Globalization of Football Fans?
The Perception and Performance of Turkish Football Clubs
and its Fans in Austria

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Football fans abroad? Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe fans in Vienna

Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray are among the most popular Turkish clubs in Vienna. Together they comprise two thirds of the Istanbul big three (üç büyükler), and their relationship is characterized as a traditional rivalry. Fans of these clubs that live abroad want to actively support their teams, even if they have grown up in another country. Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe fans, who are living in Vienna, rarely have the opportunity to attend live matches. As a result, the Internet, smartphones, and television have become essential tools in facilitating participation in the club's fan culture. The same applies to locations, such as living rooms, bars, and restaurants.

The dissertation project Migrating Football Fan Identities is part of the FREE project¹. My research is accomplished by accompanying Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe supporters on their paths in Vienna, Austria, between Austria and Turkey, and sometimes in other European countries. My fieldwork data consists of a collection of self-conducted interviews and participant observations. I comprehend my data as embedded in flexible and process-related socio-cultural contexts. This also applies for the concept of fan identities. The aim of my research is to identify these contexts in order to see how general preconditions affect, as Johannes Süßmann (2007, p. 26) describes it, the specific.

As different as my interviewees are in many aspects, they all have certain traits in common. That is: they are all associated with a Turkish diaspora in Vienna, all of them were either born in Vienna or have been living there for a couple of years, the centre of their lives in the city, and they are either in their twenties and early thirties or lateforties and early fifties. The latter are especially interesting for the perspective of media development and the altering fan practices that go along with it. Lastly, all of them have rather complex and individual strategies to manage their fandom from

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abroad, particularly in a city where, outside a constructed Turkish community (cf. Anderson, 1983), Turkish football is frequently ignored.\(^2\)

The question of migration and football is nothing new to anthropological research, but, as Victoria Schwenzer and Nicole Selmer (2010, p. 389-90) point out, in German-speaking countries researchers usually focus on migrant football teams rather than on migrant football fans.

The term “abroad” might suggest a hierarchy of football fandom. However, I look at the fan scene in Vienna as an equal experience and performance of love and loyalty to a football club; an experience similar to being a football fan in Istanbul or anywhere else in Turkey. But, it is crucial to note that the meaning people attribute to football fandom and its integration in their everyday lives differs.

One focus of my research lies on the (re)negotiation of fan identities in the Viennese context. For example, how are conflicts and hierarchies produced and performed with special regard to concepts of distance and proximity? Fans of Turkish football in Vienna are both at the same time: proximal to the fan scene in Vienna, but mostly distant to the pitch in Turkey.

Furthermore, I am scrutinising the supporters’ self-perception in a Viennese football culture. How do the fans perform their fandom in the city? Do they celebrate championships in the city centre comparable to how fans of Viennese clubs do? How do they see their role in a Viennese football space? Using these research questions I examine the impact that experiences of exclusion and inclusion, within and outside the football fan cultures in Vienna, have on a fan’s everyday life. I am concentrating on that in order to determine if and how recognition and disrespect (Honneth, 1996) are negotiated in football.\(^3\)

Moreover, the research focuses on the modification of social rules, such as with whom and where it is legitimate to watch football. In a study on Scottish Football Fans in North America, Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson call the social modification “pragmatic reterritorialization” (2007, p. 140). In their study they are referring to the discontinuing of drinking alcohol while watching football because in North America Scottish matches take place in the morning.

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\(^2\) There are exceptions like the Austrian football magazine Ballesterer.

\(^3\) Please see also Schwenzer & Selmer (2010) who are using Honneth’s theory to analyse social problems that are triggered by migration processes with regard to football.
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My field consists of two groups and networks of football fans. The first network of supporters is a group of predominantly Galatasaray and a few Beşiktaş fans, who moved to Austria no more than ten years ago to study at one of the Viennese Universities. All of them attended an Austrian school in Istanbul, have a middle-class background, and obtained a high educational level. In a rather artistic framework they are politically active in Istanbul as well as in Vienna. Most of the students are in their twenties, both male and female.

The second network is based at a café and pub in a Viennese district associated with many Turkish restaurants and shops. The location is not specifically a football pub; however, during football matches it is especially crowded. The pub owners are dedicated Fenerbahçe fans, so their customers are also mostly the same, although the pub is also popular among Galatasaray fans. The clientele comprises a high percentage of people in their early twenties to early thirties and includes both male and female guests.

Global codes from an actor-centred approach

In this paper, I will focus on the use of fan products. This includes merchandising among Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray fans in Vienna. I will show how global club merchandising products, which are corporate and uniform designed items, are used in quite diverse ways and trigger different meanings depending on who wears it where and when. For the analysis I will refer to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980) to show how global codes are, to a certain extent, decoded in local ways that depend on the time, background, and socio-cultural context of the person that is reading the text. In this case the text is Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray merchandise, specifically football shirts.

In his theoretical concept, which stems from the 1970s, Stuart Hall criticizes how the research of media and mass-communications has been far too one-dimensional assuming that there is a sender, a message, and a receiver who reads the message in the way the sender had intended. He prefers to think of this process as “production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction” (Hall, 1980, p. 117). Hall categorizes three positions from which readers can decode the encoded message:

1. the dominant-hegemonic position (the reader takes the meaning as intended),
2. the negotiated position (acceptance of the hegemonic definition and at the same time adaption of code to local context),
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3. the oppositional position (full understanding of intention of discourse but contrary decoding) (ibid., p. 125-7).

The main hypothesis of Hall’s concept is that a message, which was encoded to transport a certain meaning, is not necessarily decoded in the way the message was intended. However, he makes it clear that codes or signs that carry dominant-hegemonic discourses and have an accepted meaning in a society, rarely leave a chance for an unintended interpretation. Bernd Jürgen Warneken emphasizes that this especially applies to newscasts that rarely leave a chance for any oppositional decoding (Warneken, 2006, p. 310).

Whereas Hall refers to media, I will apply the encoding/decoding model to merchandise products that can be considered signs that carry meaning and therefore a form of communication. The dominant-hegemonic codes that are encoded into a football shirt are, amongst others: loyalty to the club, identifying with the club, showing others that you belong to this club only, showing others that you are a good fan because of buying official merchandise.

In this paper I will show how and when these codes are negotiable and what other relevant codes Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe fans add in a locally situated context of a migrant community in Vienna.

Decoding in the Viennese context (negotiated position)

It has become very common to be a fan abroad in Europe and beyond. Being a Manchester United fan in Berlin or a Bayern Munich fan in Beijing has become a widespread phenomenon in modern football. The popular clubs have fan shops in many cities around the world and even if fans do not have access to merchandising shops, the Internet is a reliable partner when it comes to the purchase of fan products. The globalization of football has led to a globalization of fans. Everywhere in the world fans can wear the same Ronaldo jersey and the same fan scarf of their beloved club. The crucial element is that the meaning people attribute to wearing mostly identical products can differ tremendously depending on the social-cultural background of the fan.

Being part of a migrant community in Vienna, which makes you part of a quite often discriminating discourse – for example in debating the rights of participation in a society or of “proper” behaviour such as the use one’s native or second-native language – reflects upon being a fan. Wearing a Manchester United jersey in Vienna is quite unproblematic, probably not even interesting to people in the city as the sign,
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what it represents, causes rather few controversial associations. Wearing a Fenerbahçe or Galatasaray jersey on the other hand, carries many layers of signs and codes regarding the discussion of how Turkish migrants should assimilate to Austrian culture. In this paper I want to focus on three of these codes, or better said three relevant ways to decode the message “football shirt” in Vienna. After that I will shortly refer to the way fans in Vienna can change the message itself.

Negotiating home and belonging via the rivalry between Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe

The biographies of my interviewees are quite different in regards to where they grew up and also how often they travel to Istanbul to attend matches. One aspect they do have in common is that football, for them, constructs a space where it is possible to (re)tell sometimes difficult and complex concepts of home and belonging.

A Galatasaray fan, who came to Vienna a decade ago to study at the university said once:

Turkish football is like Turkish food – a piece of home.
(Galatasaray fan, male, 34 [21 August 2012])

Interestingly, in diaspora the Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe antagonism is also newly negotiated for some fans, but the conditions under which one can shift one’s loyalty temporarily are very specific. The concept of shifting loyalties refers to Gerd Baumann’s “Grammars of Identity/Alterity” (2004, p. 22-3) in which he adapts Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Nuer to show, using a football example, that identities and loyalties can shift depending on context.

The Galatasaray fan Apo, whom I met during an away trip to Salzburg in July 2013 when Fenerbahçe tried to qualify for the Champions League, attends Fenerbahçe matches that are located in or near Vienna quite regularly. During a very long bus ride to Salzburg I told him that I was confused that two Galatasaray fans (he and his friend) were riding on a Fenerbahçe fan bus. He responded:

Because it is a Turkish club. Galatasaray is better of course, and you also have to go to a Galatasaray match, the fans are much louder. Of course I support Fenerbahçe, when they are playing in the Champions League. But, I would never wear a Fenerbahçe jersey. I brought my Turkish national team jersey instead.
(Apo, Galatasaray fan, male, 45 [31 July 2013])
For him, the football shirt becomes an important sign of how much he can alter his support for a certain amount of time. In a later interview he elaborates on this point:

A: *This is a picture of me at a Fenerbahçe match in Hungary, where I was wearing a Galatasaray shirt.*
N: Uh, and that was possible?
A: I really wanted to do that. Yes, it was fine. Fenerbahçe was playing Newcastle. In Sopron. Yes, Sopron. It was just a friendly match. Fenerbahçe came here [Sopron] to a training camp and Newcastle, too. *This is in the Ali Sami Yen Stadium [shows another picture].*
N: So you really like to watch Fenerbahçe matches, like in Salzburg?
A: Well, yes. But if Fenerbahçe loses I am not that sad. But-
N: But anyhow you are supporting Fenerbahçe-
A: Fenerbahçe is still a Turkish team. If I go to my work place the next day, I am teasing the Austrians, if Fenerbahçe won. (N. and Apo’s wife start laughing). Once, Beşiktaş was playing Rapid. About three years ago. I said, if a Turkish team comes I’ll always support them. [...] I was, but before I was also wearing a Beşiktaş shirt.
N: Really?
A: But I wouldn’t wear a Fenerbahçe shirt.
N: Ok. And why is Beşiktaş ok and Fenerbahçe isn’t?
A: Yes, Fenerbahçe is like an enemy. Do you understand?
N: And Beşiktaş?
A: Beşiktaş not so much, not so bad, but Fenerbahçe is different.
N: So if Fenerbahçe is playing Beşiktaş-
A: Well, if you hand me a Fenerbahçe shirt, for example, and you tell me that you would pay me a hundred Euros if I wore it, I wouldn’t do it. I swear.
(Apo, Galatasaray fan, male, 45 [09 October 2013])

For Apo football is a part of a practice of constructing home (Binder, 2010, p. 190). With regard to his football identity home for him is Turkey – a place of yearning. Following any Turkish team – despite being a passionate Galatasaray fan – has become part of a practice of constructing a space that feels like home right next to him in Austria and its neighbouring countries. Therefore, he also cheers for the arch enemy Fenerbahçe, because, as he says, it is a Turkish team. This is when the football shirt becomes important. Apo accepts the dominant-hegemonic code of the Fenerbahçe shirt “loyalty to Fenerbahçe” and consequently he strongly objects to wearing it. He does not identify with Fenerbahçe, he identifies with Fenerbahçe being a Turkish club. This is why he wears the jersey of the Turkish national team instead,
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hoping that other fans will decode the national shirt as he has encoded it: Turkish support/Turkish identity.

Later in the interview, he reports that in Sopron he wore his Galatasaray shirt to a friendly match against Fenerbahçe. He underlines that this is acceptable here in Austria and Hungary, but would be quite dangerous in the Fenerbahçe stadium in Turkey. Both incidents show how, in diaspora, trajectories and rivalries become newly negotiable as other layers of identification can become more relevant. This surely does not apply to all fans but is strongly dependent on a fan’s background. Anti-nationalist, leftist fans in Vienna would certainly not shift their club identity, even if temporarily, because of a (Turkish) national identification. However, for Apo Turkish football is a way to minimize the distance to a constructed space of home and therefore club rivalries can take a step back.

(Re-)claiming the city and negotiating “disrespect”

To summarize, wearing a Fenerbahçe or Galatasaray jersey in Vienna does not only mean that you are a fan of a specific football club, but it is also strongly entangled with questions of participation, recognition, and disrespect of a migrant community. This applies not only to a national Austrian level but also for a European level, which is part of the local discourse. In the next part of the paper I will show how football can be a platform and strategy to deal with experiences of disrespect in a migrant community and how the football shirt, as a carrier of identity (Hofmann, 2013), becomes part of the struggle for recognition and participation in public places of Vienna. First I will discuss the transnational or European status of Turkish football and its impact on Viennese football fans of Turkish football.

Football is a welcome tool to negotiate experiences of contempt or with the words of the philosopher Axel Honneth “disrespect” (1996). Honneth claims that every individual struggles for recognition, and attempts to overcome attacks to an individual’s love or a group’s rights and solidarity, as they are failures of recognition. This might happen on a rather individual level, in a class context, and also in a migratory context through emphasizing the superiority of her or his club or of the country’s football in general. This works especially well for football in Austria, as Austrian football has been and seems to be remaining rather unsuccessful at an international level. They have just recently failed to qualify for the FIFA World Cup 2014, and Austrian club participation in the Champions League and Europa League is mostly limited to the group stage. Compared to Austrian football, Turkish football, especially club football, is more successful. This does not necessarily have to lead to
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serious kind of distinction, but can also be a playful performance. As Apo said, he can tease his work colleagues the next.

Not only are hard figures part of the expression of superiority, but soft skills are as well. For example: being a more dedicated fan in the sense of singing louder or being better informed, are part of it. Many interviewees say that Austrian football is boring, as are its fans. On the before mentioned away trip to Salzburg, a fan pointed at the mostly sitting Salzburg fans and then at the always chanting and jumping Fenerbahçe fans and said:

*Look, these are real fans.* (male, 42 [31 July 2013])

Turkey has been affiliated with UEFA since 1962, so the “struggle for recognition” with regard to European football has been successful (Dietschy et al., 2009, p. 139). But it seems as though Turkey must always pay a high price to be accepted as a legitimate part of Europe. Referring to a letter to the general secretary of FIFA from 1961 Dietschy et al. argue that the president of the Turkish federation was using arguments for the membership of Turkey in UEFA that were “as much linked to the organization of the sport as to cultural proximity” (ibid., p. 130). Moreover, they point out that “[a]lthough the map of Europe drawn by soccer is a highly inclusive one, it does not prevent strong antagonisms within the cultural space it represents.” (Dietschy et al., 2009, p. 137) At the same time, Turkey as a state has been fighting for EU membership for decades and was always confronted with „disrespect“ and „denial of recognition“ (Honneth, 1996) for not being European enough to fit into the European Union.

Successes in Turkish football can only be recognized if they become part of the public discourse. Apart from having the centre of their football fandom’s performance in the city, this is also one reason why, for many fans, it is very important to be able to celebrate winning the championship in central places in Vienna.

In interviews with football fans that migrated in the 1970s or 1980s to Vienna, the supporters often talk about the problems they experienced in performing their fandom. One could not watch matches, and could only find out the results in newspapers that often arrived days after the match. They say that it was about the only way to find out the results. With technology enhancing, the situation changed and my interviewees say that they resumed following Turkish football on a regular basis. The Süper Lig fan culture in Vienna, as it can be observed today, is still quite new due to technical issues in the past. Most of the Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray fan

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4 http://www.uefa.com/memberassociations/association=tur/index.html
clubs and fan pubs are no older than ten years. The use of media changes the perception and more importantly also the performance of football fandom abroad. It enables a fan to integrate the performance of love and loyalty to a football club in their everyday lives, simultaneously to the events in Turkey. In the past, due to the lack of information, watching football in a bar and spontaneously going to public places to celebrate the victory of an important match was simply not possible. As a result, Turkish football fan culture was less visible in the city.

The way you make yourself visible in the city is by wearing merchandise. This is the way you show unity as a “uniformed mass” (Hofmann, 2013, p. 7) and you can be recognizable by others as a group. You can also sing and chant, but visual dominance can be more easily achieved through display of the same colours. Celebrating the championship in central places in Vienna does not only reveal the need and wish to celebrate a football victory in the city you live in and call home, but it is also part of a discourse of recognition; recognizing the love to Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray as an equal experience as the love to an Austrian team, whose championships are symbolically celebrated in front of the city hall.

**Being part of a dominant code**

Although fans in Vienna deal with other everyday contexts that are part of their fandom, not every message decoding is negotiated. The football shirt or scarf still symbolizes loyalty and the wish to be part of a bigger fan community. Especially relevant among my interviewees is the code of being a “good fan”. For some of them buying official merchandise is the duty of a “good fan”. It’s the way you can/must financially support your club. This is the dominant-hegemonic code or discourse, which is often interpreted the way it was intended in production. Some fans find this code seems so essential, that they consider those who refrain from buying expensive club merchandise to be either bad fans or poor. A commercialization critique, for example, is not part of their decoding references. This is also how Emre and Alper discuss their personal impression on why Galatasaray fans are wearing less official merchandise.

*E: I am trying to say that we- how can I say that? You simply notice quality. If you, for example, go to the Fenerbahçe stadium and you look around, there are probably 50.000 people of whom 40.000 came with an original jersey. And it, for sure, was bought in the Fenerium, the official Fenerbahçe shop. If you look around in the Galatasaray stadium, though, it’s just less. Why? Because fans of Galatasaray are a little poorer -*
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A: They come from poor-
E: Exactly.
A: The poverty line-
E: The richest fans are Fenerbahçe fans.
[20 March 2013]

The interview extract is part of a bigger discussion on why Fenerbahçe is the better team compared to Galatasaray. The discussion that Galatasaray fans are either too poor to buy official merchandise or bad fans must also be understood as part of an attempt to denigrate Galatasaray and to underline Fenerbahçe’s superiority.

Translocal practices and changing the codes

At the end I want refer to one example that is quite common for fans that live abroad: the altering of merchandise products to the local setting. The new merchandise also embraces the code of the official merchandise (colours, emblems), as well as regional codes to recognize hybrid fan identities. Giulianotti and Robertson call these practices “hybridization” (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007, p. 143-4).

In the case of Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray fans in Vienna I will refer to one example of a group that call themselves in Turkish “Young Fenerbahçe fans in Vienna”. They wear the official merchandise just as well as they do the merchandise that they produced themselves with the name of their group. They are expressing their loyalty to Fenerbahçe in Istanbul, their (Turkish) football identity, and likewise a strong connection to their hometown Vienna, as most of the members were born and raised in Vienna. This hybrid display of fandom represents their hybrid identities: identifying with a football club, with Turkey or Turkish football, family and a Turkish diaspora in Vienna, and with the city Vienna as the centre of their lives.

Highlights are moments when they receive recognition for both of their encoded signs, for example being mentioned on Turkish or Austrian TV and in newspapers as the Viennese fans of Fenerbahçe displaying their hybrid banners. This happens not only when they travel to the stadium in Istanbul, but also especially when Fenerbahçe comes to Austria or a neighbouring country, giving them the possibility to show that they, as the Central European fan base, support their team. Achieving the recognition by official Turkish and Austrian news (sports) channels is considered to be a great success and posted and reposted on Facebook for days.
Translocal fan practices

Football fans living in a different country or far from the stadium of their favourite football club is nothing new to the world of football. As Cornel Sandvoss talks about “mediated encounters” (2012, p. 89-91) he makes clear that new broadcasting rights and habits facilitate the identification of fans with teams abroad. Having access to matches of any league and to the official club merchandise, no matter where the fan is, produces transnational fan identities and communities. Bayern Munich and Real Madrid, amongst others, have a global fan base and sell their merchandise around the world. So what exactly is the difference to Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe fans in Vienna? When simply looking at being a fan abroad, the globalization of media and markets changed and continues to change the chances of participation as they do for any other fan that follows a football team from abroad.

On the other hand, being a fan abroad and at the same time being part of one of the biggest migrant groups in Vienna, changes the perspective on being a fan. In Austria, Turkish football is frequently ignored in German speaking media, with the exceptions of when a Turkish team plays an Austrian team, high level Champions League matches, or pitch invasions. Consequently, the fan identity can become a sensitive topic, due to family links, complex concepts of home, and possible failures of recognitions being directly connected to it.

Bibliography

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