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### **The making of "home vs. away" through football fandom in Istanbul**

Football (soccer) fandom has a very significant spatial component which I believe is under threat at this time. Two reasons I identify for this are the advent of virtual technologies that alter the definition of space and the phenomenon of what has come to be called "industrial football" (or the football industry) which targets transforming stadia rendering irrelevant fans' emotional attachments to teams, stadia and the game as a whole. This paper is an exploration of how fans try to carve out a space for themselves in the realm of football today, literally and metaphorically. One key way in which fans do this is by demarcating various spaces in the city as either home or away. After explicating this, I will also talk about fan reactions to stadium reconstruction processes. This I will argue is intimately tied to how they make *prospective* places – places that come to literal existence *after* they have already been made to some extent by those who will engage with them.

So I'm referring to **two** processes when I talk about fans trying to carve out a space for themselves.

Like in all other facets of life, the **internet** has come to redefine belonging, subjectivity and identity in fandom as well. While it used to be so that going to games, spending time in fan pubs or some parks could instate and reinforce fandom in the face of other fans and oneself; now there is also a virtual medium that one needs to engage with. Fandom is redefining itself spatially via online forums, wikis and e-mail groups.

Secondly, I think that fan discourse of affect in explaining attachment to teams is rendered somewhat irrelevant and naïve in the face of intensifying **commercialization and commodification** of football. While the football industry tries to "bank" on the emotional investments of fans by marketing the love for football it also deems inappropriate some spatial attachments fans have come to cherish.

For example, my talks with various football federation officials in Istanbul reveal that stadia relocations outside of the city center are viewed as key moves in “cleaning up” stadia and as such transforming fans and fan culture. Backed up by provisions from the law, officials believe that large, comfortable stadia outside of city centers will work towards “civilizing” fans by molding them into seats they would otherwise stand on or break to throw onto the pitch. These new stadia are also foreseen to function as social complexes including facilities such as restaurants, cafes and stores to generate profit for clubs. As many of my interlocutors put it, this realm of profit that promotes “orderly” stadia with expensive season tickets aims to “make spectators out of fans,” who would treat football games like any other social activity and watch their team like they would watch a play or a film. Therefore fans’ affective relations to the terraces they grew up in, the way they cherish sharing drinks on the walk towards the stadium and their veneration of the physical discomfort at the expense of maintaining a “spirit of fandom” becomes irrational if not illegible. In other words, the football industry desires a certain *kind* of love, one where you show your love for the team by buying more jerseys, not by breaking world decibel records in an overflowing terrace with three people positioned strategically on one seat... *pause*... True story by the way.

Consider a fan/journalist’s response to the relocation offer presented to the Istanbul club Beşiktaş by the minister of culture and tourism in March 2011.

The Dolmabahçe road (which is the road from the neighborhood centre to the stadium) is beautiful only with us, romantic only with us and real only with us.  
Our stadium is old. We love it.  
Our stadium is old-fashioned. We love it.  
The toilets of our stadium don’t work. We love it.  
Our stadium doesn’t have under-soil heating. We love it.  
Our stadium is not big enough. It’s OK, we’ll squeeze.

I find the usage of the term “squeeze” very telling here since I believe that fans are being squeezed also in a metaphoric sense due to the developments I just described.

Sport geography's leading figure John Bale<sup>1</sup> (Giulianotti 2005) has coined the term "topophilia" (love of place) to explain people's emotional attachments to stadia. Fans who regularly frequent stadia since childhood grow to view these spaces as sacred, as protective homes and as sources of local pride<sup>2</sup>. In some cases it is also the neighborhood within which the stadium is located that can largely form how fans experience their fandom. For example, a fan I interviewed told me that spending time with a rival fan on home grounds is still an expression of *his* fandom for *his* team. He explicitly explained that being a fan of his team meant that you "hung out" in this neighborhood and anyone who is socially engaged in this space is, for him, automatically an accomplice in the practice and experience of his fandom – since they are active in the *relational making* of the neighborhood as his home.

Consider the following example from Selim, a 28-year-old male Beşiktaş fan replying to my question as to how he would feel if the home grounds of his team were demolished for reconstruction:

If they tore the stadium down, it would feel like they were throwing away my childhood memories. This is a place which has been fundamental in shaping me as a person, I've been going to games there since the age of 15. I have memories there and demolishing it would simply mean that I would never be able to go there again. İnönü is like home.

I ask from him to elaborate what he means by "home." He answers: "It's comfortable. It's a place where you know you won't be judged. It's a place where you feel secure that whatever you say or think, 99% of the people will agree and support you."

Another interlocutor, Yasin, and I met at a coffee shop in the neighborhood of Beşiktaş where the team's home stadium is located. As we were speaking about what it means to him to have grown up here in this neighborhood, playing football in the streets and going to games, someone walked past us and greeted the young man I was interviewing. Yasin turned to me and said, "you see. This is what I mean. I would never be alone here. Even if I have no money, no family, no job, nothing. I would never be alone in Beşiktaş. As long as I'm here, I know I'll be fine."

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<sup>1</sup> Giulianotti, R. 2005. *Sport: A Critical Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

<sup>2</sup> See also Gaffney (2008).

Mind you, the “neighborhood” he is talking about is one of the most central locations in Istanbul with a population of over 46 thousand people. So I wouldn’t want you to imagine the backstreets of Alfama here in Lisbon when I talk about a “neighborhood.”

Well then what is home? In *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1964) characterizes home as a “felicitous” space, a happy space as opposed to a hostile space. Home is literally your “corner” of the world, it is a safe place. Your childhood home is inscribed in your body, your motions remember its peculiarities and odd tricks. While I appreciate Bachelard’s depiction of home and its protective nature, I find it quite interesting that homes, described as shields from the outside, are possibly the most dense and intensely crowded public spaces in the case of fandom. For Bachelard, one builds a sense of self and understands the non-self by means of engaging with the home – very much like the way Selim talks about the stadium as hosting his childhood memories and contributing to the way his character has formed.

Travel stories to the stadium are stories of coming home; remembered both individually and in relation to the larger community of fans who constitute a “family” in the stadium. It is sure telling that official terminology marks the location of games as home and away but the quotes above suggest that fans’ appropriations of these terms go beyond simple terminology and demonstrate how everyday practices load layers of meaning onto these formalities. Not only does this challenge conventional depictions of private and public spheres, but it also gives us key insight into the mapping of a city, its felicitous and hostile zones based on one’s affiliation with a football team. Moreover, fan discourse on home and away also transforms the definition of felicity versus hostility since stadia in Istanbul could easily be conjured as hostile places at face value given the heavy policing, lit torches, lack of amenities and roads paved with broken beer bottles.

Similar to how fans make homes out of spaces of differing scales through football, they also mark various locations in the city as essentially and forever “away.” One’s own city or even the neighborhood they grew up in can easily become an “away” turf depending on which team they support. For example, I spoke with an 18 year-old female Beşiktaş fan who has lived on a street off the Bagdad Avenue on the Asian side of Istanbul all her life. This particular avenue and its surroundings are associated with a rival Istanbul team Fenerbahçe. Zerrin, my interlocutor told me that she feels both awkward and proud to walk around her neighborhood with her Beşiktaş jersey. She said, “I can look out the window of my room and see Fenerbahçe fans drinking at the pub below. How do you think that makes me feel to hear them swear at Beşiktaş? It’s frustrating. I hate it. At the same time, I feel like I’m displaying my courage when I walk around here with my own jersey. It’s like saying, ‘look at me, I can exist here among you.’” Her existence in a neighborhood which is the only “home” she has known all her life becomes a point of negotiation and attestation as she practically and discursively re-makes this space as an away turf.

In Turkish we use the French derived term “*deplasman*” to signify an away game. One is literally de-placed, robbed of the space she has made into a home-place, when playing or attending an away game. Consider my 32-year-old interlocutor Feyyaz’s story about reaching an away game in Istanbul.

It’s a nice day, we drink a few beers here in Beşiktaş and then we plan to take the ferry across to Kadıköy and go to the Fenerbahçe vs. Beşiktaş game. Do they let you in the ferry as a group? No. Alright we say, we’ll take one of the smaller boats. Again, the police won’t let you in. We’re getting angry you see, with each rejection. We decide to split a cab but the cabbie asks for three times the money of what it would normally cost. We try to take a bus, it’s impossible. By this time, you can imagine how infuriated we are. So what do we do? We start walking towards the bridge. And because you’re not allowed to walk across the bridge, a police car picks a few of us up and takes us to the stadium. Now, imagine reaching the game in a damn police car. How am I supposed to stay calm after that? Then of course there is the fact that there is never any food or water served at the away fans’ terraces. I remember that legendary game where we beat them 4-3 in Kadıköy. When the footballers came to the stands for us to cheer together and celebrate, all we could scream out was “water, give us some water.”

Away games are recalled as experiences of deprivation – deprivation of mobility, of self-expression and ultimately of place. Groups of fans that are made to arrive at away locations hours in advance, escorted by police and made to wait in the away stadium until after the home team's fans have cleared the scene, hold onto these experiences of away turfs even when there is not a football game. For example, they choose not to go to a match of the national team if it is being hosted by the stadium of an Istanbul rival – or they avoid certain neighborhoods in the city altogether. Consider Feyyaz's words about Bagdad Avenue: "That place represents for me everything that is wrong with Fenerbahçe. It carries the culture of Fenerbahçe – a whole bunch of wannabes that dress the same, speak the same and care only about money, only about winning."

One very interesting way in which fans deal with the displacement forced upon them by away stadia is displayed by fans of Trabzonspor, a team from the Black Sea coast town of Trabzon. Their well-known slogan reads, "For us, it's Trabzon everywhere." This is a clear attack on the displacing and depriving forces of away cities, stadia and terraces and a conscious effort to reclaim the away as home. Fans of the Istanbul municipality football team (also competing in the Turkish Super League) built *their* motto off of Trabzon's slogan – theirs reads "for us, everywhere is away." This team had no real fan base until September 2010 when a group of the same internet wiki users decided they were going to actively support a football team. The wiki they share is infamous for its excessive use of vulgar language and this is reflected in a banner they once designed for their footballers "sons of bitches – you're not alone." The home stadium of this team is the Istanbul Olympic Stadium located outside of the city center with difficult access in terms of transportation and a seating capacity of 80.000 people. In other words, it's a giant empty stadium that's hard to reach. So even when the team's newly-founded fan group goes to the home games, they can only fill a very small portion of this place. I find it very telling that an *online*

group, using marginalized vulgar language is attempting to reclaim the conventionally “away” as a “home” and is doing this by stressing their permanent predicament of homelessness and de-placement.

The question which I find intriguing in relation to the intense emotional discourse on attachment to stadia and specific neighborhoods as homes through football is how fans would respond to the overwriting of these experiences through relocation and reconstruction of stadia.

I argue that there is no essential response to the demolition of “home.” The response is highly contingent on the particularities of the *making* of prospective places – of new stadia. These particularities in turn depend on some extent to fans’ relations to industrial football.

At this time, two Istanbul teams Galatasaray and Beşiktaş are going through processes whereby their home stadia are or will be changing.

I spoke with both team’s fans and found altering perspectives in regard to the prospects of a new stadium.

While Galatasaray fans are welcoming of their new stadium, Beşiktaş fans are quite resistant to appreciate any sort of change the stadium might go under. Years before the construction started, Galatasaray fans started to build hopes and dreams based on the new stadium. They began praising it for its high technologies and “modern” qualities. Not only did they expect the stadium to bring success to their football team and generate wealth, some of them also believed it would change the face of their fandom by for example regulating gender relations. In other words, the Türk Telekom Arena was for a longtime in the making as a new home. Both the administration and the fans adopted the slogan of “it’s about time,” to express and legitimize a pressing *need* for a new stadium. The demands of industrial football were welcomed and used to justify the new project. Naming has been a large component in this making. Galatasaray fans started to refer to the neighborhood of the new stadium as Aslantepi (lionhill

– lion being the mascot of the team) and soon after the stadium was built they brought back the name of the founder in its official title – now it's called the Ali Sami Yen Sports Complex/Turk Telekom Arena. Therefore, neither the Galatasaray team nor the fans were moving into an empty space. The reason why they are not experiencing the move as an emotional trauma or the fact that some of them express how they can get over this soon is because they have been actively working towards *making* a new stadium; in every sense of the word.

Beşiktaş fans on the other hand are much less welcoming in general of a new stadium. They do admit that the current stadium lacks certain amenities. At the same time however, they feel like a new stadium project would severely damage their communal identity. Even though it's difficult to assign class affiliations to football teams in Istanbul, it is safe to say that Beşiktaş fans attribute to themselves a left-leaning and “anarchic” political identity. Once again, this is not to say that all fans share the same point of view, nor that those who *do*, agree on what it means to be left-leaning or anarchic. The fans take pride in “not playing by the same rules” as their rivals and hold onto the “spirit” of the neighborhood in a most romantic and nostalgic way to remind each other of what a “locally grounded” team Beşiktaş used to be. For them, a new home, precisely because it will be “orderly” reflecting the order of industrial football is a hostile space, a space that has sold-out to the global football economy. The making of a prospective stadium as the antipode of home reinforces their sense of “fandom in opposition” and reinserts their discourse of emotions and affect amidst a conversation where it is being obscured.

As such, spatiality in football allows us to trace changes in fan culture through responses to industrial football.

It also provides us with data to challenge essentialisms of conventional dichotomies such as home v. away, public v. private and felicitous v. hostile.

I'd like to end with pointing out that in regard to the topic of spatiality where new stadium projects are concerned, the problem at hand seems to be familiar: the highly different priorities of decision-makers and those affected by the decisions. When the culture and tourism minister of Turkey Ertuğrul Günay explained the need to relocate the Beşiktaş stadium due to the fact that "stomping fans made the stadium slip gradually towards the coastal Ottoman palace nearby," 30.000 fans responded to him in the next game with the following cheer: "that who doesn't stomp is not a Beşiktaş fan, we're stomping, we're stomping, stomping right into you Ertuğrul. The stadium is slipping, it's slipping, it'll slip right into you Ertuğrul."

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