



**A COMPARATIVE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS:
TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE FANS IN TURKISH FOOTBALL
'FROM SOCIAL ACTIVITY TO FOOTBALL FAN IDENTITY'**

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*I read texts, images, cities, faces, gestures, scenes, etc.
Roland Barthes*

Abstract

The main aim of semiotic analysis is to reveal the reality behind what is seen. It is, therefore, more important to read what is signified than what is seen, especially in visual (such as pictures, photographs) objects. Based on Roland Barthes' concepts of sign, signifier and signified, this study aims to reveal the transformation of especially female fans in the history of sports. Photographs of female fans in the Republic of Turkey in the 1930s were compared with those of today's female fans and analyzed using semiotic analysis. A table consisting of the sign, signifier and signified was plotted for each photograph, which was then analyzed individually. The most notable feature of the photographs from the 1930s is that female fans wore elegant clothes to football games. It is also notable that their movements were restricted and that they were watching the games falteringly and passively, indicating that they acted as if they were attending a social event rather than a football game. On the other hand, the photographs of today's female fans show that they are more active and confident in football events and that they socially identify as football fans.

Keywords: Female Football Fans, Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Turkey.

Introduction

Modern society in general is a scene which embodies and fosters the principle of equality of men and women in all spheres of life. Having ushered in the demise of patriarchy, modern society offers equal opportunities to both women and men, and creates a more pluralistic and egalitarian structure, by which sports in general and football in particular are also influenced.

The structure of football directly linked to notions of masculinity created gender inequality, especially in the early periods, during which football monopolized by men closed its doors to women. The effort of associating football with masculine identity has played a role in this as well. Football has been perceived as a sign of strength, violence, resistance and excitement, and imbued with such dominant meanings. Such notions as violence, sweat,

blood, smell, speed, kick, etc. reinforcing the ideals of masculinity have been influential in shaping and perpetuating gender inequality in football.

During those periods, gender inequality prevailed and football fields became a stage for the display of masculinity and power to which women had limited access.

However, active participation of women in social life has increased with the modernization process, which has also transformed the traditional perception of football. Having become one of the most important actors in the public sphere, women have gained access to different fields, one of which was football.

Women who have made their way to stadiums more confidently, either as spectators or players, have also paved the way for a change in society's perception of football. Once described as the playground of masculinity, football has encountered many elements that have transformed it into a domain, in which women can also make their presence felt. This encounter has encouraged more women to participate in football events as spectators and paved the way for the emergence of women's football.

This is also true for Turkish female football fans, who have reached their present position as a result of the developments mentioned above. This study aims to elaborate on this historical development to better understand the process of change and development that female football fans have gone through.

Purpose of Research

This study will compare the photos of female football fans from the early years of the Turkish Republic and those of contemporary female football fans, and interpret the differences between them using semiotic analysis.

The 1930s photos were selected from a total of 635 issues of sports magazines; *Türkspor* (issue, 208; 1929-1932), *Olimpiyat* (issue, 200; 1931-1934), *Top* (issue, 148; 1934-1937), *Golspor* (issue, 43; 1934-1935), and *Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor* (issue 36; 1937-1939). Photos that showed female football spectators clearly were used for analysis. We accessed especially the aforementioned magazines in order to get a sense of the extent to which women participated in the football events of that period. We conducted archival research at the National Library of the Republic of Turkey and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Atatürk Library for about 9 months. The photos of today's female football spectators were obtained from the Internet.

Methodology

Semiotic analysis was used in this study. Semiotic analysis can be applied for content analysis to all types of systems, such as painting, photography, sculpture, cinema, music and

architecture, etc. and to written discourses such as story, novel, poetry and theater, and especially to advertising, tourism, marketing and political discourses. Semiotic analysis has been widely used for the analysis of visual contents especially since the 1970s (Altınbuken, 2014: 240). Aiming to reveal the underlying reality behind the visible element, semiotics is a discipline that has been addressed and discussed by many linguists. Having a linguistic content, semiotics is an abstract and abstruse discipline. Though the field of semiotics has been shaped by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, the word semiotics was in use in ancient Greece. Derived from the words “semenion” (sign) and “logia” (science) in Ancient Greek, the word “semiologiem” refers to the “science of signs” (Rifat, 2009: 27).

Semiotics is mainly concerned with meaning, and all signs and compositions form a system of signification. These systems are not languages, however, it is impossible to isolate and dissociate those systems from languages because even if signs try to generate meaning, they cannot do it independently of the language (Yücel, 2008: 119).

Since semiotics is primarily concerned with signs, it would be appropriate to explain the latter in order to understand the former more clearly. A sign is defined as any object, entity or phenomenon that can stand for something else and signifies something other than itself (Vardar, 2002: 106). The level of perception is, therefore, crucial with regards to signs because perception influences the way signs are shaped and comprehended as they signify something other than themselves. For example, smoke signifies fire, frowned eyebrows signify anger and a dog signifies an animal (Vardar, 1982: 52). In other words, what a sign signifies is what a person perceives through his/her life and experiences. While the sign of “bread” consists of the letters b + r + e + a + d, it also signifies hunger. The main task of signs is the transmission of ideas (Guiraud, 1994: 21).

Languages, behaviors, gestures, images, traffic signs, the architecture of a city, elements of an art and of printed media, fashion, and means of transportation etc., in short, everything that constitutes a meaningful whole is a system. These systems are also signs (Rifat, 1998: 111). This means that everything that we see or hear is a sign and that we are surrounded by them. Signs establish an empire to present their existence in different forms to human beings.

According to Barthes (1993: 40), especially urban and modern people spend their lives making meanings of signs. A dress, a car, a meal, gestures, a movie, music, newspapers etc. the common character of these is that they all are signs of which people unwittingly try to make a meaning. A car signifies the status of the driver while a dress signifies the conformism of the person who wears it. For example, the headline of a newspaper that reads “Pope Paul

VI is scared” signifies that if you buy the newspaper, you will find out why he is scared (Barthes, 1993: 153).

A sign is composed of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the plane of expression concerned with auditory or visual elements while the signified is the plane of content changing from culture to culture. The signifier coalesces with the signified and composes the sign (Vardar, 2002: 106).

The sign has two meanings in semiotics, which are denotation and connotation. Connotation plays an important role in image and photo interpretation. For example, according to Burton (1995: 154), denotation reveals the content of an image or a photo while connotation aims to reveal the possible meanings of the content, which means that denotation is what everybody sees while connotation is what changes from person to person.

According to Barthes, the meaning-making of a text involves both denotation and connotation (Barthes; in Çobaner, 2013: 221). Denotation refers to the existing meaning of the sign. Consider black and white and color photos of an apartment. In the former, the whole image consists of an apartment because the color of the wall, the door, the windows, the curtains and the roof is not clear. On the other hand, we can clearly see in the latter the colors of all the elements of the apartment. However, what is seen in both types of photos is the apartment. In other words, denotation is the element seen in the photo and puts forward a judgment that applies to everyone.

Connotation, on the other hand, refers to change and subjectivity. It emphasizes the interaction that emerges as a result of the sign coming into contact with senses, emotions and cultural values (Fiske, 1990: 85). Connotation refers to the plane of content of a work and, therefore, is the signified (Parsa, 2008:116). Connotation is the secondary meaning (Barthes, 2002: 7) and, in the most general sense, is the opposite of denotation (Rifat, 2013: 223). In terms of emphasizing the signified, connotation rather reveals how the sign is expressed.

In his work titled “*Image, Music, Text,*” Barthes (1977: 26-28) states that the distinction between denotation and connotation is more obvious in photos. Denotation is rather the reproduction on the film of the object in which the camera zooms. Connotation, on the other hand, is the human dimension of the process, by which what is included in the photo, the focus, the light, the angle and the quality of the film are decided. Denotation is what is photographed, whereas connotation is how it is photographed.

This points to the fact that the signified (connotation) can be interpreted better than the signifier (denotation) because the former allows all possible interpretations. Barthes’ semiotic analysis was the choice of method in this study as it is more effective in photo interpretation

and more convenient for comparisons than other methods. Semiotic analysis is not based on the current meaning of a text or image but instead on the meaning behind it (Sezer-Sert, 2014: 21). In other words, the aim of this study is not to make sense of the meaning at the surface of the photos in question but to reveal what they really mean.

Semiotic Analysis of Photos and Findings



Photo: 1



Photo: 2

Photo 1: Sign	Photo 1: Signifier	Photo 1: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, glasses, dresses	Stylishness, astonishment, happiness, smile
Photo 2: Sign	Photo 2: Signifier	Photo 2: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys, scarves	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

In Photo 1, which was taken in Taksim Stadium in 1935, spectators consist of men and women focusing on a certain point, with men feeling a sense of amazement or surprise, whereas women feeling a sense of happiness. The women, who seem to be aware that a photo is being taken, are smiling. The clothes of the women and men are very notable. The women look very modern and give the impression that they dress more carefully than men to football games. Most of the men are wearing felt hats, ties and jackets, and their clothes, just like those of the women, look modern and neat. It is apparent from the photo that men and women were wearing elegant clothes to football events and watching games together in the past.

In Photo 2, a woman and a man, who are apparently watching a sporting event, are in the foreground. The spectators are cheering to support their team and wearing its jersey. The spectators, especially in the foreground of the photo, are standing and some are raising their arms, some clenching their fists and some raising their index fingers. The fact that female fans go to games to support their team, wear the colors of the team, identify themselves with it and even stand up to support it are a couple of points that should be considered in this context.



Photo: 3



Photo: 4

Photo 3: Sign	Photo 3: Signifier	Photo 3: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses	Stylishness, happiness
Photo 4: Sign	Photo 4: Signifier	Photo 4: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys, scarves, flag	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

Photo 3 is from a match between Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray held in Taksim Stadium in March, 1935. Three women are in the foreground of the photo. It seems like the game has not yet started because the spectators sitting in the front seats are looking at the camera and other spectators in the background do not seem to be focusing on anything in particular. The clothing of the female audience is again notable and quite stylish. The female spectators are wearing coats and foulards to protect themselves from the cold, and smiling. The male spectators are also wearing coats to protect themselves from the cold. They are also wearing shirts, jackets, ties and felt hats. In other words, the women and men in this photo look very modern.

Two women stand out in Photo 4. They are wearing their team's jersey and waving its flag. Pleased with the current situation, they have raised their hands. The male spectators in the background are also wearing their team's jersey and sitting in their seats. The interesting aspect of the photo is that the male fans are sitting whereas the female fans are standing and supporting their team, which can be interpreted as an indication of the fact that female fans express their affection more freely, and support for their teams and identify themselves more with them.



Photo 5



Photo 6

Photo 5: Sign	Photo 5: Signifier	Photo 5: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses, chairs, fences	Stylishness, happiness, curiosity
Photo 6: Sign	Photo 6: Signifier	Photo 6: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, jerseys, flags, bandanna, paint	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

Photo 5, which was taken in Taksim Stadium in 1925, shows a group of men and women. There are four women, one little girl and an old man sitting in chairs in front of the fence, and children behind them standing with fezzes on their heads. There are also people on the top left corner of the photo sitting on a tribune-like structure. The women in the foreground give the impression that they are sitting in the dress circle. They are focused on a certain point and probably watching the game while the little girl is looking at the camera. Their clothes are quite elegant and modern. The old man sitting on the front row is wearing a suit and holding a cane and looks classy. The other men standing on the other side of the fence are wearing fezzes and jackets. The women rather look like they are attending a social event and watching the game quite comfortably.

Photo 6 is a snapshot of female fans that seem like they are there to watch the match of the national team. The most noticeable detail in the photo is that the three female fans painted their faces. The woman on the left painted a crescent and a star, which are the symbols of the flag of Turkey, on her right and left cheeks, respectively. She also painted on her forehead a strip representing the colors of the national team. The woman in the middle painted half her face in red and the other half in white. She also painted a crescent and a star on her cheeks. The woman on the right painted a crescent and a star on her right cheek and wore a bandanna that reads "Turkey" round her head. Feeling a sense of nationalism, they each are holding a Turkish flag. It is very common for fans, especially during matches of the national team, to

paint the colors and symbols of Turkey's national flag on their faces. The female fans, who are content with supporting the national team, represent the new image of female fans.



Photo 7



Photo 8

Photo 7: Sign	Photo 7: Signifier	Photo 7: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses	Stylishness, curiosity, excitement
Photo 8: Sign	Photo 8: Signifier	Photo 8: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys, flags, paint	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

Photo 7 is from a match between Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray held in Taksim Stadium in 1929. In the photo, we see a group of men and women focused on a specific direction and watching a specific event. It must be noted that, from today's perspective, it is hard to believe that the people in the photo are actually watching a football game. While almost all the spectators are seated, two female spectators are standing on the right. All female spectators have a fairly modern look. They all are wearing hats and coats. Most of them are wearing foulards and skirts. The male spectators are wearing felt hats and coats. The main feature of the 1930s photos is that all spectators watch football events calmly without letting themselves go overboard. This is due to the fact that fans of that period did not identify themselves with the teams they supported. The fact that even male fans of that period sit and watch the games calmly is in complete contrast with the concept of football fanship today.

There are two men and a woman in the foreground of Photo 8. The female spectator painted the flag of Turkey on her right cheek and wore a red and white wreath round her head. Raising her left hand and clenching both her fists, she gives the impression that she is absolutely content with the situation. The male spectator in the middle is wearing the national team's jersey and the Turkish flag round his shoulders like a cape. He painted all over his face in red, and painted a crescent and a star on it. The male spectator on the right painted a Turkish flag on each of his cheek. Both the male spectators are raising their clenched fists in

the air. The expression on the face of the male spectator on the right matches the color of his shirt (red) because red, which is the color of blood and fire, also symbolizes energy, war, power, determination and dominance, which are clear from the expression on his face.



Photo 9



Photo 10

Photo 9: Sign	Photo 9: Signifier	Photo 9: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses, chairs	Stylishness, curiosity, excitement
Photo 10: Sign	Photo 10: Signifier	Photo 10: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

Photo 9 shows a group of men and women. In the foreground, there are three women sitting on the chairs, and to their right, there are two men sitting on the chairs. There is a woman sitting on the chair behind the empty chair and a woman standing behind the women sitting on the chairs. In the photo, we see 5 women wearing elegant clothes. They are wearing hats and coats. The three women sitting on the chairs and smiling in the foreground seem quite pleased with the event. The men are wearing suits, ties and coats, and curiously watching what is taking place in the field. The photo indicates that women feel very comfortable in social life. The fact that female spectators are sitting on chairs away from tribunes is a proof of the importance given to the presence of women in sports events during that period.

In Photo 10, we see a female fan in the foreground as the focal point of attention and a group of male fans in the background. She is wearing her team's jersey and raising her right arm in the air, cheering to support her team, whereas the male spectator standing to her left is watching the game nervously and curiously. Raising right arm symbolizes especially power. In other words, she gives the impression that she can do anything for her team, which is one of the most important indicators of the courage that female fans feel in tribunes.



Photo 11



Photo 12

Photo 11: Sign	Photo 11: Signifier	Photo 11: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses, chairs	Stylishness, curiosity, excitement, order
Photo 12: Sign	Photo 12: Signifier	Photo 12: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys, scarves	Joy, enthusiasm, excitement

Photo 11 shows a group of men and women. There are female spectators sitting on chairs at the front. They are wearing hats and coats, and look very elegant. We can tell from the expression on their faces that they are happy being there. The female spectators standing also seem that way. The male spectators are wearing suits and felt hats. We can also tell from the photo that the seating area is on the field.

There are two women and a man in the foreground of Photo 12. The black long-haired female spectator in the foreground is wearing the jersey of her team and holding a scarf that reads on it "one against all," indicating that her team has the power to fight alone against other league teams. What is more, the serious expression on her face emphasizes fearlessness. We can tell from the photo that female spectators now feel confident enough to unfurl banners in tribunes and move in public space independently. This can be attributed to their identification with their teams. The woman in the background of the photo is wearing the jersey of her team. The male spectator on the far left could not be interpreted, for the camera did not fully capture the expression on his face.



Photo 13



Photo 14

Photo 13: Sign	Photo 13: Signifier	Photo 13: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses	Stylishness, order, curiosity, excitement
Photo 14: Sign	Photo 14: Signifier	Photo 14: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Woman, man, jerseys	Perplexity, sadness

Photo 13 shows a group of men and women. There are four women and one girl among the group gathered to watch a football game. Especially the hats that women are wearing are noticeable. The spectators are not wearing any coats, indicating that it is warm there. The female spectators are watching the game with great curiosity. The girl is sitting with her hand on her chin. Most of the male spectators are wearing suits and ties. We can tell from the photo that the male spectators especially in the back rows are watching the game more carefully.

A woman and a man are in Photo 14. The woman wearing the jersey of her team placed her left arm round the man's shoulders. We can tell from the expression on her face that the team she is rooting for is not doing well on the field. Disappointed, she placed her left arm round the man's shoulders to get some support. We can state that female spectators do not shy away from socializing and expressing their emotions in tribunes anymore. The male spectator, also wearing the jersey of his team, is focused on the field. He placed his left hand on his mouth, looking sad.

**Photo 15****Photo 16**

Photo 15: Sign	Photo 15: Signifier	Photo 15: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses	Stylishness, order, curiosity, excitement
Photo 16: Sign	Photo 16: Signifier	Photo 16: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys	Perplexity, sadness

In Photo 15, we see a group of men and women gathered to watch a sports event. All the female spectators sitting in the first row look stylish. The photo was taken before a football game held in Izmir in honor of Mübeccel Namık who won the Miss Turkey pageant in 1930. The fourth woman from the left is Mübeccel Namık. The fact that a football game was organized in honor of the winner of the Miss Turkey pageant is a clear indication of the importance given to women in Turkey. It is also possible to think of this as an action to increase the visibility of women in sports fields.

In Photo 16, we see a group of male and female spectators of a football team. The female spectators are wearing their team's jersey. It is clear from the expression on their faces that the team they support is not doing well on the field. The female spectators look perplexed and sad. Some of the male spectators are wearing their team's jersey while others are wearing regular clothes. The expression on their faces is that of discontent. In other words, the photo presents a portrait of life. Just like in real life, people in tribunes feel sad, confused and disappointed. The difference between the two photos can be described as the manifestation of support for the participation of women in sports events for 90 years. In other words, it is possible to explain the situation from a cause and effect perspective.



Photo 17



Photo 18

Photo 17: Sign	Photo 17: Signifier	Photo 17: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, hats, dresses	Stylishness, order, curiosity, excitement
Photo 18: Sign	Photo 18: Signifier	Photo 18: Signified
A photo of spectators watching a football game	Women, men, jerseys	Curiosity, excitement, enthusiasm, hope

We see a group of men and women in Photo 17. The clothes the three women sitting on the front row are wearing are particularly notable. The woman sitting in the middle is Ceriman Halis who won the Miss World pageant 1932. She is there to watch the game. Smiling, she is wearing a hat, a jacket and gloves. The other two women are also wearing hats and coats. Most of the male spectators are wearing felt hats, ties and jackets, and some wearing coats. Both the male and female spectators look stylish.

In Photo 18, there is a crowd of men and women gathered to watch the game of their team. There are five female spectators in the photo. The most prominent among them is the woman wearing her team's jersey and holding up the team's scarf. She seems like she is cheering to support the team. The woman standing at the back on the left is also wearing her team's jersey, holding up the team's scarf and cheering to support the team. Two other women are standing in the upper right corner. There is a security guard woman on the front, with her back turned. The female spectators seem content. The male spectators are wearing their team's jersey and some of them are holding up the team's scarves and cheering. The difference between the two photos can be described as the manifestation of support for the participation of women in sports events for 90 years.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Football fanship is a rather complex phenomenon which is mostly performed by men as it is associated with multiple masculinities such as violence, profanity, slang, sweat, smell,

blood and, sometimes, death. However, with modernization, women have claimed more space in public areas, which has challenged male hegemony in football.

This is also true for Turkey in which women have begun to penetrate almost every aspect of football. Either as players or fans, women have gotten their hands on football, talked about it and transformed it.

The aim of this study was to perform a semiotic analysis to reveal the transformation of female football fans in Turkey. Women attended football events as spectators in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Whether being spectators can be associated with the concept of fanship, however, it remains a moot point because female spectators in the early years of the Turkish Republic wore stylish hats and coats for football games and had a purely aesthetic look. In fact, the photos from 1925 show that female and male spectators were sitting in separate places. Female spectators were watching the games sitting on their seats without letting themselves go overboard or wearing their teams' jersey. The 1930s photos indicate that football games were rather social events for female spectators back then.

With the adoption of a secular civil law in 1926, the visibility of women in social life increased even more, which also reinforced a more egalitarian setting in stadiums. An example of this can be seen in the photo from 1929 where women and men are sitting together in tribunes. In addition, women who won Miss Turkey pageants and Miss World pageants were invited to watch football games, which can be interpreted as an effort to encourage women to attend sports events.

After a while, female spectators started to stand up from where they were sitting to watch the games and let themselves get carried away by them. This can be interpreted as women enjoying their rights more fully in the public domain than they did in the past. In other words, for women, football events were no longer social occasions in which they had to wear stylish clothes, but areas of social life with which they have started to identify themselves.

The current photos show that today's female fans have begun to be more active in football games. Gradually playing more significant role in the public sphere in Turkey, women have been transformed into fully fledged football fans.

The most noteworthy aspect of the study is the transformation of women's clothing. In other words, female spectators have taken their hats and coats off and put their team's jerseys on. They also use the flags and scarves of their teams as accessories. What is more, they paint their faces with the colors of their favorite football teams instead of wearing makeup.

The current photos also show that female spectators watch the football games standing and using their body language more, like clenching their fists and raising them up in the air or making obscene hand gestures.

The photos also point to the exponential increase in women's self-confidence in 90 years, which can be clearly seen in their facial expressions and body language. In other words, women have become more visible in the public sphere and gained more self-confidence with modernization. This has also been facilitated by the concept of the equality of women and men, the increased importance given to women, and promotion of their economic freedom.

Another prominent aspect of the current photos is that female spectators cheer for their teams, which can be interpreted as the ultimate display of freedom that women enjoy in tribunes. Female spectators of the past who watched football games in an aloof manner and hid their true feelings have been replaced with female fans watching football games in a state of excitement and freely expressing their emotions, sometimes with cheers and sometimes with obscene hand gestures or remarks. In other words, today we see female spectators in Turkey who identify themselves with and exhibit emotional attachment to their teams just like their European counterparts, and share similar characteristics to male fans instead of calm, quiet and reserved female spectators of the past who regarded football games as social activities where they wore stylish and elegant clothes.

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