

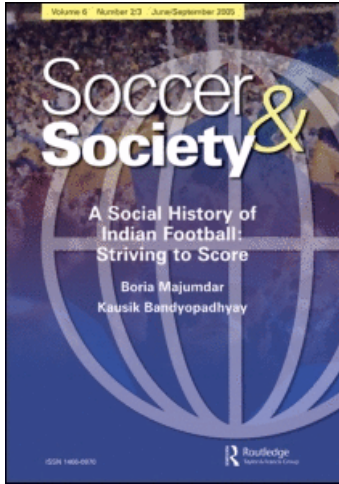
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From elite circles to power networks: Turkish soccer clubs in a global age, 1903–2005

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Emerging as a key site of popular culture in contemporary Turkey, soccer occupies a prominent position in the everyday life of most Turkish citizens. This essay examines the evolution of Turkish soccer clubs in the last 100 years with reference to nationalist, populist and commercial forms of domination. Pursuing an historical analysis, the essay argues that the Turkish soccer clubs have had different modalities in each regime-type that can be demonstrated by examining the social composition and political economy of Turkish clubs.

Introduction

It was one of the biggest celebrations in the history of the Turkish Republic when the Turkish national team won the third spot in the most prestigious FIFA World Cup soccer tournament in 2002. Beyond nationalism, the festivity mood was a clear indication that the game occupied a prominent position in everyday life of most Turkish citizens, transcending class differences as well as ethnic and religious divisions. Emerging as a key site of popular culture in contemporary Turkey, sport has received little attention in the international scholarship on modern Turkey. A fascinating topic for anthropological research, this study takes a different turn and approaches Turkish soccer from a historical perspective.

More specifically, the essay explores the historical evolution of Turkish soccer clubs in the twentieth century with reference to nationalist, populist and market forms of domination. In the first section, I outline the introduction of soccer into the Ottoman-Turkish context and then discuss the pre-dominant position of the nationalist elite during the interwar era. The second section examines the horizontal diffusion of the game on a national scale after the Second World War where soccer clubs came to represent regional identities within a populist framework. Finally, the third section provides a detailed analysis of the commercialization and politicization of soccer clubs in the era of globalization.

Intellectuals in charge: inventing soccer in Anatolia

Turkish soccer clubs came into existence in the late Ottoman Empire when the Ottoman-Turkish elite acquired the game from the British in cosmopolitan cities of Istanbul and Izmir at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ Beyond geographical concentration, it was the modern institutions of higher education and the interactions with

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Europeans and non-Muslims that popularized the game among the educated elite in urban contexts. Representing cooperation, negotiation and rivalry among the ethno-religious communities of a multi-ethnic empire, the Ottoman-Turkish soccer clubs were no exception to the rule.²

The breaking up of the Ottoman Empire (1912–22), which instigated communal clashes during the First World War and the War of Independence, gave the Turkish clubs a clearly-defined political task: to support the nationalist project under the auspices of the intelligentsia. The Committee of Union and Progress, which was in power from 1913 to 1918 was instrumental in this regard as it promoted sports organizations to bolster Turkish nationalist ideals and challenge cultural supremacy of non-Muslims and the presence of Europeans in urban centers.³ The subsequent proclamation of the Turkish Republic consolidated elite rule in soccer and yet forced the clubs to revert back to their previous positions; that is, to function as a class marker of leisure activity.⁴

Categorically stated, the political vision of the Turkish nationalists proved decisive to sustain the class-base and ‘apolitical’ nature of Turkish soccer. This perspective was crystal clear in the high priority given to physical education over soccer in the nation-building agenda.⁵ While physical education classes were more conducive to nationalist indoctrination of the youth, stadiums made social control a key problem. Furthermore, nationalists had neither the financial capacity nor the organizational infrastructure to operate a national soccer division. Hence, with the exception of rail-road and army clubs, state interference to the game remained limited until the days of the Second World War.⁶

Viewed from a comparative perspective, the Turkish case in the inter-war era stands in stark contrast with Peronism in Argentina, the Vargas regime in Brazil and fascism in Europe that equally exploited the game for nationalist goals and political purposes.⁷ The key to the puzzle on the Turkish scene was the hostile attitude of nationalists to any form of political and social mobilization in the country. As authoritarian modernists with an elite tradition, soccer seemed too risky for Turkish ruling class as they were preoccupied with combining two contradictory modes of modernity: revolutionary radicalism on the one hand and the desire for order on the other.⁸

Democratic populism: opening up the game

The post-war era ended the authoritarian regime and paved the way for multi-party politics and import-substituting industrialization.⁹ Both historical trends generated large-scale urbanization and political mobilization. After five decades of stagnation, Istanbul began to grow rapidly as the city offered new opportunities to its residents. In the meantime, national integration connected the countryside into the cities and developmentalism promised economic equality across the regions. It was against this historical background that the second phase of soccer club formation took off in the provincial cities of Anatolia during the 1960s.

With the popularizing effect of radio and national press, Turkish soccer clubs found enormous following in the expanding metropolitan areas and the provincial cities. In the former context, the key issue was to compensate the emotional needs of recent immigrants in the city by reconnecting them to their local-regional fellowmen. In the latter case, sport arenas turned into critical sites to reproduce the imagined social differences among Anatolian cities.¹⁰ Nonetheless, club support in both situations

seemed equally Durkheimian where soccer clubs represented the local identity and collective morality of their members.

The game rapidly evolved into a national past time with the introduction of first and second national divisions respectively in 1959 and 1963. Receiving financial support, political backing and moral leadership from local entrepreneurs and provincial politicians, it was around this time that the Anatolian teams challenged the supremacy of Istanbul clubs in the Turkish sports scene.¹¹ While Trabzonspor, a team from the Eastern Black Sea region, won six national championships (1975–83), another club from Central Anatolia managed to get the second spot for three times (1968–71) during the 15 years of ‘Anatolian revolution’. As such, the decade of 1970s was a symbolic victory of the Anatolian periphery against the cosmopolitan and economically strong city of Istanbul.¹²

By the second half of the 1970s, certain goals were already achieved in Turkish soccer. Most importantly, the game played an unintended but constitutive role for national integration. Unlike the less successful top-down nation-building efforts of the interwar era, soccer, along with expanding communication networks, allowed the masses to become part of an imagined community that has common rituals and territory.¹³ On an equal ground, soccer clubs were instrumental in consolidating and representing local and regional identities which eventually fuelled inter-city rivalries which had their origins in economic competition, ethnic rivalry and religious differences.¹⁴

Built around regional entrepreneurs, local fans and domestic players, the post-war Turkish soccer began to crumble by the end of the 1970s. Most Anatolian clubs were on the brink of financial bankruptcy as local entrepreneurs decided not to sponsor them because of economic crisis and political violence in the country. The final blow to Anatolian soccer was Turkey’s integration into the global economy. As transfer fees skyrocketed and revenue sharing structure was redesigned in favour of top Istanbul clubs, in less than a decade, the majority of the Anatolian clubs along with historic neighbourhood teams of Istanbul were marginalized in the soccer world.¹⁵

The new economic context of the 1980s that dramatically undermined the position and curtailed the livelihood of most of the actors in the Turkish soccer scene left those who survived the storm with two major options: (1) to receive economic and political support from local municipalities, or (2) to find a nationwide rich capitalist to sponsor the team. While the former has become a common practice for clubs from small towns and mid-size cities of Anatolia, the top four clubs of the country along with few others from major cities were brought under strict capitalist control in the market era.

Money talks: Turkish soccer clubs in the market era

Like the rest of the developing world, Turkey shifted its economy into an export-oriented growth strategy during the 1980s. Nonetheless, the new economic framework was still closely tied to political favours from the state.¹⁶ Accordingly, patronage politics and market economy created three major consequences for the Turkish soccer world: first, there was rising resource inequality among the soccer clubs; second, business people got hold of managements of top clubs in the country; and finally, Turkish soccer clubs provided a short-cut strategy and a fertile ground to victory for the political elite.

Within this larger context, the ‘municipal support scheme’ became a realistic option for the majority of soccer clubs when local governments were allowed to receive larger funds from the central state. Hence, in contrast to the practice in the

populist times where the local political elite could join the club management to monitor the interest of the team at the politico-administrative level, municipalities were needed primarily for economic reasons in the market era. This perspective was clearly visible in the 2000–01 season where 66% of all ‘club director-mayors’ were managing teams in the financially-troubled Third Division.¹⁷

In conjunction with financial need, the political rationale provided the rallying point for municipalities to mobilize resources for the soccer clubs. Motherland Party (ANAP) joined by others in the 1990s was more than willing to use the soccer field to get votes by turning club support into a form of ‘public clientelism’. As such, the increasing weight of municipalities in Turkish soccer has been the outcome of a unique situation: the commitment of political parties on one side and the economic impoverishment of soccer clubs on the other. The overall contribution of municipalities to Turkish soccer was quite impressive: Uztuğ found out that 22% of all teams competing in professional soccer divisions had municipal mayors in top positions of their administrative structure.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the top teams of Istanbul along with a few others fell under the tyranny of top capitalists. Reaping the benefits of an export-oriented economy and being close to political circles, businessmen, especially from media and construction sectors, turned into new ‘godfathers’ of Turkish football. As in post-communist Eastern Europe, *perestroika* created a class of nouveau riche in Turkey who invested part of their fortune into soccer teams for public recognition, economic interest and prospective political career. Respected by press and shielded against democratic participation, Turkish capitalists ruled soccer clubs just like political parties and labour unions in the country; single-handedly and as one-man organizations.¹⁹

The two trends in club management clearly reflect the primary role attached to economic resources and political actors during the 1980s. Available to a few, while the capitalist alternative allowed top clubs to acquire large sums of capital, emerging as a defensive strategy, the rest utilized municipality support as a strategy to catch up. When the first phase of market transition in Turkish soccer was completed in 1989, soccer clubs operating under different formats have largely become dependent on financial resources from outside and were increasingly shaped by business networks and political corruption, downplaying the social identity card as their constitutive feature.²⁰

Market forms, political rents: Turkish soccer in a global age

Galatasaray needs to own a stadium, it must have some form of public listing as a company, it must organize its fans all over the world and it must establish the financial support for these plans ... If success is limited to the field then it is just a surprise, a one-off. You have to carry the success off the field. (Coach of UEFA Cup Winners Galatasaray of Turkey, later the coach of Milan.)²¹

Two historical trends during the 1990s pushed Turkish clubs further towards the market. The first one was globalization. By accelerating athletic flows on a global scale,²² and integrating Turkish clubs fully into European soccer, the new global framework required a more commercial approach. Second, the domestic transformation of Turkey towards a market society consolidated the domination of economic actors on the soccer field. Subsequently, while business classes capitalized on their position in club managements, soccer clubs have started to operate under market forms.

In terms of the latter agenda, the sea change began within the club hierarchies of Istanbul clubs when Galatasaray, Beşiktaş and Fenerbahçe all expanded their bureaucratic structures by adding professional staff into club administration whose expertise was business operations and public relations. Replacing the old-style amateur-type club personnel with executives, sales managers, accountants, marketing agents, travelling agencies, legal firms, public relations experts along with others, Turkish clubs have shown tremendous interest in installing firm hierarchies in order to run their day-to-day operations since the 1990s.

Restructuring club hierarchies in favour of capitalist work principles were accompanied by an expanding commercial logic. Istanbul clubs opened various mega-stores in big cities in order to sell more 'official' club products to their fans and wiped out thousands of 'unofficial' club merchandise producers from the market.²³ In need of fast cash, clubs also increasingly turned to business deals to sell their branding rights to a variety of firms. What has been striking is the fact that the attempt of Istanbul clubs to turn fan support into cash is backed up by recent claims on intellectual property and branding.²⁴

Newly created revenue streams such as sponsorship contracts and other financial instruments have also been influential in carving out the market logic in the Turkish soccer world. Since the last decade more than a dozen clubs from the Turkish Superleague and Division I decided to function under the financial support of a major company. Likewise, a number of Turkish clubs have entered into financial deals which benefited the investor firm and/or the banking interests more as ill-managed high-interest loans drove clubs closer to bankruptcy.²⁵ Finally, top Istanbul clubs along with others turned themselves into publicly traded private companies and floated on the Istanbul stock exchange to raise the much-needed cash revenue, clear debts and expand club infrastructure. In doing so, many Turkish soccer clubs have established close ties with financial markets with uncertain long-term outcomes.²⁶

Compared to other sources, the largest impact of the market on Turkish soccer clubs has come through the media.²⁷ As profits drawn from selling merchandise or gate receipts hardly cover club expenses, television revenues proved crucial to have a balanced budget, run the club on a day-to-day basis and most importantly to buy talented and famous players from the inflated global athlete market of the 1990s. Coinciding with the historical shift from state-owned TV to commercial channels, the media domination on Turkish soccer emerged in the last decade through the broadcasting of top division games on privately-owned exclusive cable channels.²⁸

Three major developments in particular were of critical importance with the pouring of media money into Turkish soccer. First, similar to the experience in Britain and elsewhere,²⁹ top Turkish soccer clubs cut their ties with lower divisions and formed the Superleague to share the lucrative TV revenue among themselves. Organized in three professional divisions and several amateur sub-divisions, the Anatolian clubs joined hands with the 'Istanbul masters' to defend their commercial interests, breaking all ties of regional solidarity that existed prior to market age.³⁰ Accordingly, second and third divisions were given only 3% from the lucrative TV deals that Turkish soccer has been receiving for the last ten years (Table 1).

Second, echoing the major trends in other major European divisions and the European Champions League, the top three Istanbul clubs negotiated better deals with the media companies and the Turkish Soccer Federation to get the bulk of the TV money. Aware of the historical supremacy of Istanbul clubs, the Anatolian clubs responded by uniting under one roof against the imperious 'Istanbul masters' to

Table 1. Broadcasting revenues of Turkish soccer, 1994–2008.

Years	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2001	2001–04	2004–08
Revenue (\$)	7.2	23	40	45	55	120	465	377.6

Source: Akşar, *Endüstriyel Futbol*, 48.

defend their share from the pool of TV revenues. Represented in a single voice in the Superleague, the Anatolian side demanded that the broadcasting rights of soccer games be negotiated as a full package rather than on an individual team basis. Predictably, the collective deal would give each Anatolian side more revenue given their localized support, less media coverage and ‘mediocre’ football quality.

Finally, market pressure implied that the sizeable Turkish sport media that emerged during the 1990s both in quality press and tabloid forms gave enormous coverage of the top three Istanbul teams, ‘deleting’ the rest of the Superleague teams and lower divisions from the screen and ignoring them in the press. The partisan attitude deepened further as soccer journalists are classified according to Istanbul club allegiance.³¹ Each columnist is then assigned to follow, comment on, criticize and support one Istanbul team against others. Falling prey to the idea of market, contemporary Turkish sport journalism strongly believes that the coverage of the top Istanbul clubs with its own columnists would guarantee a niche in the luxurious sport market.

Viewed from a broader perspective, the penetration of media improved the material conditions of the game but neither brought long-term success nor fostered social solidarity. On the contrary, the media money helped to consolidate the inequality in terms of transfer revenues, club budgets and stadium improvement. Nonetheless, the vibrant global athlete market allowed a handful of Turkish clubs to emerge as brokers. Located in relatively prosperous and globally-connected cities, these teams concentrated club energies on youth development and recruiting young talents from abroad. Benefiting from effective scouting, both strategies worked well to sell young talents to Istanbul sides and European clubs at exorbitant prices only a few years later.

The influence of market and market practices on Turkish clubs is not confined to the *futbol-empresa* (football-firm). Businessmen, who acquired key positions in club managements, are also interested in converting their economic power into political victory, public recognition and social influence as the recent take-over of British clubs by the wealthy figures of the ‘Third World’ countries nicely suggests. Either as club owners or club presidents, the Turkish economic elite has pursued two aggressive strategies to get political support from the fans, most of whom are also voting-citizens. The more visible strategy was put into action by powerful capitalists from the right wing of the spectrum when they ran for political positions as independents or through individually-controlled political parties.³²

Cem Uzan, who until recently controlled a considerable portion of the private mass media, insurance and telecommunications sector along with leading companies in other industries, is a striking example in this regard. The Uzan family emerged on the Turkish scene during the 1990s through their involvement in media and Turkish soccer that eventually led them to buy long-time neglected, but historically famous, soccer clubs from the economic hubs of the country.³³ After capturing club managements in both contexts, the Uzans also secured the broadcasting rights of the Turkish Superleague division and the European Championship League for a number of years, creating a major link between their media-empire and the large masses through the medium of soccer.

Having built public recognition and social influence, Cem Uzan's next strategy was to found the Youth Party (*Genç Parti*) to compete for the position of prime minister. A strong challenger to the Turkish political establishment with his one-man controlled political party, Uzan could not win seats in the parliament due to the Turkish electoral system. Having received the third largest number of votes in the country in the elections of 2002, the political career of Uzan and the fortunes of his family eventually declined when his business empire collapsed because of corporate crimes and foreign pressure. Ironically, Cem Uzan's attempt to emulate the success story of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy was superseded by the experience of another Italian family: the Tanzi family of Parmalat.

As powerful capitalists, Berlusconi, the Tanzis and the Uzan family all owed their public popularity and positive reputation largely to a soccer team. Accordingly, Berlusconi was the president of AC Milan in the 1990s, while the Tanzi family bought the tiny Parma club in their home town and turned it into a European giant during the 1990s. Furthermore, both Uzan and Berlusconi emerged on the national stage as media tycoons, challenging the monopoly of the state in telecommunications. The future of Cem Uzan differed from that of Berlusconi when the latter successfully connected his media empire and enormous economic wealth with political power in his political party 'Forza Italia' whose name even originated from a slogan on the football stands.³⁴ Unable to do the same, the career of the Uzan family converged with that of the Tanzis as both lost their economic wealth, public prestige and social influence because of corporate scandals.³⁵

An alternative strategy to link politics with soccer clubs was pursued by business people with a social democratic orientation. Emerging as powerful figures, social-democrats utilized their club management position to consolidate their political power for city municipalities.³⁶ Entertaining public popularity through media and via the local club, some of them have emerged as key referents of their city in national settings and therefore have turned into local icons and influential regional power brokers in contemporary Turkey. As Mignon acknowledged for the French case, the football team served 'for the image of municipality, working for the common good, and the stadium for that of the mobilization of the inhabitants around the city, its team and *its mayor*'.³⁷

Despite various attempts of the Uzan family, the management of the top three clubs of Istanbul has largely stayed out of 'conventional politics' during the 1990s. In contrast to the Latin American experience where soccer and politics have been historically combined through *socios* electing club officials,³⁸ Turkish clubs have remained close-knit, elitist organizations with a limited number of members. Hence, it was the organizational structure of the club that allowed the politically minded business people to dominate the soccer world in the global era. Furthermore, the social composition of members transformed clubs into a 'locus of social capital'; a prestigious setting for the informal networking (*camarillas*) of the power elite.³⁹

To sum up, sharing the experience of Europe where a number of elite clubs are becoming financially dominant, *the new commercial perspective* in Turkish soccer during the 1990s has accelerated the existing inequalities between the top three teams of Istanbul and the rest. Subsequently, social solidarity between lower divisions and Superleague clubs waned, while common interest among the Superleague clubs is also shattered by the constant search for more economic revenue. On the political front, the municipality support schemes have been routinized, exchanging political support with financial resources for the local team. Finally, the entrepreneurial class expanded its

influence on clubs to utilize its visible position in the soccer world for political careers.

Which way forward?

In this essay, I have tried to explain the century-old history of Turkish soccer clubs through the regulation framework. Despite continuities among separate modes, I have argued that the Turkish soccer clubs have had different modalities in nationalist, populist and market eras that can be demonstrated by examining the social composition of clubs, locating their *Lebensraum* as well as understanding the distinctive performative role and the ideological function they have played in each era.

Currently operating within market regulation, Turkish soccer clubs are governed by populist politicians, top capitalists, political career-oriented entrepreneurs and an emerging corporate structure at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As such, clubs increasingly define themselves at the interstices of 'the political' and 'laws' of modern economics. It remains to be seen whether Turkish soccer will continue to subscribe to an 'eco-political' approach or substitute it with a pure corporate model as pressure mounts on Turkish clubs to become more competitive on a global level. Faced with two alternatives, one still wonders: is there enough room for an anti-systemic option to emerge that goes beyond political uses of the game as well as recent attempts of commercialization?

Notes

1. Okay, 'The Introduction', 1–10; Murray, *The World's Game*, 29.
2. Sert, *Gol Atan Galip*.
3. Aksoy, 'Gavur İzmir'de Gol Sesleri', 323–50.
4. Bora, *Ankara Rüzgarı-Gençlerbirliği Tarihi*, 13–53.
5. Akın, 'Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar'.
6. While the share of sport and physical education in the budgets of Turkish Republic was relatively minimal until 1935, Turkish Athletic Association Union (Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı) only transformed into a fully state/party institution right before the Second World War.
7. Duke and Crolley, *Football, Nationality and the State*; Mason, *Passion of the People?*, 65–70; Alabarces and Rodriguez, 'Football and Fatherland', 118–33; Gordon and Helal, 'The Crisis of Brazilian Football', 139–58.
8. Atabaki and Zürcher, 'Introduction', 1–12; Emrence, *99 Günlük Muhalefet*.
9. Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, 117–63.
10. Akın, 'Not Just a Game', 219–32.
11. Topyıldız, *Anadolu Yıldızı Eskişehirspor*.
12. Mardin, 'Center and Periphery Relations', 169–90; Kulaçoğlu and Bora, 'Alemin Kralı Geliyor', 315–27.
13. Bora and Erdoğan, 'Dur Tarih, Vur Türkiye', 221–40; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
14. Among others, regional rivalries included Bursa v Eskişehir and Sivas v Kayseri. See Coşkun, 'Yiğidoların Tarihsel Yenilgisi', 359–69.
15. Çupi, 'Olaylar, Sağlık Lahana Dolmasını Yemesiyle Başladı'.
16. Kalaycıoğlu, 'Commercial Groups', 79–87.
17. Uztuğ, 'Devlet, Belediyeler', 139.
18. *Ibid.*, 137.
19. Öneş, *İçimizdeki Futbol Dışımızdaki Futbol*, 43.
20. The French case is instructive. Eastham, 'The Organisation of French Football', 58–78; Mignon, 'French Football', 230–55; Raspaud, 'From Saint-Etienne', 103–29.
21. Reuters, May 10, 2000, quoted in Moorhouse, 'The Distribution of Income', 90.
22. Bale and Maguire, *The Global Sports Arena*.

23. Morrow, *The People's Game*, 121.
24. Lash and Urry, *Economies of Signs*, 163.
25. Emrence, 'Playing with Global City', 630–41.
26. Akşar, *Endüstriyel Futbol*; Brown, 'European Football', 129–50.
27. King, *The European Ritual*, 97–117.
28. Kozanoğlu, *Türkiye'de Futbol*, 186–9; Kıvanç, *Kesin Ofsayt*, 27–97.
29. King, *The End of the Terraces*, 37–69.
30. Koçak, 'İkinci Lig', 95–102.
31. Kıvanç, *Kesin Ofsayt*, 123–74.
32. Another example was the adventurous entrepreneur, Fadıl Akgündüz who bought Yozgatspor and signed up star players to acquire national fame. His dramatic rise on the national scene was soon accompanied by a political victory when he became an independent member of the Turkish National Assembly for a short period of time after the national elections in 2002.
33. The Uzan family controlled the club managements of İstanbulspor (Istanbul) and Adanaspor (Adana) during the 1990s. Both soccer clubs were in financial ruins as of 2005 and were expecting their new owners.
34. Hazard and Gould, 'Three Confrontations', 199–222.
35. Bernard Tapie of Olympique Marseille should also be included in the list. For a brief discussion, see Murray, *The World's Game*, 157–8.
36. Social democratic leaders included, but were not limited to, Sefa Sirmen, former mayor of Kocaeli; Adnan Polat, a former candidate for Istanbul mayor position; Celal Doğan, former mayor of Gaziantep; and Mustafa Sarıgül, mayor of Şişli and long time candidate for the leadership position of the main opposition party.
37. Mignon, 'New Supporter Cultures', 281. Emphasis added.
38. Duke and Crolley, 'Futbol, Politicians', 99; Giulianotti, 'Built by the Two Varelas', 148.
39. Bourdieu, 'How Can One Be a Sports Fan', 427–40; Mills, *The Power Elite*.

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