s sustained position as the dominant side in the de-regulated neo-liberal structure of Premier League football which provided the space of politicisation in which those fans involved in FC United came to wish to challenge the structure by which English football is (non)governed. Furthermore, this challenge was triggered by the particular experience of the Glazer family’s leveraged buy-out at Old Trafford. The problem this raises for bringing about collective cross-club fan campaigning is that FC United fans’ challenge to the present system, much like Manchester City fans’ acquiescence, is the product of their particular, unique, position within an uneven system. As such, from my discussion within this section, I would argue that an uneven de-regulated free-market structure of English football militates against the realisation of any kind of shared ‘consciousness’, or perception of common interests. This is precisely because a de-regulated free market model ensures groups of fans are positioned differently in relation to this structure and for some fans, such as those of Manchester City, their short term interests align with those of the uneven structure. In the last section, I suggested moments of shared ‘consciousness’ amongst supporters are most likely to emerge out of shared experience of moments of crisis within the current system. In the final section of this chapter I wish to look at the way in which the uneven experience of these moments of crisis have also been built into new forms of fan rivalry and ‘status’.

‘You’re going bust in the morning’: Old Rivalries Under New Terms

At the ‘Beyond the Debt’ rally Malcolm Clarke argued that ‘we’re [football fans] in this together’ in relation to the perceived crises of ownership and debt within English football. However, as I have suggested in the above section, the argument that football fans are all ‘in this together’ belies the unequal outcomes of the current de-regulated structure of English football. So at the time of ‘Beyond the Debt’ while Manchester United were beset by fears of a burgeoning debt crisis Manchester City were enjoying unprecedented riches. What I wish to suggest in this section is that these moments of crisis within the present system are used as forms of status within fan rivalries rather than creating a shared
‘consciousness’ or sense of solidarity. To illustrate this I want to discuss two incidents which occurred during my fieldwork, which show how two different sets of fans responded with glee to the spectre of potentially unsustainable debt at Manchester United.

On Wednesday the 27th January 2010, Manchester United played Manchester City at Old Trafford in the second leg of the League Cup. Manchester City had won the first leg 1-0 and this represented a major opportunity to break their thirty-four year wait without a trophy. The fixture came some 16 days after the release of the bond prospectus for the re-financing of Manchester United’s debt and amid large-scale press interest in the financial health of Manchester United (see for example: Conn 2010; Ladyman 2010; Kelso 2010). Furthermore, the match coincided with the early days of the Green and Gold protest amongst Manchester United fans. On the same night FC United were playing in a home fixture against Frickley Athletic at Gigg Lane. The match was watched by a slightly lower-than-usual midweek crowd of 1,468. Several people around me at the game listened to the Manchester United game on portable radios and Manchester United goals during the second half of the FC United games were met by cheers and chants of ‘34 years, fuck all’.

The FC United game finished before the game at Old Trafford and on my way back to the tram stop I heard that Manchester United had scored in the last-minute of the game to win 3-1 and eliminate Manchester City from the League Cup. On the journey home from the FC United game an incident occurred which is salient to the discussion in this section and I now wish to revisit my fieldnotes on this incident:

I got a bus back from the centre of Manchester to Withington. On board there were several Manchester United fans on their way back from Old Trafford, a couple of them were wearing Green and Gold scarfs. Just in front of where I was sitting, a party of smartly dressed older people were stood up – three women and one man – as no seats were available. The man in the party began to engage a Manchester United fan sat a couple of rows in front of me in conversation. It quickly became apparent that the older man was a Manchester City supporter as the conversation turned to football and rapidly to Manchester United’s current

109 ‘Second leg’ refers to the second game in a two game fixture between two sides where the cumulative score over those two games decides who progresses through to the next round of the competition.

110 A suburb in the south of the city.
financial state. The Manchester City fan asserted that ‘it doesn’t matter that [Manchester] City lost tonight’ because ‘Manchester United are in 700 million pounds of debt’ and ‘in ten years’ time Old Trafford will be a Primark’. The Manchester United fan tried to argue back suggesting Manchester United were ‘the biggest club in the world’ but the Manchester City fan only became more vociferous claiming the League Cup would be ‘[Manchester] United’s last trophy for a while’ and ‘we will see in ten years’ time how many trophies [Manchester] City have compared to [Manchester] United’. The argument was only brought to a halt by the Manchester United fan leaving the bus (fieldnotes: 27/1/2010).

What interests me about this exchange is the way in which the Manchester City fan uses the financial situation of Manchester United as a way to claim status over the Manchester United fan. So he argued it ‘doesn’t matter’ that Manchester City lost because Manchester United’s financial plight was such that Old Trafford would have to be sold to become a branch of ‘Primark’.111 This claiming of status in relation to Manchester United’s financial state was not restricted to just one isolated Manchester City fan. The ‘KSTL’ column in UWS fanzine recorded how during the game at Old Trafford Manchester City fans had sung ‘there’s only one Malcolm Glazer’ and chanted ‘USA’, in reference to the Glazer’s nationality, and also suggested Manchester City fans had waved twenty pound notes at Manchester United fans to highlight their clubs comparative wealth.112 While, the Manchester City King of the Kippax blog, before a game between the two sides in April 2010, suggested Manchester City fans should sing ‘U.N.I-T.E.D, that spells fucking debt to me’ and ‘We love the Glazers we do, we love the Glazers we do, We love the Glazers we do, cos the Glazers have screwed you’ to ‘wind up’ Manchester United fans (KOTK Editor: 2010). It can be see here how the potential debt crisis at Manchester United was, through chants and songs celebrating their financial turmoil and praising the Glazer ownership, turned into a source of ‘status’ by Manchester City fans to assert superiority in a rivalry with Manchester United fans. However, this celebration of a potential debt crisis at Manchester United was not just restricted to Manchester City fans. When I attended West Ham United’s game at Old Trafford on the 23rd February 2010, by which time the Green and

111 Primark is a low-price clothing store.

112 KSTL stands for K Stand top left. K Stand is the former name of the section of the now E stand closest to where away fans sit in Old Trafford.
Gold protest was in full swing and had caught international press attention, West Ham United fans displayed a similar attitude towards concerns over Manchester United debt to that of Manchester City fans. During the game West Ham United fans sang ‘you’re going bust in the morning’ and ‘Stand up for the Glazers’ towards the Manchester United fans (fieldnotes: 23/2/2010). The potential of Manchester United ‘going bust’, rather than being a source of solidarity between fans, becomes a means through which one set of fans gains ‘status’ over another. It is particularly interesting that West Ham United fans chose to assert ‘status’ in this way given that, as detailed in the introduction, West Ham United had only recently suffered a crisis of ownership themselves before being bought out by David Gold and David Sullivan in January 2010. The KSTL column in UWS contrasted West Ham United fans’ reaction to the issues surrounding the Glazer takeover to those of Portsmouth FC fans who had visited the week before:

The two most recent clubs to visit Old Trafford have had more than their fair share of afflictions, each experiencing a financial meltdown of their own. We should share sympathy with Portsmouth [FC] and West Ham [United] fans as they too have suffered from irresponsible financial management and dodgy owners. Unfortunately, the word ‘sympathy’ is not in the vocabulary of your average KSTLer. However the contrasting attitudes of the two sets of visitors ensured they received varying levels of empathy. Respect was earned by the small band of visiting Portsmouth [FC] fans for embracing the Anti-Glazer campaign, with many even wearing newly purchased green and gold scarves … West Ham [United] fans arrived with a huge chip on their shoulder, possibly a consequence of being saved from administration by a couple of sleazy porn barons who used to be Birmingham [City FC] fans.113 ‘Are you Norwich in disguise?’ they smugly sang … Further evidence of the Hammers lack of class was shown when the goons sang ‘Stand up for the Gla-zie-ers (KSTL, UWS: 2010).114

So the column began by noting a commonality between Manchester United, Portsmouth FC and West Ham United, ‘they too have suffered from irresponsible financial management and dodgy owners’, and whilst noting that ‘sympathy’ wasn’t normally something involved in their fandom the columnist suggests ‘the contrasting attitudes of the two sets of visitors

113 David Gold and David Sullivan owned Birmingham City FC prior to owning West Ham United.

114 ‘Are you Norwich in disguise?’ refers to Norwich City FC whose kit is green and yellow.
ensured they received varying levels of empathy’. While they suggest ‘respect was earned’ by the Portsmouth FC fans for ‘embracing the anti-Glazer campaign’, in contrast West Ham United fans were seen as lacking ‘class’ for mocking Manchester United’s ownership plight. I think ‘KSTL’ identifies the crucial reason for this difference in attitude when they suggest it is the ‘consequence of [West Ham United] being saved from administration’. While undergoing ownership crises simultaneously is enough for a (mild) form of solidarity between Portsmouth FC and Manchester United fans, the joint wearing of anti-Glazer scarfs, merely having undergone an ownership crisis in the recent past proved no basis for any sense of solidarity, indeed quite the opposite, amongst West Ham United fans.

In this section I have shown how crises emerging within the structure of English football, far from being a source of a new ‘consciousness’ or solidarity between fans, have been co-opted into new forms of rivalry and ‘status’ by those fans unaffected, or no longer affected, by these moments of crises.

Conclusion

This chapter has assessed whether, in the light of a moment of crisis within the English game, a wider supporter movement to change the current ownership and governance structure of the English game is likely to emerge. I focused particularly on how Andy Walsh and others involved with national supporter activism have advocated a form of ‘football consciousness’ where supporters of all clubs recognise a shared enemy, in the form of the current club owners and regulators of the English game, and put aside rivalry to campaign together for an alternative in the form of supporter ownership. While I noted the presence of such a ‘football consciousness’ amongst a wider section of FC United’s support and Manchester United’s politicised support, this was the result of the particular experience of the Glazer takeover and I suggested such a form of collective ‘football consciousness’ was harder to find across a broader cross-section of supporters. Chiefly, I argued that because of the uneven outcomes generated by the current de-regulated system of football club ownership some fans, such as those of Manchester City, are unlikely to wish to be part of collective action to reform the current system because their current short-term interests, in terms of having a successful club to support, are aligned with the continuation of the present system. Furthermore, I have shown that the emergence of crises affecting particular clubs’ financial solvency has, rather than creating a universal shared consciousness amongst supporters, become the means through which new forms of rivalry
are expressed and status claimed amongst fans. As such then, the vision of a supporter movement involving fans of all clubs leading to a radical change in ownership and governance structures within the game has not come to pass, in part precisely because the uneven de-regulated neo-liberal structure of English football militates against the realisation of any kind of shared ‘consciousness’ and, therefore, mass fan campaigning. However, it is important to note that while this more radical hope has not come to fruition, the high profile nature of the crises of football club ownership and finance discussed at the start of the chapter and the campaigning of those involved with supporter-owned clubs and Supporters Direct has led to some smaller, reformist, steps towards a change in football governance and ownership. As noted in the thesis introduction, both the Labour Party and Conservative Party manifestos for the 2010 election contained promises to look to reform football governance and the Coalition agreement contained a pledge to reform the rules of football governance to encourage supporter ownership. This led onto the cross party ‘Football Governance’ inquiry launched in 2011 by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, to which FC United submitted evidence, but as yet no actual legislative changes have resulted. Nonetheless, FC United has offered support and advice to supporters of a number of smaller football clubs, including Wrexham FC, Chester FC and Lewes FC who have gone on to successfully take control of the clubs they support (or in the case of Chester FC form their own club following the liquidation of Chester City FC) following problems of ownership and financial uncertainty.

While what I have discussed here is explicitly focussed on the field of political campaigning within English football, it gives a wider insight into the difficulty of achieving a collective consciousness and collective campaigning for political change within a neo-liberal economy, even at a time of financial uncertainty and upheaval. The largest radical movement to have emerged since the financial crisis hit in 2008 is the ‘occupy movement’, which through its slogan of ‘we’re the 99%’ has attempted to create a form of class consciousness which could lead to a true mass-movement and radical reform of the current economic system. The problem for such an attempt at creating a collective movement for reform is that within most neo-liberal western economies, despite the financial crisis, different groups among those within the ‘99%’ are positioned very differently in relation to the overall system. While some of the ‘99%’ face long-term unemployment, low-wages and precarious living conditions others enjoy the flip-side of inequality. As such, much like amongst football fans, those who are beneficiaries of the present system are unlikely, as a mass, to
push for wholesale reform of it because their own short-term interests are aligned with its continuation. Inequality militates against the radical overhaul of unequal systems. Such an argument is borne out by the fact that, much as in football, no movement that actually involves the ‘99%’ has materialised and radical reform of western socio-economic systems, despite the on-going upheaval of the financial crisis, has not materialised.
Conclusion

This thesis has presented an in-depth ethnographic analysis of FC United. It has provided an account of supporters’ motivations for following the club and how these have impacted upon the form the club takes and fans’ relationships to FC United. In doing so it has pushed forward social scientific understandings of English football fandom by giving detailed insight in to one of the most important recent developments in the game, the setting up of supporter-owned clubs by fans of existing teams, and by providing an ethnographic understanding of the dynamics underpinning protest amongst supporters. Furthermore, the study has also looked at FC United as an important form of contemporary collective action and analysed the wider insights the club may give into the issues and motivations that may mobilise such action in the contemporary era. In generating such insights into collective action both within football and more broadly, I particularly focused on what this study could say about issues of community and place and issues of political engagement and activism both within the context of football fandom and more widely. In this conclusion I will set out these insights in relation to these issues in some depth but first I want to highlight an important further point to emerge from this thesis.

My analysis has shown that FC United cannot be understood without appreciating the wider historical, political and economic context in which it was formed and continues to exist. In particular, in Chapter Two I showed how the rapid commercialisation of Manchester United, which led to many of the issues (discussed in Chapters Three and Four) which motivated support for FC United, was part of a wider capitalist transformation within England that in turn reflected a neo-liberal turn across much of the world. In turn, Chapter Five showed that the community initiatives conducted by FC United were shaped in part by new modes of governance and public sector provision in the UK. Chapter Seven highlighted the significance of wider changes in the British Left in order to understand the activist make-up of FC United, while Chapter Eight again addressed the importance of the neo-liberalised structure of football and suggested it had significant implications for the possibility of FC United becoming part of a larger movement within football. In consequence, then, the thesis demonstrates both that a full understanding of FC United specifically, and English football fandom more generally, requires the appreciation of broader historical, political and economic processes and also that through ethnographic engagement with football fandom, and FC United in particular, an anthropological understanding of the social implications of these wider processes can be gleansed. With that
in mind I now wish to discuss in greater depth the insights the thesis has generated, in relation to the broader themes of community, place and political engagement and activism addressed in this study, and also in relation to the research questions set out in the introduction.

The first research question set was ‘how is community manifest within the context of FC United?’ Community has emerged within this thesis as a crucial feature for understanding FC United but community has been shown to not be reducible to a single meaning and instead has diverse manifestations within this context. Chapter Three, showed how for my informants the process of commercialisation at Manchester United in the 1990s had led them to feel increasingly dissatisfied with the Old Trafford match-day. This dissatisfaction had been expressed through upset at the disruption of significant social relationships around watching Manchester United and feelings of alienation and a lack of commonality with ‘new’ supporters, due to differing modes of support but also overlaid by particular narratives about differences in class and locality. Such experiences shaped FC United’s aim to provide affordable ticket prices and a non-restrictive match-day environment and I showed how my informants expressed how watching FC United allowed them to experience particular feeling of commonality and community with fellow supporters, due to shared modes of support but also a common set of politics over the impact of the Glazer takeover and wider commercialisation of Manchester United. Community, in this chapter, then, was about a particular quality of sociality experienced around watching football, the feeling that you had something in common with one another and that you shared particular modes of behaviour and thought. Chapter Four, looked at how FC United came to have a particular emphasis on being of benefit to the ‘local community’. I showed how a set of issues in the 1990s, associated with Manchester United becoming an increasingly large commercial concern within the neo-liberal economic model of English football, acted to raise many fans’ consciousness of issues of locality and of the ‘precariousness’ of the relationship between Manchester United and Manchester as a locality. Furthermore, I highlighted the how those running football clubs in the 1990s sought to frame the relationship of club to supporters as that of a series of economic transactions with individual customers. I argued that, in the context of an increased consciousness of issues of locality, many fans sought to critique this economic reductionism by arguing that Manchester United had a reciprocal moral responsibility to the community in which it was located and that Manchester United rightfully belonged (in an economic and moral sense)
to the people of Manchester. In turn such a claim was manifest in the formation of FC United as a club which recognised specific obligations to its ‘local community’. The notion of community under discussion in Chapter Four can be understood as a particular moral and political claim, a political and moral claim specifically about the football club’s duty to the social collective in which it is situated and, following from this, the type of exchange relationships football clubs should engage in. While Chapter Three and Four discussed two quite distinct ways in which community was elicited, I would suggest they highlight a common thread about the nature of community at play within this context, which is what Delanty has called the ‘radical impulse ... present in the idea of community’ (2010: 95). Both chapters highlight a process of politicisation, for those fans that formed FC United, in relation to the transformation occurring at Manchester United which was couched in a discourse around ideas of commonality, social connection and community, and in turn such a discourse was first used to contest such a transformation and then bring a new reality into being with the formation of FC United. These chapters therefore suggest, in line with the work of Amit (2002), Dawson (2002), Delanty (2010) and Rapport and Overing (2000), that community, within the context of the capitalist transformation of the neo-liberal era, is both a way in which feelings and ideas of belonging and social affiliation can continue to be expressed but is also a conceptual resource through which the consequences of such transformation can be both understood and contested through collective action.

However, Chapter Five highlighted an important further element to understanding the nature of community within the context of FC United. There I looked at the community football initiatives carried out by FC United, which were one of the principal manifestations of FC United’s commitment to be of benefit to the ‘community’. I set out how such football in the community initiatives rapidly expanded in both scale and scope following the election of the New Labour government in 1997, who were committed to a governmental project of ‘rebuilding communities’ and saw football as carrying an instrumental power to achieve just such a thing. It was my contention that through their community football initiatives FC United have become part of a new de-regulatory governance structure of the United Kingdom, particularly at the level of local government, emerging since the Blair Governments. I argued that this governance role was manifest within FC United in terms of the club running schemes aimed at meeting particular social policy agendas, in the community initiatives drawing on funding from a liberalised public sector which has been increasingly opened up to non-state bodies and in the club, through the building of its own
ground, taking responsibility for delivering Manchester City Council social and economic regeneration agendas. Community in this chapter then was chiefly manifest as a particular governmental phenomenon.

The second research question raised was ‘in what ways are ideas of place mobilised by FC United supporters?’ This thesis has shown the importance of ideas of place, of Manchester and Mancunianess, to understanding FC United and supporters’ relationship to the club. I have approached place in this thesis not as self-evident location but rather as a set of symbolic and imaginative practices about appropriate action and ways of being in the world amongst fans. Further to this, I have also shown how supporters from beyond Manchester take part in these symbolic and imaginative practices. In Chapters Three and Four, drawing upon King’s (2003) work, I looked at how Manchester, in the light of the commercialisation of Manchester United, had often been invoked previous to the formation of FC United as a common symbol to define perceived appropriate modes of support. However, in Chapter Three I also suggested that such a symbolic function for Manchester had dissipated as attendance at FC United itself came to symbolise a shared set of understandings about what constituted appropriate support. Chapter Six focussed on how FC United fans created a particular imagination of Manchester as a ‘radical’ city based on a specific historicity of the city. I suggested that such imaginations needed to be understood as inter-subjectively created and, therefore, subject to dispute and change. I argued that such an imagination of Manchester became a way through which FC United supporters justified actions taken but also provided for them a guide to political action both within and, for some, outside of football. In focusing within these chapters on the importance of imagination and symbolism and particular forms of practice and modes of behaviour in the construction of place and, importantly, how this can become implicated within collective action, I have made a contribution to the understanding of place amongst anthropologists and academic researchers of football fandom.

The third research question was ‘do FC United fans connect support for the club to wider political issues?’ Chapter Seven particularly addressed this question by looking at the relationship between FC United, as a form of collective action within the sphere of football, and wider political ideas and political engagement. My ethnographic analysis in Chapter Seven suggested that such a relationship was defined by contestation amongst FC United fans and subject to different interpretations. Some fans explicitly connected FC United to ‘socialist’ or ‘left-wing’ political ideas and believed the club could and should play a part in
producing a wider political change within society. However, I also showed how other fans wished to actively distance support for the club from wider political issues. While in Chapter Two I showed how the neo-liberalisation of football helped to create many of the issues that FC United was formed in opposition to, my ethnography suggests that the club as a whole is unlikely to become formally aligned with any particular wider political movement against neo-liberalism more broadly. Indeed, my analysis in Chapter five supported this point by showing, despite the rhetoric of FC United as a ‘socialist’ football club, how through the club’s community programme FC United is also part of neo-liberal de-regulatory forms of local governance. One important further element to the relationship between wider politics and FC United revealed in Chapter Seven was the presence of a sizeable number of former socialist and leftist activists at the club and this may be revealing of a more general movement of people from radical socialist organisations to new types of political and social movements.

The final research question was ‘to what extent do FC United fans wish to be part of a wider movement within football? What is the likelihood of any such wider movement emerging?’ Chapter Eight discussed an emergent moment of crisis within English football, which reflected the wider global financial crisis, and the possibility of a mass fan movement emerging in response to this crisis within the game. I set out how Andy Walsh and others involved in supporter campaigning had argued that in response to this crisis supporters of all clubs needed to recognise a shared enemy, club owners and those running the game, and campaign together regardless of fan rivalry to bring about supporter ownership. I argued that such a position could be understood as a form of ‘football consciousness’ analogous to Marxist understandings of class consciousness. My analysis suggested that such a ‘football consciousness’, and therefore desire to take part in a wider-movement within football, was visible amongst FC United fans but was harder to find amongst a broader cross-section of supporters. My argument contended that the unevenness of outcomes, in terms of ownership and financial solvency of clubs, generated by the current de-regulated system in English football meant joint campaigning between supporters of different clubs was unlikely as some fans’ short term interests aligned with the continuation of the present system. Furthermore, I showed how the uneven nature of this crisis of ownership and financial stability, rather than creating a shared consciousness, led to new expressions of fan rivalry which incorporated these moments of financial crisis. My analysis in Chapter Eight highlighted the difficulty of creating a shared consciousness and
collective campaigning to reform a total system within a neo-liberal economy, even at a time of emergent crisis.

**Final Remarks**

This era is dominated by the market but ... this does not mean the end of politics or community. It involves the creation of new forms of solidarity and identification and new types of political activity. (King 2003: 260).

King’s remark, from the final lines of *The European Ritual*, resonates with what has been discussed within this thesis. FC United is just such a new type of political activity emerging in the context of a neo-liberalised economic system in which market relations predominate. The creation and continuation of FC United has involved the active thinking through and debating of what forms of community and politics were at stake in the light of a wider political and economic context. Community, in its diverse manifestations, has been shown to be not only a motivational force leading supporters to form FC United but also an outcome of the club’s formation and the reflection of wider political discourses. In addition, ideas of place and what it meant to be a Mancunian also lay at the heart of many supporters’ relationship to the club. What was politically at stake beyond the confines of football was not given but, rather, contestation over this very question was shown to be a key feature of FC United. Finally, if the particular neo-liberal and free-market system of English football has been shown to have given rise to FC United as a new type of collective action, it was also shown to militate against the formation of a genuine mass movement amongst English football fans leading to total change of that very system.
Appendix 1: Making it work Evaluation Questionnaire

Tick in the circle below which response is most appropriate for you for each of these statements

1. Taking part in Making it Work has helped me stay fit and healthy
   Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree ○

2. Taking part in Making it Work has made me more likely to undertake voluntary work in my community
   Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree ○

3. My time at Making it Work has made it more likely I will be able to go on to the job or further study I want
   Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree ○

4. Taking part in the course has helped me make new friends
   Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Neither agree nor disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree ○
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115 I have not included page numbers for fanzine articles because most fanzines do not include page numbers. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Red Issue’s issue numbering system changed over time – initially giving a volume and issue number reflecting the season of publication, then just an issue number reflecting the particular issues place within the sequence of publications within a given season, and finally an issue number which reflected the particular issues place within the total number of Red Issues published. I have given the issue number as it appears on the front cover of each particular Red Issue.


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