

7 Turkish football, match-fixing and the fan's media

A case study of Fenerbahçe fans

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Introduction

Football was imported to Turkey by British merchants in the 1890s and has since become the most popular sport in the country (Irak, 2013: 30–31). While football is popular nationwide, the leading football clubs are predominantly concentrated in the city of Istanbul. Nearly 95 per cent of football enthusiasts throughout Turkey support either Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray or Beşiktaş – known as the ‘three giants’ of Turkish football (En fazla taraftarı, 2012). These three clubs owe their popularity to their historical position as Turkey’s semi-official ‘national team’. Throughout the 1910s, for example, these clubs represented rising Turkish nationalism and ethnic rivalries against Greek and Armenian teams, and later against occupation forces in the late Ottoman period (Gökaçtı, 2008: 70–73). These teams have subsequently managed to preserve their symbolic status in the modern era of football.

The popularity and historical significance of the ‘three giants’, combined with their centrality to Turkish nationalism and politics, means that any off-the-pitch ‘controversies’ involving these clubs (and Trabzonspor to a lesser extent) become wider political issues in Turkey. In 2011, for example, a police operation against match-fixing was initiated, targeting Fenerbahçe, the league champion of the previous season, and also featuring Beşiktaş and Trabzonspor to a lesser extent. Through an examination of fan blogs this chapter provides a critical account of the events surrounding the match-fixing scandal. According to a police investigation during the 2010/11 Turkish Super League season, 19 matches involving champions Fenerbahçe were fixed. League runner-up, Trabzonspor, and cup winner, Beşiktaş, were also implicated in the scandal as attempting to manipulate the outcome of games. Despite these serious allegations, the evidence base was low. Nevertheless, there were a number of conspiracy theories in circulation.

This chapter aims to analyse the Fenerbahçe fans’ reactions to match-fixing through their use of fan media; principally the blog Papazın Çayırı. In doing this I also critique fans’ perceptions of conventional media, the government, the judicial system, police, other teams, the Fenerbahçe Board and their imprisoned President, Aziz Yıldırım, the principal actor in the match-fixing operation. The

aim is to understand the political nature of these reactions, and to articulate whether these responses create a fans' democracy, which gives fans a share in the daily running of the football environment in Turkey. Arguably, due to their level of popularity amongst fans, the 'three giants' may appropriately be considered as 'micro-nations', possessing their own identities. Thus, it is important to know if the fans were primarily interested in defending their own group interests (such as more affordable ticket prices or better police treatment at the stadia) in their clubs, or in reaffirming their allegiance to the powerful ruling elite of the clubs.

Football stands, democratisation and politicisation

Since the 1970s, as football began to be aired extensively on television, football stands have gradually become more visible and audible. Football stands became a channel of fan expression, related or unrelated to football. The political feud between Spanish, Argentinian and English fans about the Falklands/Malvinas crisis during the 1982 World Cup in Spain, for example, was a textbook case of how football stadiums could be used to convey political messages (Williams *et al.*, 1984). Sandvoss (2003: 50–51) states that fandom is a part of 'everyday politics' and writes "the everyday discourses and actions of football fans suggest that fandom is political in both its content and its implications, even though negotiated outside the traditional spheres of political discourse." In his work about Lebanese football fans, Moroy (2000) confirms Sandvoss' view, claiming that the politicisation of football stands creates a 'liberated' space for the fans to express their political views. It can be said that football stands, as rather autonomous places, provide fans with an environment to express themselves. However, as McLean and Wainwright (2009: 68) argue, the hegemonic football culture – which is dominated by media, club owners and politicians – may easily block and manipulate the 'free speech' atmosphere of the stands.

In Turkey, as football has been dominated by a number of powerful individuals since the very beginning, the politicisation of football stands has been controlled and sanitised by dominant groups. Prior to the 1980 coup d'état, people had rarely considered the significance of football stands as spaces for mobilised political action. According to Bostancıoğlu (1993: 242–244), in Turkey, left-wing politics discarded football as the 'opium of masses' while, as Bora (1993: 231–237) argues, the right-wing perceived the rivalries of football as a "disturbance against the national unity". Therefore, the junta of the 1980 coup, which aimed to depoliticise the masses in order to impose its own crafted ideology, considered football as an ideal, harmless and apolitical social gathering. The junta government and the following Özal government invested highly in football, often subsidising bigger clubs. Football was also used as a distraction from Turkey's isolation from the Western world. Turkish football clubs started to excel in European cups in the 1990s, and these successes triggered a 'pop-nationalism' wave in football stands. This wave reflected Turkey's liminal position in relation to Europe, both seeking involvement, and reinforcing Turkish

1 distinctiveness (and separatism). This was in line with the official ideology of
 2 Turkey, which is, at the same time, nationalistic yet also pro-Western.

3 In the 2010s, under the stewardship of the Islamo-conservative Justice and
 4 Development Party, Turkey's football stands have witnessed a new politicisation
 5 trend. This trend's harbinger was the upper-middle class: urban football fans
 6 with higher education who were uncomfortable with the government's interven-
 7 tions in secular lifestyles. The Gezi Park protests of June 2013, which also
 8 involved these fan groups, is a good indicator of such discontent (returned to
 9 later). The match-fixing investigation examined in this chapter has also been at
 10 the forefront of the politicisation of Turkish football stands.
 11

12 **New media = instant democratisation?**

13
 14 Since the introduction of Web 2.0 in 1999, many scholars have discussed the
 15 role of this new technology, as both a media tool and a tool for political
 16 protest. Gibson (2009) claims that web-enabled citizen-campaigning may re-
 17 vitalise and empower de-politicised citizens. Similarly, Birdsall (2007) proposes
 18 that the Web 2.0 development can be seen as part of a larger human rights
 19 movement, which could enhance people's right to communicate. Coleman
 20 (2005: 280) notes that the internet has "the capacity of ordinary people to
 21 enter, shape and govern it to a greater extent than with any previous communi-
 22 cation medium". Mounir Bensalah (2012: 24), in his work on the role of the
 23 internet during the Arab Spring, states that the "the individuals' personal
 24 revolts [on social networks] helped developing communities who share, asso-
 25 ciate, contemplate and react."

26 While it is generally accepted that new media technologies enable 'ordinary'
 27 users to produce content, and that this may, to some extent, have a democratising
 28 effect, all aforementioned assessments seem to be based on an assumption that
 29 accepts that citizens have the means to be engaged in democratic processes.
 30 However, while access to the internet and burgeoning new-media literacy of
 31 people in Turkey varies, the differences between citizens on these aspects could
 32 lead to pre-existing socio-economic inequalities being reinforced and exacer-
 33 bated, particularly as the content of new media would be dominated by those
 34 who are more able to use them. For instance, the lack of a Turkish-language
 35 interface on social networking tools such as Twitter has, for years, excluded
 36 Turkish people from accessing and using them. The use of Twitter in Turkey
 37 remains well below that of Facebook for instance, but when a Turkish interface
 38 was introduced in April 2011 (five years after its global emergence) it was do-
 39 minated by two main groups: Turkish users with higher levels of education and
 40 professional media institutions.

41 Furthermore, the instant democratising effect popularly attributed to new
 42 media tools needs to be discussed on a socio-political level. What needs to be
 43 analysed is the extent to which this effect could function in case an anti-
 44 democratic, but populist power manufactures consent in society. As
 45 Rızvanoğlu and Gidişoğlu (2011: 84) underline, studying nationalism in the

Turkish context is critical as it has been the predominant and hegemonic ideology in Turkish political culture. Furthermore, Bora and Canefe (2002) demonstrate that nationalism, which was employed to justify the new republic in the days of its emergence, later converted itself to a hegemonic ideology, which glorified populism that served right-wing governments and juntas in different eras and combined with Islam and economic liberalism after the pro-American coup in 1980. Özkırımlı (2002: 710) states that popular nationalism in daily life, to which sports contribute, reproduces nationalism better than the ‘official’ channels could manage. Therefore, it should be questioned whether new media tools democratise masses or reproduce ‘official’ tendencies in societies where hegemonic ideologies prevail. Popular football culture, which “has been a stronghold of hegemonic-social practices where nationalistic discourse is reproduced” (Erdoğan, 1993), and its associated products on the internet, is a fruitful research area in Turkey, where the voters of all major parties define themselves as ‘nationalists’ (‘Halkın yarısı Atatürkçü’, 2010). As Turkish media is one of the locomotives of nationalistic discourse, fans’ media should be analysed to question if and how they adopt a similar nationalistic discourse about their clubs.

Method

In order to analyse Fenerbahçe fans’ reactions via social media during the match-fixing scandal, a popular fans’ blog which covered the events in detail was chosen. This chapter focuses on the coverage of the blog, Papazın Çayırı (the Priest’s Meadow, the former name of the terrain where Fenerbahçe Stadium is located) (see <http://papazincayiri.blogspot.com>), which has been online since April 2008. The founder of the blog, Gürman Timurhan (also known as *aethewulf* on Twitter and popular *EkşiSözlük* forums) was known for his critical stance against the government and against the Fenerbahçe administration, even before the match-fixing scandal became public. Timurhan was also a keynote speaker in the fans’ ‘Great Fenerbahçe’ rally in December 2011, after the investigation had started. Papazın Çayırı has no ties with the official media of Fenerbahçe and it is contributed to by dozens of bloggers, all of whom are Fenerbahçe fans. Due to its popularity and overt critical stance, Papazın Çayırı is representative of non-official fans’ media. The data used in this chapter were collected via qualitative analysis of blog content archived under the label ‘3 Temmuz’ (‘July 3’, the day the investigation started). I was particularly interested in obtaining data regarding the blog’s stance towards the government, wider politics, the justice system, media, rival clubs, ‘home’ fans, Fenerbahçe’s administration and club President Aziz Yıldırım.

The research contains qualitative content analysis of Papazın Çayırı’s interpretation of the match-fixing operation. Within the analysis, I show how these sources perceived various actors (such as other clubs’ fans, government, judicial system and Turkish Football Federation) in the operation, and how they interpreted their actions.

The match-fixing operation

Match-fixing has been a recurring theme in Turkish football over the last two decades. In this period, various rumours about the existence of match-fixing were circulated in the press, although any investigation started by the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) about elite division teams were quickly dismissed by legal sections of the Federation.

On 31 March 2011 Parliament passed Law No. 6222, which aimed to regulate illegal acts in sports. This law was supported by major sports clubs and meant that match-fixing attempts could be more rigorously investigated by state attorneys. Therefore, match-fixing cases entered into court jurisdiction, which was a departure from existing policy.

On 3 July 2011, three months after Law No. 6222 was passed, Turkish police started early-morning raids on many sports officials' residences. Amongst those implicated in the raids was Fenerbahçe President Aziz Yıldırım, who was taken into police custody. According to police, 19 matches involving Super League clubs in the 2010/11 season had had their outcomes fixed. Images of Aziz Yıldırım were leaked to the press by police sources, along with pieces of evidence and telephone transcripts, which reinforced the allegations. This not only constituted a violation of the defendants' personal rights, but also threatened the secrecy and credibility of the investigation.

In May 2012, the TFF announced the results of its own investigation. It concluded that no individual clubs would be punished for match-fixing. Instead, only minor penalties would be given to certain club officials. Following these decisions the TFF amended its regulations' Article 58, removing the responsibility from the clubs and instead targeting any penalties at individuals. This was in light of the fact that, as recently as three days previous, Fenerbahçe withdrew its case from the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) demanding €45 million in compensation. They explained their actions as being in the 'national interest' (see CAS davasını, 2012). In December 2012, the court gave its verdict and sentenced Aziz Yıldırım to a six-year prison sentence and US\$1 million pecuniary punishment (the penalties for match-fixing in Law No. 6222 were also alleviated by a parliamentary motion in December 2011).

The conventional Turkish media and its political context

The decade-long Justice and Development Party (AKP) government period dramatically changed the face of Turkish media, particularly in terms of ownership and freedom of expression. The Doğan Group, which once owned a substantial part of Turkish media (Barış, 2008), for example, was forced to downsize due to heavy tax penalties imposed by the government (Sözeri and Kurban, 2012); while another major actor, Merkez Medya, was taken over by the pro-government Turkuaz Group, with a state auction bid in 2007. The other prominent media actors of today, Ciner Group, Çukurova Group and Doğu Group, all have state connections in different sectors, while other holdings such as Koza

Group, Albayrak Group and Star Medya are openly pro-government. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, the flagship of the pro-Gülen media group, Zaman newspaper, is the only remaining newspaper selling more than a million copies per day (along with subscriptions) (see Tiraj, n.d). In fact, it sells as many as the total of its three closest competitors combined. In saying this, despite selling only around 50,000 copies, the Taraf newspaper was also very influential during the match-fixing affair because it published many of the leaked documents, including coup plot cases and, therefore, is perceived to be an important actor in the battle for hegemony between the military and the civil government (Elpeze Ergeç, 2012).

Papazın Çayırı: the Fenerbahçe fans' voice?

The police operation into match-fixing was unprecedented, and the arrest of Aziz Yıldırım, a prominent figure in Turkish football, was quite shocking for many football enthusiasts, especially Fenerbahçe fans. The severity of the situation meant that it was necessary to establish a social discussion environment, where concerned members of football's community, including millions of football fans, could attempt to unravel what was going on. The conventional media failed to satisfy this need as it mainly concentrated on publishing leaked and ethically dubious documents about the ongoing operation. A number of sensational moves, such as publishing Aziz Yıldırım's 'mugshot' (Belli and Uludağ, 2011) or speculative headlines such as 'The State Attorney Scores the Goal' (Savcı Doksandan Çaktı, 2011) or '(Aziz Yıldırım), the Armed Gang Leader' (Silahlı Çete Reisi, 2011), showed the media's lack of social empathy on an incident of such a scale, and therefore failed to convey public opinion on this issue. This meant that the fans, and their personal narratives and opinions, were all the more important at this time.

The Papazın Çayırı blog sarcastically calls itself "an illegal publication"¹ and has been known for its critical stance against state elites, as well as the Fenerbahçe administration. It once suggested that the club's official statements "sound like military statements that negate the contra-guerilla" (blog post, Jitem'le İlgilenmiyoruz, 2011). The loudly critical and politically charged nature of the blog meant that it was an influential source of information throughout the match-fixing event. For example, the blog's former disputes with the club's Executive Board and President Aziz Yıldırım, gave the blog an air of credibility on the basis that the contributors were known to have no ties with the club's inner-politics.

Papazın Çayırı's response to the match-fixing event

Attitudes towards the 'mainstream' media

Among 126 articles published by Papazın Çayırı under the label 'July 3', the vast majority criticised the conventional media's coverage of the scandal.

1 Throughout the 13-month period where the Papazın Çayırı blog published posts
2 about the event, not a single article with positive sentiments towards conven-
3 tional media appeared. During the first week (3–9 July), for example, out of 12
4 articles published in the blog, 50 per cent contained negative sentiments towards
5 the conventional media. Similarly, during the first month, out of 63 articles pub-
6 lished, 43 (68 per cent) contained negative sentiments about the media coverage.
7 Whilst the number of posts criticising the conventional media diminished as the
8 situation lengthened, overall perception towards the media did not change. It
9 should also be mentioned that media is the most recurring theme in this blog's
10 posts about the scandal, as over 63 per cent of the total articles expressed some
11 interest in the media. This clearly shows that the Papazın Çayırı blog saw con-
12 ventional media as one of the primary actors in this operation; specifically, they
13 believed the conventional media manipulated public opinion against the
14 defendants.

15 Looking at the content, the language used about the media verifies this
16 assumption. In its article entitled 'Lynching through media' (5 July 2011), the
17 blog interprets the first days of the scandal as "the obnoxious hysteria of pro-
18 government newspapers ... head[ing] to a defamation operation through media
19 of which examples we already know" (blog post, Medya Yoluyla Linç, 2011). In
20 this quotation, the media is portrayed as an apparatus of strong political power,
21 which also controls the justice system. This perception overlaps with the afore-
22 mentioned concerns about wider political influence within Turkish media.

23 One striking point about Papazın Çayırı's criticism of the media is that the
24 blog publishes special features focused on rather impartial figures of the media
25 who expressed their concerns about the corrupt football system and were critical
26 of Aziz Yıldırım. These blog posts accuse these pundits of "being fake and two-
27 faced" (blog post, Banu Hanım'ın Hayalkırıklıkları Üstüne, 2011), and "partici-
28 pating in the horrible lynching against Fenerbahçe" (blog post, Tekmili Birden
29 Radikal Spor Servisine Sorular, 2012). The insistence of putting these writers in
30 the same category with the pro-government columnists suggests that the blog
31 employs an 'us' and 'them' logic and rejects anyone who does not accept their
32 version of 'truth'. This kind of logic is inherent within nationalist discourse, as
33 Joshua Searle-White (2001: 12) suggests, "along with the tendency to favour
34 one's ingroup, [we] also tend to think in predictable ways about outgroups". In
35 this case, the mainstream media is clearly seen as an outgroup and its more
36 moderate members are included alongside the pro-government journalists.
37 Meanwhile, the perception of bias which constant 'ingroup favouritism' might
38 create was diluted by quoting a few 'sane' outsider voices. The perfect example
39 of this practice is the article entitled 'The Last Stronghold: The Fenerbahçe
40 Sports Club and Turkish Politics' by Hay Ethan Cohen Yanaracak. The blog
41 announces this article by an introductory sentence: "I left it untranslated on
42 purpose, so you can see an outsider's view without any mediation". The writer
43 of this 'outsider article', completely in line with Papazın Çayırı's views, happens
44 to be an Istanbul-born Turkish citizen who completed his Bachelor's studies in
45 Turkey (see Hay Eytan Cohen Yanaracak, n.d). He is also an avid Fenerbahçe

fan who decorates his Facebook profile with Fenerbahçe apparel. Thus he can hardly be considered to be an ‘outsider’ (implying impartiality) as the blog presented him to be.

Attitudes towards the justice system

The justice system, or the lack of trust towards it, was also a very common theme in Papazın Çayırı’s blog entries during the match-fixing scandal. The critical articles about the judiciary system start with the first detentions and accelerate again after the indictment towards the defendants, including Aziz Yıldırım, was announced in December 2011. The Papazın Çayırı blog criticised the justice system in two main ways. First, especially in the early articles (July-August 2011), the blog made several references to other big political cases, such as the Ergenekon coup attempt (blog post, Neden tedirginiz? 2011), and the journalist trials (blog post, Tutukluluk Kararları ve Şimdi Ne Olacak? 2011). They claimed that the match-fixing case was similarly politically motivated. Here it can be seen that the Papazın Çayırı blog unreservedly accepts that the justice system is controlled by the government, which is clearly a political statement. Similarly, there were a number of articles comparing the match-fixing defendants with anti-government defendants from other cases. There are similarities between these groups, such as the long duration of detentions, or the leakage of evidence. However, the defendants from other cases, who are mainly pro-opposition journalists, lawyers, students and former high-ranking military officials, come from very different social status than the defendants of the match-fixing case, who are mainly businessmen with very close ties to the government. Therefore the comparison between these groups reflects the political leanings of the blog.

Attitudes towards the police

During the first days of the event, Papazın Çayırı published several articles criticising actions of the police. In fact, during the first month there were more posts criticising the police than the government or justice system; though this was likely due to the fact that the trials had not yet started. What Papazın Çayırı predominantly criticised during the first days of the scandal were the personal rights violations against the defendants, especially the club President Aziz Yıldırım. Papazın Çayırı claimed the police handled the operation in a way that incriminated the defendants and, in so doing, ensured that public opinion revolved around their culpability. In May 2012, criticism of the police by the blog was reheated after a major incident. In the final game of the championship playoff – Fenerbahçe vs. Galatasaray – the police used tear gas in the stadium against the fans in the stands, injuring small children. After the game hundreds of fans clashed with police in the Kadıköy area (where the club and its stadium are located), causing damage to police vehicles. In this period, the blog refocused on critical articles about police violence, linking this to other sections of Turkish society, for example the Gülen religious group (blog post, Yasama, Yürütme, Yargı, Cemaat, 2012).

Attitudes towards other clubs

Papazın Çayırı's perception of other clubs' administration and fans presents a very negative picture. Throughout the process, in addition to the media, rival teams are the other consistent target of criticism. On analysing the comments made about other teams' fans and administrations, there were conflicting views. Initially, the blog tries to preserve its fan-focused approach and attempts to relate to the other teams' fans. However, when the other teams' fans are critical of Fenerbahçe and Aziz Yıldırım, the blog's authors put those fans into the same category as their clubs' Boards, whom Papazın Çayırı sees cooperating with the 'coalition against Fenerbahçe'.

Fenerbahçe's inner-city rival, Galatasaray, appears to be one of the major culprits of the 'conspiracy'. Contributors perceived Galatasaray to be a 'state team', which consequently received support from the state and other influential bodies, in the hope that the club would dominate Turkish football. In a posting on 8 May 2012, entitled 'The Children of Other Worlds in the Same Era – Love and Hate', the perception of Galatasaray by the blog's author is described in the following terms: "Another aspect Galatasaray regained in this situation [the operation against Fenerbahçe] is their new status. Galatasaray, excluding any remaining bits of truth and becoming a persistent follower of punishment [against Fenerbahçe], advanced to become a part of a wide coalition of assault [against Fenerbahçe]" (blog post Aynı Çağda Başka Dünyaların Çocukları Sevgi – Nefret, 2012). The article, associating Fenerbahçe fans with 'love' and Galatasaray fans with 'hate', is a prime example of the club-nationalism which classifies different groups according to their identities: attributing 'good' and 'bad' characteristics to all the members of these groups. Accordingly, Fenerbahçe fans act out of love for their team, and Galatasaray fans act out of hate for Fenerbahçe. Defining all other groups according to their relationships with 'us' is a very popular theme in Turkish nationalism. "A Turk has no friend other than a Turk" (*Türk'ün Türkten Başka Dostu Yoktur*) is still the most popular answer when Turks are asked to define their relationships with 'Others' (Akgün *et al.*, 2011: 11). In this example, Fenerbahçe fans used a similar slogan: 'We suffice for ourselves' (*biz bize yeteriz*).

Trabzonspor, the biggest provincial team, also received similar criticism, especially after Environment and Urban Affairs Minister, Erdoğan Bayraktar (Trabzon MP of the ruling-party), said they (implying the government or AKP) "work[ed] diligently to give the title to Trabzonspor" (see Konuştu, 2012). The blog developed a theory about Trabzonspor's affiliation with the government. It claimed that the government supported this club because of a previous incident. In 2004, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (also a Fenerbahçe fan) criticised the punishment of visiting Fenerbahçe fans after a brawl with Trabzonspor fans. After this incident, AKP lost the local elections in Trabzon. According to the blog, after this incident the government started to favour Trabzonspor to regain popularity in the city and "AKP learned that the political power in Trabzon is connected to Trabzonspor" (blog post, Bordo Mavi Hükümet, 2012).

The ‘ingroup favouritism’ and ‘outgroup defamation’ in Turkish football fans’ behaviours are neither exclusive to Fenerbahçe fans and/or to the Papazın Çayırı blog, nor did they first appear during the match-fixing event. While ‘micro-nation’ nationalism helps create ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ classifications, the common distrust, and the lack of transparency in Turkish football, pushes this mentality to a series of conspiracy theories. The match-fixing event not only aggravated the problems already apparent in Turkish football, but also deepened this type of self-centred scepticism among fans. Thus, Papazın Çayırı’s tendency to manufacture ‘us’ against ‘them’ rhetoric can only be considered to be its result, rather than being its cause.

Attitudes towards the Board, President, and players

Throughout the match-fixing event, the Papazın Çayırı blog mostly retained its critical approach towards the Fenerbahçe Board, which it has had since its inception. The blog mainly criticised the board for not being active against the operation, and not supporting the club President, Aziz Yıldırım. However, the blog’s overt criticism of the Board was short-lived. After the Board initially challenged the TFF regulation change in January 2012, the interests of the blog and Board were realigned and the blog’s posts reflected this.

During the event, Aziz Yıldırım was perceived quite positively in Papazın Çayırı postings. Over 13 months, the only criticism about Aziz Yıldırım was about his silence in the first two weeks. After that, despite his close ties with the state, he received no overt criticism in the blog. Whereas the blog’s attitude to the Board and President was ambivalent, portrayal of the fans was wholly positive during this time. At the beginning of the scandal the blog separated the fans from the Board, saying:

This club is great, not because you sign sponsorship deals and spare some of your valuable time spent in the plazas to Fenerbahçe, [but] because there are people who dare to face tear gas just to defend their club’s rights.

(blog post, Fenerbahçe Yönetimi Ne İş Yapar? 2011)

Players and technical staff were also included in the ‘ingroup’ that the blog praised: “what those who travel to Topuk Yaylası [club’s training site] by buses cherish is not the championship title, Aziz Yıldırım or Şekip Mosturoğlu [board member]; it’s the sweat of Fenerbahçe footballers through the season. No more, no less” (blog post, En Büyük Delilimiz Alınterimiz, 2011). This rhetoric was repeated on several occasions as the fans and players were perceived and portrayed as the main victims of the whole event.

Conclusions

Throughout this event, the fans’ media, which was led by Papazın Çayırı, helped the fans develop a political interpretation of their fandom. Most of the slogans

1 used by Papazın Çayırı, such as 'Fenerbahçe halktır' (Fenerbahçe is people) and
 2 'Haklıyız, kazanacağız' ('We're right, we'll prevail' (well-known lyrics by com-
 3 munist music ensemble, Grup Yorum)) were used in fans' rallies arranged in
 4 front of the Silivri prison and Çağlayan courthouse (these rallies were also pro-
 5 moted by Papazın Çayırı). Unlike other media outlets, including the semi-official
 6 blog, 12 Numara, Papazın Çayırı did not glorify club President Aziz Yıldırım,
 7 and remained critical of the club Board on several issues. Throughout the match-
 8 fixing event Papazın Çayırı decried injustice against Fenerbahçe and took a fan-
 9 centred approach. The blog's stance was visibly different to 'official' or
 10 'semi-official' discourse(s), which glorified Aziz Yıldırım by using his images
 11 on official fan apparel, hanging posters of him in the stadium, and even produc-
 12 ing paper facemasks out of his portrait. Papazın Çayırı was evidently an inde-
 13 pendent fan media source. As it was an independent and politically critical
 14 source of information, the blog can be compared to other independently pro-
 15 duced blogs, for example those in Egypt, which were involved in the mass pro-
 16 tests against Hosni Mubarak. As Eltantawy and Wiest (2011: 1207) underlined
 17 on the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution:

18
 19 social media technologies have been used especially in organizing and
 20 implementing collective activities, promoting a sense of community and
 21 collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less-
 22 confined political spaces, establishing connections with other social move-
 23 ments, and publicizing causes to gain support from the global community.

24
 25 In another study on Egyptian social media, Khamis and Vaughn (2011) claim
 26 that "Social media can also serve as channels for expressing collective con-
 27 sciousness and national solidarity."

28 Despite being distant from the imprisoned President, and critical of the club
 29 Board, Papazın Çayırı also employed a nationalistic discourse, mainly based on
 30 the glorification of fans and the 'workers' (players and other staff) of the club. In
 31 the same way that Anderson (2006: 12) defines the nation as "an imagined polit-
 32 ical community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign", the blog
 33 conceives the Fenerbahçe 'nation' as "a deep, horizontal comradeship". The
 34 question, however, is whether it does that "regardless of the actual inequality
 35 and exploitation that may prevail", as Anderson (2006: 7) proposed. This
 36 research shows that Papazın Çayırı does not try to camouflage the class-based
 37 differences between fans and dominant groups within the club; however, through
 38 the match-fixing operation, it tactfully abstained from reminding anyone about
 39 them. It perceives the club as a 'micro-nation', where these differences are not a
 40 priority when it comes to a period of hardship. However, despite the blog's cri-
 41 tical approach towards the club Board, and even club President at times, and the
 42 ever-present fan glorification among the articles examined, there was not a single
 43 post discussing how fans could join or influence the decision-making process
 44 and democratise the club. Even when the TFF changed the controversial Article
 45 58 of its regulation, which saved clubs from receiving penalties for match-fixing,

the blog did not encourage fans to become more active in democratic processes, despite its criticism of the TFF, clubs and the Fenerbahçe Board for ‘staging a match-fixing of justice’.

It is visibly true that Papazın Çayırını represented a discourse of politicised fandom, though this did not lead to a fans’ democracy, and rather served the inner-nation status quo, which had constantly pacified fans and reduced them to customers buying season tickets, TV subscriptions and other official consumables. Therefore, the Papazın Çayırını blog appeared as a political media, contesting the conventional media, justice system, government and police. However, it lacked the revolutionary approach that would democratise the ‘micro-nation’. Therefore, while contributing to the democratic mobilisation gradually diminished by authoritarian policies in Turkey, the fans were unable to overcome wider inequalities and exploitation within their ‘micro-nation’. This can only be explained by the blog’s adherence to inner-club nationalism, despite heavily criticising the state ideology which favours nationalism over other ideologies. Conversely, complete adherence to the nation’s imagined identity also explains why and how the traditional Turkish media failed to contribute to democratisation in the country. Papazın Çayırını mimicked a similar failure on another level of nationalism, despite succeeding in filling the traditional media’s void in Turkish democratisation. To that end, it shows that even though the sports domain holds social characteristics that may trigger democratic mobilisation, its own set of dogmas inherited from Turkish political culture blocks it from democratising its own realm.

However, this is not to say that protests cannot prompt over-arching cultural changes. For example, the Gezi Park protests of June 2013 unified many Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe fans, of similar upbringing, around similar concerns. They mobilised under the banner ‘Istanbul United’. It could be argued that such events represent a paradigm shift in contrast to the other events illustrated in this chapter. During the Gezi Park protests, urban, well-educated, modern football fans from different clubs (along with many other dissident groups, such as socialists, anarchists, LGBTs and even anti-capitalist Muslims) voiced their concerns about the government’s autocratic agenda and, in so doing, created a supra-identity of football fans. These groups pursued their protests in stadia in the first weeks of the Turkish Super League, chanting “Taksim [the Square where Gezi protests took place] is everywhere, resistance is everywhere” in the 34th (license plate number of Istanbul) minute of games. Whilst these events would appear to contradict the dominant paradigm of Turkish football, it is too early to draw conclusions about their lasting significance. But, as these protests are very significant in the recent political history of Turkey, and football fans were ever-present in these events, their significance cannot be overlooked, and should be closely followed.

Note

1 “Örgütsel yayın” (organisation’s publication), a well-known expression used by Turkish police for illegal organisations’ publications.

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