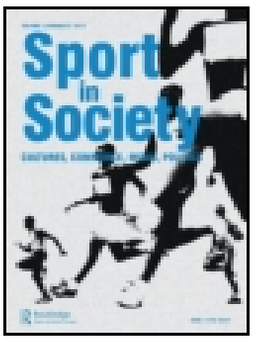

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The (Re)Constitution of football fandom: Hapoel Katamon Jerusalem and its supporters

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ABSTRACT

Hapoel Katamon Jerusalem, a fan owned club in Israel, was established in 2007 by fans of Hapoel Jerusalem, in protest against the management of the original club. The fans have adopted anti-racism, opposition to violence and inclusiveness as markers of their identity, while stressing their links with the surrounding community. The paper emphasizes the role of reflexivity and agency, as the fans built the new club to embody their aspirations. The emphasis on reflexivity is required to integrate in the analysis, both macro-social elements, and processes linked with 'everyday life'. The paper stresses the unintended consequences of the fans' success, in creating a football club owned by them. The performance of HKJ fandom forged, over a short time, an inclusive 'protected space', wherein norms of solidarity and trust were developed. Such a space attracted several thousand persons – many of them coming to football for the first time – and cultivated a sense of 'community' that has become of growing importance in the fans' collective identity.

Introduction

This paper examines the constitution of fandom of a supporter-owned football club, and the social processes behind it. To a certain extent, fans' ownership of their club is the mirror image of most 'ultras' groups. Both are forms of committed fandom, resisting commercialization, with a high degree of emotional attachment to a team (Kennedy 2013). However, they usually represent opposite positions on issues of identity, social inclusion and involvement with club management.

By concentrating on the case of the fans of one football team, Hapoel Katamon Jerusalem (HKJ), the essay argues that there are various structured patterns of fandom culture that stem from the reflexive acts of social agents (Giddens 2013). It tries to describe the 'origins' (Dixon 2013) of a fan-owned club fandom, and how interacting fans produced and reproduced a particular pattern of support.

The aim of the paper is twofold: firstly, to illustrate the implications of fan ownership for the constitution of fandom and the formation of the fan identity, and secondly, to analyse fandom as form of reflexive social agency in modern society. After a brief description of

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HKJ fandom and its development, the first part of the paper examines the formation of its collective identity, the design of its traditions, and the challenge of 'authenticity' in an inclusive environment. The second part reviews issues of inclusion and exclusion, and examines fandom as a 'space' produced and updated through interactions between fans from varied backgrounds. The third part deals with fan ownership as an institution, and describes how the supporters managed the tension between their cultural capital and the financial needs of their club. It also surveys the ways they confronted issues of authority and legitimacy in the club that they own.

Introducing HKJ

HKJ is an Israeli supporter-owned football club founded in 2007 by fans of Hapoel Jerusalem (HJ) in protest against its mismanagement. The original team was established in 1926 by the local branch of the Histadrut (Trade Unions General Federation). Financial troubles during the 1980s led to its sale to local real estate businessmen at the end of the decade as part of the privatization of Israeli football (Ben Porat 2012). The club's financial decline continued, however, and the number of supporters was down to a few hundred by 2006, while the local rival team, Beitar Jerusalem, linked to the nationalist right wing, thrived. Fearing that their team was heading towards its disappearance, the supporters organized several protests against the club owners.

The supporters who eventually founded HKJ had originally planned to buy their old club, and set up a nonprofit association for that purpose. However, after HJ owners refused to sell the club, the fans bought the managing rights, but not the ownership, of a club playing in Israel's third division, and changed its name to Hapoel Katamon. In 2009, the association members decided to set up a new club, owned by them. The new team, HKJ, started playing in Israel's fifth division that year, reaching the second tier in 2015 after a series of promotions. As of the end of August 2015, the association had 700 dues-paying members and several thousand home supporters, with the number rising to 4000–6000 for important matches. Fans come from diverse backgrounds in terms of politics, attitudes towards religion and economic ideology. The association members annually elect the club's board on a one-man, one-vote basis.

The club opposes racism and homophobia, rejects violence, and dedicates time and efforts to communal projects. About a fifth of its budget is used to finance community activities, the highest proportion in Israeli football. HKJ organizes five groups of boys and three groups of girls playing in the leagues of the football federation. Its community activity includes two leagues for boys and girls from Jewish and Arab schools in Jerusalem, a setting that enables Jewish and Arab children to become acquainted with each other. It runs a system of mentors in Jerusalem schools and two sport projects for at-risk youth, one Jewish and one Arab. It also runs a football school attended by children from all parts of the city, and sponsors a football team for adults with mental health problems.

The initiative to form a new club came from a group of young people, most of them in their 30s. They became HJ supporters during its decline in the 1990s, and were very active in the protests against its owners. Joining them were older supporters from the 1970s and 1980s – former activists in political extra-parliamentary groups opposed to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The third group involved in the establishment of HKJ

consisted of traditional HJ fans in their 40s and 50s for whom the club was part of their childhood in the city's southern neighbourhoods.

People outside these three groups joined HKJ after it was established, attracted by its opposition to racism and violence and the idea of fan ownership. Their number and importance have increased steadily and, as stressed below, their arrival set in motion the process of creating HKJ fandom. In practice, it is a new fandom, combining all the groups, with a distinctive collective identity. HKJ fandom includes 'traditional fans' and persons who originally were not HJ followers, some of them not even football fans at all, who joined the club in search of a social framework that would express their aspirations. Thus, HKJ supporters created a committed fandom, best described as a form of both social activism through football and resistance to racism and discrimination.

This case therefore makes it possible to follow the social processes behind HKJ fandom constitution, and to examine the dynamics of its development as a form of collective behaviour. The analysis below is based primarily on fans' posts in the club's online forums in 2010–2015. As explained below, the main debates among the fans were conducted in these forums.

Additional sources include:

- The association's constitution, collectively drafted by rank-and-file members and approved in 2011.
- Recordings of the fans' biweekly podcast containing interviews with individual supporters and groups.
- The minutes of three round table discussions between 80 association members, during the May 2015 'HKJ Association Day'.
- Minutes of a meeting of the association's board with association members on January 2014 to discuss means of increasing the club's revenue.
- Interviews with three founding members of the association for the purpose of putting some of the issues reviewed here into context.

HKJ fandom and its symbolic definitions

Studies on football fandom find that for committed fans, supporting a team is a significant, continuous and stable part of their identity (Ben Ben Porat 2012). Football fandom is seen by the fans themselves as a lifetime practice rooted in family traditions or local context. This feature of fandom is usually stressed to highlight its contrast to the commercialization and globalization of football (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004). Furthermore, fandom stability stands out against the background of fluid or liquid modernity (Best 2013).

However, fandom is rooted not only in tradition, but also, and primarily, in the everyday and institutionalized social life of the fans (Stone 2007). Fandom is a dynamic process shaped by fans monitoring of, and reflection on, their lives, the social symbols and boundaries that regulate their interaction with others, their chances in the market, and their links with public and state institutions (Numerato 2015). Therefore, fandom practices and meanings, including 'traditions', are updated by the fans' reflexive efforts to handle the conflicts and problems woven into their daily lives (Dixon 2011). Expressions of football support are not limited to the pursuit of stability or connectedness in a diffuse reality.

The case of Hapoel Katamon highlights the importance of reflexivity in generating collective symbolic definitions, and the eventual formation of a collective identity. The monitoring and self-awareness of those fans played a key role in forging their collective identity. HKJ fans aimed to form a football club that would fulfill their aspirations, and to become its fans, in ways that would express their perceptions and values. Their aspirations are best described as particular attempts to transcend the divisions created by the particular and primordial definitions of identity in Israel.

Social trends display a high level of income inequality, weak solidarity among groups, erosion of the welfare state, and decreasing levels of trust in social and government institutions. In the urban space of Jerusalem, those trends are marked, owing to the unequal status of social and national groups in the city and its high levels of poverty (National Insurance Institute 2015). Everyday life in the city is constituted and negotiated along the overlapping cleavage lines of nationality (Jews – Arabs), ethnicity (Oriental Jews – Ashkenazi Jews), and religion (religious – secular).

Those social boundaries constitute the everyday horizon that HKJ fans aspired to transcend and transform. The association's most active members in its first days were young people who became HJ supporters during the decade of the 90s, coinciding with rising tensions between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem. Furthermore, for some of them, membership in the HKJ association was an extension of their involvement with other grassroots organizations seeking social change. Moreover, as wage earners and members of young families, they had suffered the consequences of privatization, outsourcing of social services and deterioration of labour conditions. Therefore, in their eyes, football's privatization was part of a wider trend. Establishing a fan owned club, and turning it into a focal point of communal initiatives constituted an act of resistance that expressed their outlook.

The new club soon attracted people who had similar experiences, or were active in community activities, education, environment protection, urban planning, trade unions or fighting racism. HKJ was set up at a period of rising public attention to the effects of economic policy and privatization on welfare and income distribution. Thus, the founding of a fan-owned club by HJ fans manifested a wish to save their team, while echoing a set of ideas and projects emerging in the public sphere. Those ideas eventually led to the outburst of the social protest in July and August 2011, when hundreds of thousands took to the streets to protest economic policy.

In February 2011, close to four years after the establishment of the association, the members approved its constitution. Eight months earlier, in June 2010, a group of founding members had proposed to draft a constitution, in view of the large number of newcomers joining the association. They argued that it was no longer possible to assume that there was a common set of implicit principles for its management, and these therefore had to be stated explicitly and included in a formal document.

However, the same interactions led the new arrivals to accept the declared principle of 'reuniting Hapoel Jerusalem'. Placing it at the opening of the new constitution was not an insincere acceptance of the 'till-death-us-do-part' approach of HJ fans; rather, it constituted a merging of the perspectives of both 'old' and 'new' fans. These mutual perspectives became the cornerstone of HKJ's inclusive character and the basis of a fandom composed of supporters from various backgrounds.

The analysis of the emergence of common symbols is related to the fans' uses of online communication. Online forums, set up by the fans in 2007, played a central role in the

protest against the owners and the proposal to buy the team. The initiative to set up a new club owned by the fans developed in the online and offline social networks connecting members of the group of young supporters. The online forum also connected the young supporters to older fans who had distanced themselves from HJ after its privatization and decline.

After the establishment of HKJ, its open forum became a place where non-association members could also place posts. Moreover, its importance rose steadily as new fans joined the club and took part in the debates. It displays the same features found in any forum of football fans and, helped develop the fans' bond with the new club (Gibbons and Dixon 2010). In addition, there were lively discussions of the club's goals, the relationship between fandom and politics, issues of authenticity, and the role that HKJ should play in advancing the fans' ideals. Therefore, the online interactions turned the forum into a permanent assembly that generated key markers of a collective identity, and where the diverse fans' perspectives merged.

One of those debates took place in March 2012, after hundreds of Beitar Jerusalem fans, leaving the city stadium after a match, attacked Arab employees at a nearby mall. HKJ fans discussed the incident during a discussion lasting two days, with a general condemnation of racism and criticism of police impotence. The debate turned on the event's significance as part of the growing phenomenon of violence against Arabs in Jerusalem and a harbinger of future events. It also covered the best ways of responding to the attacks. The proposals included aiding attacked employees to file a complaint with the police and sending HKJ volunteers to the mall after Beitar Jerusalem matches to protect Arab employees.

This example is one of several instances where fans defined themselves through collective condemnation of racism and violence, while creating a symbolic space of resistance to an urban environment that became threatening. The same definitions appeared in the discussion held in May 2015, when association members held several round table discussions to debate its goals, failures and achievements. One member summarized the day's debates as follows, 'As a social worker, I witness racism every day. HKJ is my choice to partner with people who see the danger and feel threatened'.

The performance of HKJ fandom

Football support traditionally expresses itself in social settings; it is an experience full with emotions and shared with others. During matches, there is a collective expression of support for a team, often described as 'passion' (The Social Issues Research Center 2008), involving singing, jumping, banner waving and wearing of scarves, hats or shirts with the team colours (Clark 2006). Although it is possible to support a team privately, 'true' fans knowingly display their loyalty not only on match days, but when interacting with others in their everyday life.

Football fans assert their identity by their collective performance, inside and outside the stadium, based on the mutual symbols, traditions, norms and values composing their social knowledge (Stone 2007). Moreover, by performing their support, they cultivate their links with other supporters in face-to-face encounters or through online social networks. At the same time, they update their shared knowledge, thus becoming active participants in the construction of the meanings of fandom (Dixon 2011).

The expression of support for HKJ during match days developed as a process that reflected the changes in its fandom – from a narrow range of support forms, commanded

by the founding group of young fans, to a variety of expressions that suited the diversity of fans. The process took place alongside the debates about the nature of 'genuine' support. In its early stages, the discussion involved the young supporters, and was restrained to a narrow definition of support. They agreed that 'true' support involved standing together, choreographically coordinated movements while singing, and chanting accompanied by drums. Any behaviour that did not correspond to this pattern, which is suitable for young males, was not considered 'support'.

The debate was whether to organize 'genuine supporters' and set apart a section of the stands for them. Those proposing such a move also used the term 'ultras' to describe the desired form of support. Opponents of that approach identified ultras with violence, and stressed their opposition to creating a hierarchy of support among fans attending matches. Establishing a hierarchy of fans is a part of creating 'authenticity (Fiske 1992)'. Thus, the opposition to setting apart a group of 'dedicated' fans undermined the idea of 'genuine' support that the young supporters were trying to advance.

This paradox is explained by the agreement of the fans debating 'genuine support' to open the club's doors to anyone accepting its principles. Moreover, they deliberately excluded from the association's constitution any distinctions between old and new fans. The decision to adopt such an inclusive strategy was based on both principle and practical motives. A fan-owned club needs a broad base of supporters from which dues-paying association members are recruited. Inclusiveness also means that a many fans attending matches are women and families with children. Diversity itself became one of the markers of HKJ identity, and constrained the possibilities of developing a male support culture. Thus, it changed the perception and definition of 'authentic support'.

In November 2011 several women supporters appeared on the club's podcast and spoke at length about female fandom. They expressed their satisfaction with the ability to express support in a way that suited them, without imitating male patterns. 'I do not have to join the "supporting block" of males. I can find my way of supporting the team without joining them'.

Some newcomers were attracted to HKJ because of its rejection of violence and its communal work, while others came because it was a 'family-friendly environment'. Once diversified forms of support became legitimate, they could join and internalize the social knowledge associated with fandom: knowing the players, attending away matches, singing the songs, and wearing the team shirt on match days.

However, from the perspective of HKJ young founding supporters, their acts had brought about an ambivalent outcome. The diversification of fandom they had introduced eventually challenged their notion of 'authenticity'. The question of what constitutes 'genuine support' is behind recurring online debates about fans' behaviour during matches and, in particular, the place of cursing and verbal aggressiveness. Although cursing in football might appear devoid of importance, for HKJ followers, it was a question about the form and content of identity creation and the acquisition of norms associated with its fandom.

One example of this debate took place in July 2012 on the online forum, after fans attending the stadium with their families demanded, at the association's annual assembly, the banning of 'verbal violence' in the stands. In response, some young fans described curses and verbal attacks as 'part of football culture'. They called football 'an emotional sport' with 'no room for softness', and proposed setting up a designated 'sterile' zone for families, thus enabling 'other fans to express themselves'. One post summarized the case for 'authenticity' by saying that at the original club, no one had ever thought of banning cursing. He also

criticized applauding the players after they lost a match, a practice introduced by newcomers, which he called 'defeatism'.

This dispute has never been formally settled; nevertheless, each time the diversity versus authenticity question emerged, it was the former that prevailed. Groups of supporters habitually fill specific sections of the stands, but there is a constant movement of people during the match. The 'supporting block' usually occupies the middle stands, singing, jumping, and waving flags during the match. It includes supporters from 'Brigada Malcha', the organized fans of HJ basketball team, who have no special status during football matches. Other groups express support by applauding, sporadic shouts and sometimes joining the singing. Several times during the matches, all of the fans perform a joint chant, preceded by silence, thus affirming their collective identity.

Identity is also affirmed and commemorated through ceremonies sometimes held before home matches. Banners with legends against racism and violence are displayed, or children attending the community projects are invited to the pitch before the match. During 2015, the rainbow flag was displayed several times to mark the club's rejection of homophobia.

Fans' practices of support outside the stadium are similar to those of other supporters around the world. They organize meetings and parties and five-a-side tournaments, there is a club fanzine and a biweekly podcast, the club organizes an annual event for families before the season opening, and children are enrolled in its football school. These activities generate committed fans with a strong attachment to the club and to other supporters.

However, the performance of support for the club also includes practices directly linked to its rejection of racism and its affirmation of social solidarity. Like the ceremonies preceding matches, these practices load HKJ support with emotions, and help forge a collective identity. They also portray HKJ support as a social agency driven by the reflexive acts of supporters.

In December 2014, a classroom in Jerusalem's bilingual (Hebrew–Arabic) school was set on fire by members of a racist Jewish organization. The school is attended by Jewish and Arab children, whom are often invited by the club to attend its home matches. The club enlisted supporters and team players to help the school and play with the students. The attack and the club's response were widely commented on the supporters' online networks. Like the social worker quoted above, they also saw the action in support of HKJ as creating a 'safe space' free from racism.

Community projects are a more standardized form of expressing support for the club outside the stadium. HKJ operates a network of volunteers that involved in those projects who are enlisted through the online forums. During the period under review, from January 2010 to May 2015, there was a constant flow of messages on the fans' forums celebrating those projects and calling them 'the club's essence'.

Agency and reflexivity played a key role in defining supporters' practices and identity formation, as they did in shaping their opposition to racism. During the round table discussions held at the 2015 association day, one of the members described the club's partnership with an institution for at-risk adolescents. She ended her description as follows: 'They now have a football team that includes Arab kids from a neighbouring village. It shows that HKJ makes it possible to turn abstract ideas about justice and coexistence into a reality'.

Oral traditions, memories and fandom

Fandom as collective identity is always connected to the team's history as narrated by the supporters to each other. Knowing what to remember, what to forget and how to narrate the past is a basic feature of a collective identity and its updating (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995). Memories are oral traditions that develop in supporters' social networks and express, in their view, the spirit of their team, 'Genuine' supporters are loyal to their team in the present and to its past, as they perceive it. Moreover, the supporters' collective identity attaches itself to geographical sites with special significance in the team's history, usually a stadium, a neighbourhood, or a city (Fitzpatrick 2013). Thus, the traditions and the memories are part of the intangible assets, the cultural capital, held by the fans (Richardson and Drachan 2006).

The establishment of a new club, like HKJ, owned by its supporters, poses a special challenge to issues of continuity and tradition. HKJ was named to honour Katamon stadium, where the original team played for more than 25 years before it was sold to real estate developers in 1978. The reference to the old stadium in the new club's name was a way of connecting it to the traditions of the original team. In addition, the 'memories' adopted by the fans were translated into practices that in turn reaffirmed 'traditions'. The schools league, the fans' annual five-a-side tournament, and the activities of the club's 'football school' for children are all referred to by both the club and its fans as expressions of values passed to the next generation.

Another element they adopted from what they called 'HJ history' was the rejection of racism. In 1968, Hapoel Jerusalem became the first club to include an Arab player in its team, and he became one of its legends. Thus, an event from the past, the presence of one Arab player at HJ, was transformed into a constitutive element of the 'traditions' adopted by HKJ fans. The emphasis on tradition reinforced their argument that they were the heirs to the spirit of their original team. But it was not merely a matter of symbolically recovering the team of their past; it was about connecting their present situation, in modern Israel to what they regarded as an earlier tradition. The stories they told about the team's past were a reflexive choice of social agents resisting racism.

In contrast, Beitar Jerusalem, HJ's local rival for many years, never hired Arab players. Furthermore, BJ fans are usually identified by their racism and hatred of Arabs and Muslims. Through their rejection of racism, HKJ supporters asserted their communal identity, while defining a distance from BJ fans who were consequently perceived as 'others'. The process was similar to the creation of identity through supporters' rivalries in other parts of the world (Benkwitz and Molnar 2012).

In November 2013, the HKJ team captain publicly criticized Beitar Jerusalem players for not condemning racism among their fans. His statements were heavily criticized in the news media for 'mixing football with politics', triggering an angry response from HKJ fans over online platforms. These fans used the occasion to affirm their anti-racist identity and praised the player, calling him 'our captain' and 'a source of pride for the club'.

The contents of the fans' commentaries reflected the daily reality in Israel and their awareness of the rising tide of racism. Furthermore, rejection of racism became one of the features linking founding members and newcomers, because the latter could identify with the club's stance. Therefore, new fans of a club established a few years before could see themselves as part of a 'tradition', and merge their perspectives with those of the founding

supporters. Thus, 'memories', always an elusive subject, became the unquestioned content of a narrative uniting 'new' and 'old' fans.

Reconstructing authenticity

Merging diverse perspectives and creating a common identity was not a trivial process; rather, it involved negotiating meanings and updating symbolic definitions of identity. It involved a long and sometimes acrimonious debate about what constitutes a genuine supporter. Research on football fandom has analysed the 'authentic' fan from several points of view: social knowledge and cultural capital, the unconditional and emotionally loaded connection with the team, and the social and family bonds involved in lifetime fandom (Davis 2014). Here, authenticity is related to the fans' own experience and their ability to categorize and assess their behaviour and of other supporters, according to their social knowledge (Dixon 2014).

This notion is important, because it played a central role in defining a collective identity by negotiating meanings and adopting common definitions. As described above, the debate on authenticity among HKJ supporters involved the definition of 'genuine' support on match days, but such a discussion centred on the forms of support during matches. A more profound and far more important debate took place in the summer of 2013 and between January and April 2014 concerning two proposals to merge HJ and HKJ.

Since 2009, there have been several initiatives, most of them from third parties, to reunite HJ and HKJ. In 2013, HKJ gained promotion to Israel's second division, meaning the team would face HJ in the next season. Immediately after promotion was secured, the mayor of Jerusalem made an unsuccessful attempt to reunite the teams. Then, in January 2014, a private businessman offered to buy HJ and let HKJ's association manage it as a united and privately held club, with all of its community projects becoming part of the merger.

The two proposals, especially the second, triggered a vigorous debate on the fans' online forums and in several association general assemblies. The possibility of 'returning home' constituted a challenge for the ways the founding members defined and portrayed themselves as 'authentic'. What was at stake was a question of the primary goal of the new club. For some founding members HKJ is a temporary arrangement designed to eventually save HJ from bad management. Thus, genuine fans were exclusively those who supported the original club and aspired to 'return home'. New supporters claimed that HKJ was a club on its own right. It symbolizes a beginning for fans from various backgrounds, who reject racism and advocate supporters' ownership of their club.

On the online forum, some founding members complained that for the newcomers, HKJ was a 'project', while for genuine fans like themselves, football was about loyalty to a team. Newcomers were portrayed as nothing more than 'project fans' who 'did not know 'what it means to support a team from birth', and therefore had no right to prevent the merger. In other words, part of the founding members perceived newcomers as a challenge to their definition of identity. They responded to such a challenge with rituals of distinction, and displayed norms of behaviour that set new supporters apart.

Still, this line of argument was rejected by most founding members. Instead, they appealed for solidarity from all HKJ fandom, founders and newcomers alike, with the ideal of a 'united Hapoel team'. The fans also agreed that the united club should continue to be owned by its

supporters. When the proposal was brought for approval, more than 90% of the members voted for the formation of a united club, if it were owned and managed by the association.

Eventually, the proposal to reunite the two clubs faded because it was not financially feasible. Nevertheless, the experience of defining a united platform and outlook about fandom was a turning point. The episode tested the validity and endurance of the common values and definitions of identity inscribed in the association's constitution. The process of renegotiating meanings and definitions took place over recurrent encounters, in the online forums, in several general assemblies, and in informal meetings. The eventual outcome was a rejection of a specific definition of 'genuine' fandom based on the distinction from newcomers. In its place, the common core of values and the fans' collective identity were reaffirmed.

Furthermore, participants in the debate on the online forum often stressed their affective ties to the club and its 'project'. They expressed anguish over 'losing what we have built', and recognized that HKJ fandom offered a sense of comfort in a protected space. Therefore, new supporters voted with the founding group, in an expressed effort to 'remain together'.

Moreover, the general assertion that 'football belongs to its fans' meant that 'genuine' supporters displayed their loyalty by joining the association and defending fan ownership. A new autonomous definition of 'authentic fans' emerged from the interactions and debates about the proposed merger with the original club. Thus, HKJ founding supporters adopted norms of behaviour and symbolic categories that did not differentiate them from new supporters. The latter had become, in a short time, 'legitimate' supporters in their eyes and those of the founding fans. Authenticity was constructed through negotiations over meanings during recurrent interactions among supporters from varied backgrounds.

Fandom as 'community': bridging and bonding

Football fandom can ease or hinder the creation of social ties across groups. It can create long-term social relations, if it foments common interests and values and provides an environment that encourages trust and collaboration (Brown 2013). However, fandom can also be a powerful tool of exclusion through the creation of sealed social boundaries. After all, fandom practices not only grant meaning to the idea of 'us', but define 'them' or 'others'. The 'other' is not always a supporter of a rival club; sometimes, he is a fan of the same team from a different background, a different religion or a different ideology.

Studies on football fandom and social policy projects have dealt extensively with questions of inclusion and exclusion (Vermeulen and Verweel 2009). Both practices are part of the process of establishing norms through social interactions in particular contexts. Thus, social links among fans historically developed in urban industrial centres as a response to anonymity (Blackshaw 2008). In such a context, social relations among team supporters were an expression of the geographical proximity of residents of a city, or a sector of it. According to some studies, in modern societies, social connections among supporters stem from the search for stability in a diffuse modernity (Best 2013).

This paper argues that social proximity is crucial in the analysis of the process of inclusion or exclusion. The key question is whether interactions happen between 'similar' people with a perceived common social, economic or cultural background. These types of interactions are often related to the nature of the ties they create through time, whether they are 'strong',

frequent, affective, and related to many dimensions of the individual's life, or 'weak', infrequent, and one-dimensional (Granovetter 1973).

The notion of weak and strong ties is of key importance in understanding the character of football fandom. Those ties set the context of interactions and the norms regulating them. Borrowing Putnam's terms, interactions and ties among members of the same social network and the same social background are usually referred as 'bonding', while those among people from diverse social networks are termed 'bridging' (Putnam 2000). Interactions regulated by bonding relations are the basis of exclusion; they are based on the expectation of loyalty to the team and fulfilling obligations to the group (Brown 2013). Interactions among members of ultras groups, holding norms of 'genuine' fandom, are usually associated with this pattern (Kennedy 2013).

Bridging interactions, on the other hand, develop among people from diverse environments usually connected by weak ties. Relations among fans in this pattern of interactions face a double challenge: constructing common meanings, and building expectations based on trust. Without these two elements, bridging as a long-term project becomes impossible. At the same time, bridging is a key to the success of fan-owned clubs, where diversity is the rule. This feature should not be ignored, and the assumption of a homogeneous fandom avoided. Supporters come from diverse backgrounds and hold diverse views about the meanings attached to the support of their club.

When HKJ founders set up their club, they had to create its fandom as well. They had to create ties among various groups of supporters and later attract new fans to the association. The rejection of exclusion as a feasible way of constituting a fandom was therefore a matter of both principle and need. Thus, many interactions occurred between fans barely acquainted with each other. In addition, immediately after the establishment of the club, members volunteered for diverse tasks, despite the weak ties among them, and the uncertain future of the team. The executive board members, internal auditors, and marketing officials are non-paid members. Volunteers manage the club website and podcasts, the sale of merchandize, and the campaigns to recruit new association members.

Explanations of volunteering activities in social organizations emphasize the significance of trust and the importance of social ties as features motivating volunteers (Putnam 2000). The uncertainty about HKJ's continued existence and the initial weak ties between its fans ostensibly did not provide an adequate basis for trust. Nevertheless, in the general framework of HKJ fandom as an instance of reflexive agency, volunteering and trust are deliberate acts of confidence. Since membership in the association is renewed at the end of every season, such confidence is tested yearly.

The developing connections between supporters encouraged cooperation and engagement with the club's projects, even when these were not directly related to football. In addition, once a common set of symbols and values was adopted, the success of the club became the focal point of recurrent interactions. Fans from diverse social networks, economic positions and political beliefs could collaborate, even when the ties between them remained weak. Usually, however, those interactions led to stronger ties.

The encounters among fans, their collaboration and their shared interest in the club led the supporters to use the term 'community' when referring to their fandom. This usage was most prominent during the online debates about the proposed merger with HJ. The symbolic definition of community was widely adopted. Supporters used the term, loaded with positive meanings, when referring to their involvement in the club's activities. The

word 'community' was connected to the affective links to the club; it referred to the 'space' they had created secure from the threats and tensions of everyday life.

HKJ fandom is therefore a symbolic community (Cohen 1985), which the fans perceive as continuous and stable. Their encounters are the context in which they reaffirm and update those symbols. In March 2014, during one the most tense weeks in the debate about the proposed merger with HJ, one of the supporters stated his perception of the club on the online forum: 'In Hapoel Katamon, there is love. There is truly a sense of community, a rejection of racism, not only as a response to Beitar Jerusalem, and there is a commitment to society'. The metaphor of space becomes an important element in the analysis of how reflexive agents created through interaction, a location in which the norms of tolerance, inclusion and trustworthiness were reaffirmed.

The case of HKJ illustrates the importance of bridging in the constitution of fandom. Trust and the feeling of a common identity develop during the encounters between supporters, both on match days and at other times. The ties linking the supporters are their social capital – the basis of their perceived power and capacity to react to external pressures.

Our club, our responsibility

A football club is a legal entity, usually working to achieve its goals using business methods and logic. It raises money from sponsors, buys and sells players, sells tickets and sometimes gets money from television broadcasting rights. A handful of mega-clubs have become corporations with a global presence, but most teams in the world act in accordance with local business conditions.

In contrast to club boards and management, supporters base their acts on emotions and shared symbols that define them as a collective entity. Fandom is a voluntary form of enlistment that operates through social ties and networks. Fans regard the symbols that unite them, their cultural capital, as the repository of the team's spirit. They may resist efforts to base club management on the pursuit of financial gain, because they view such behaviour as a threat to their cultural capital (Richardson and Drachan 2006).

Up until the end of the 1980s, owners of football clubs were usually local associations, local councils and municipalities, trade unions, churches, commercial enterprises or local private owners. Since the 1990s, the trend towards commercialization has integrated football into the global market. It has created a global culture of football consumption, and has often shattered existing patterns of ownership (Kennedy and Kennedy 2012).

Parallel to these developments, patterns of fandom have also evolved. Up until the late 1990s, studies of football fandom portrayed supporters as males operating in informal social networks, based to a large extent on geographical and physical proximity. A perceived rise in violence and the emergence of 'hooliganism' were symptoms of the tensions between the supporters' cultural capital and their local traditions on the one hand, and the commercial and financial values embedded in globalized football on the other (Numerato 2015).

However, when examining supporters' response to football's commercialization, it cannot be assumed that they are passive, or merely reacting to club initiatives. The fans are not merely clinging to local traditions and seeking an anchor of stability in a diffuse reality; they are reflexive agents aware of their situation, who can actively choose from a range of possible reactions to commercialization (Williams 2013). Concentrating exclusively on violence and extreme behaviour therefore ignores the variety and complexity of the fans' reaction.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the analysis of football fandom should not ignore its social dimension. Fandom is a form of collective behaviour conducted within social networks. Therefore, when describing fans' patterns of reaction, it is necessary to take into account their collective dimension, instead of concentrating exclusively on the individual and his everyday life. Fans talk to each other, and sustain a constant dialogue about their situation as supporters of a team. They exchange views about their aspirations and relations with the club owners. Furthermore, by utilizing technology and global communications, they can also learn from the fans' initiatives in other places around the world.

Conversations among supporters may become a recurrent deliberation about the ways to respond to any perceived threat to their values, or traditions. Sometimes, the deliberations become a formal feature, and the fans may set up organizations to advance their interests. In practice, fan organizations have taken diverse forms. They can be one-time efforts or permanent features of engagement; they can be structured flatly or loosely, or conform to a structured hierarchy.

Moreover, there is also great variety in the type of actions adopted by the different groups of fans, depending mostly on the local contexts where they take place and the challenges facing the supporters. This process of 'creative accommodation' to commercialization refers to the character of the relations between the fans' cultural capital, and the club's management of its economic resources (Williams 2013). The range of potential outcomes includes several patterns: all-out confrontation, conflicts over particular issues, cooperation, and, finally, an overlapping of interests when the fans become the owners of the club, like in the case of HKJ.

Fan ownership of football clubs has received less attention than other forms of fandom collective actions, particularly ultras. Specifically, with the exception of some outstanding cases (e.g. FC United of Manchester) (Brown 2008) there is a lack of research regarding the social processes behind it. However, there have been a number of studies on the economic and organizational aspects of supporters' ownership and/or management of their clubs (Working Group Report on Supporter Involvement in Football Clubs 2014).

The path to fan ownership varies according to the club. In some cases, the fans took over after the club imploded financially, while in other cases, fans collaborated with private businessmen to keep the club alive. Finally, there are cases of fans who decided to set up a club that would represent their aspirations, even when their original team was still active, as in the case of FC United of Manchester. HKJ belongs to this last category, since its fans wanted it to embody the 'traditional ideas' of HJ as they defined them. Their basic premise was that a football club morally belongs to its supporters.

However, fan ownership of HKJ did not eliminate the friction between commercial considerations and the principles embedded in the fans' cultural capital; rather, this tension was transferred to the supporters themselves. HKJ fans are compelled to confront the day-to-day management of their club, including its financial needs. The tension between the monetary aspects of club management and their principles led them to include in the association's constitution a clause stipulating that HKJ would be managed on the basis of 'budget responsibility', and would always honour its contractual commitments to its players.

Nonetheless, accommodation to economic needs is ubiquitous in the management of the club. Some of those practices were specific measures dealing with temporary issues. In December 2013, following a report by the board that there was no money for players' wages, the association members launched a special money raising effort, including additional payments from them.

However, when financial issues became recurrent, it was necessary to find formal, even bureaucratic, solutions. This happened when the club was required to set ticket prices – an issue for clubs and followers all over the world. The association appointed several committees, which presented recommendations that were eventually approved by its general assembly. The need to accommodate principles to need was also evident in the case of sponsorships, which are raised mainly by the association members and its board. The need for sponsors has increased with the team's promotions to higher leagues, since the financial needs increased far more than the money coming from members' fees. In an effort to keep the commercial aspect in line with HKJ values, the sponsors are invited to join the community projects and take part in their activities.

Even when sponsors' money has been forthcoming, however, the members are fully aware that long-term financial needs have to be met. In particular, their decision to reach the top division forced them to compromise on one of their main principles: the management of their club. After lengthy deliberations, the members agreed to add to the board representatives of businessmen who donated large sums to the club. The constitution was amended to increase the number of board members to seven, four of whom are association members who are required to vote in accordance with the decisions of the general assembly. While the fans remain the owners of the club and the chairman comes from their ranks, the compromise shows the need for accommodation when fans take the path of ownership of their own club.

These examples illustrate the need for practices capable of managing the inherent friction between financial requirements and the 'spirit of the team'. Fan ownership is a form of engaging and committed fandom, frequently originating with dissention on some of the very issues on which they must compromise when in charge of their team.

Legitimacy and authority

The establishment of HKJ originated from the protest by a group of HJ fans, from one network of friends and acquaintances. They viewed themselves as embodying the spirit of their original team; its symbols and traditions. They staged protests against the way the club was being run, which, in their opinion, jeopardized its future. After becoming increasingly frustrated with the owners, they felt compelled to abandon the club; they would continue their struggle from the outside. In their eyes, their loyalty to HJ justified their acts; legitimacy stemmed from the years they had spent 'following the team wherever it went'.

The fans' campaign against the owners featured, at its onset, similar traits to those of comparable ultras and activist groups around Europe. It involved young men, usually bonded by strong ties, but loosely organized; they came to the rescue of their team, in the name of their 'genuine' love for it; they resisted racism and were attached to local 'traditions' (Doidge 2013). Nevertheless, what started as a grassroots protest, against mismanagement of a football club, grew into an inclusive civil association. The latter is strongly institutionalized; it has a formal constitution, with a defined structure of governance and decision-making procedures, well understood by its members.

HKJ fandom still retains some of the features of a grassroots movement; it promotes resistance to racism and fan ownership of football clubs; the collective adopts and undertakes activities and projects proposed by rank-and-file members. At the same time, HKJ is a civil association that advocates social change through football; it mediates between its members

and the community. In addition, HKJ is an inclusive organization, open to all persons who agree to comply with its principles. Finally, the association is a form of formalized fandom; it displays a diversity in views, but has created mechanisms enabling it to reach eventual consensus, when necessary.

This paper has underscored the importance of reflexivity in guiding the fans' choices, and the unintended consequences they had. The process started with a small group of fans, discussing and deciding to open their ranks to other groups of supporters. Their original plan was to raise money in order to buy their team; however, they soon changed course and established HKJ, after the owners of the original club refused to sell it. The new club was meant to embody the fans' values and enable them, in the future, to buy Hapoel Jerusalem. Breaking away from an active club is considered by football fans to be an extreme measure; usually is should be avoided. Thus, HJ rebel fans decided to call 'every supporter that cares about the team' to join them; after failing to buy their team, they raised money to establish a new club. But money was not the only reason behind the call for support from the young fans; they also needed to gain legitimacy for their decision to break away from HJ. Both aims were intertwined, as the commitment to contribute money to the project meant, concurrently, voicing agreement with a radical move.

The concept of fan-ownership was not new to the rebel fans; it had appeared extensively some years earlier, in a fanzine published by some of them. Therefore, when the crisis between the fans and the owners reached a climax, in 2007, the idea of fan-ownership was adopted by the former, without much debate. The initiative offered, to those fans joining it, a powerful vision; the ownership of their football club. It became a focal point of attraction to fans who felt that their team was the victim of mismanagement; it also attracted people who did not support Hapoel Jerusalem.

A wider base of support, beyond 'traditional' HJ supporters, meant that HKJ fandom included persons from diverse economic, social or political backgrounds; 'self-evident' norms and expectations did no longer apply. Witnessing the rise in the number of fans, and their diversity, the founding members drafted, in 2010, the proposed association's principles. According to those principles, the association's general assembly is the source of authority in all matters pertaining to the club's management. The general assembly approved, in 2011, the association's constitution. Since then, it has been amended several times, but it still is the document that defines the principles and values by which the club is managed.

In addition to the formal decision-making mechanisms, the fans online forums are an informal meeting place, where important issues are discussed, and disputes over matters of principle tacitly settled. Thus, in 2009 and 2010, long debates were held on HKJ and its links to party politics. Eventually, the fans agreed that the club should eschew any political identity, but to promote community work. Since then, the issue of politics has only appeared sporadically on the forum.

Through the debates on the forums, norms managing online interactions among fans were defined. This feature was crucial, as practices designed to find common ground among members were routinized. By the time the debates on the proposed merger with HJ began, in 2014, those practices were already firmly established. They were instrumental in reaching a wide consensus, on the association's response to the planned merger. As mentioned above, the online interactions enabled the members to define fan ownership as their primary source of legitimacy.

Conclusions

HKJ fandom was forged, to a large extent, out of a sense of yearning for a team that, in the view of its fans, once existed. The fans of a battered team from the 1990s saw HKJ as embodying the memories of a HJ they never knew, but whose memory they had preserved, through oral traditions; it resisted racism and was rooted in the communities of southern Jerusalem. Their longings were a ` period of time, they created a club with a committed fandom, with a defined common identity.

HKJ fans are reformists, not revolutionaries; they promote the creation of an inclusive community based on a diversity of backgrounds and opinions; they willingly cooperate with state and municipal agencies to promote their projects. Nonetheless, the establishment of a fan owned club was a form of social activism, in response to the commercialization of football. It was also an expression of their opposition to racism, violence and homophobia in Jerusalem's public sphere. The case of HKJ highlights the complexity and diversity of fandom, as a culture of resistance to the conditions defining the fans' everyday life. In this sense, the practices of football fans constantly update fandom itself. Fandom is a process, not an object.

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