

CONSTRUCTING CIVIC IDENTITY THROUGH SOCCER FANDOM IN ROME

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Abstract: This article explores how Italian football (soccer) fandom shapes civic identity, focusing on Roman soccer fans. Through ethnographic data, it delves into the construction of civic identity using various communication forms, including verbal and visual expressions. Drawing from museum studies, the study emphasizes the significance of fan-created displays in shaping fan identities. These discursive practices reveal fans' notions of place and local identity. Despite the global reach of mass media fan cultures, sports fan culture maintains strong ties to locality. While many cultural practices have become deterritorialized, sports, including high school, college, and professional teams, continue to represent local identity. Teams compete against rivals from nearby or distant locales, symbolizing community pride. However, the market economy complicates this representation, as professional teams often consist of athletes from a global labor pool. This research highlights the enduring connection between sports, locality, and fan identity.

Keywords: football fandom, civic identity, communication, fan-created displays, local identity

Introduction

In Italy, football (soccer) fandom is an important site on which to construct and perform civic identity. Based on a constructivist, communication-oriented understanding of identity, this article uses ethnographic data to illustrate how Roman soccer fans construct civic identity through various communicative forms, such as verbal performance and visual display. The essay draws from museum studies scholarship to highlight the role of fan-created displays in the construction of fan identities. Ultimately, the fans' notions of place and local identity emerge through these discursive practices.

In mass media fan cultures, geographic boundaries tend to recede as nationally or globally dispersed fans have virtually simultaneous access to media texts and spatially transcendent online forums in which to socialize. In most cases, the physical proximity of the viewer to the setting of a text seems trivial, if not irrelevant. Conversely, sports fan culture remains firmly rooted in notions of locality. Despite global trends of deterritorialization that weaken the "spatial connections of cultural practices, identities, products, and communities" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 34), the local team, be it at the high school, college, or professional level, always plays against the team from over there—down the street, in the next city, across state lines, or from another continent (Dunning, 1999, p. 5; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). As various scholars (including Kraszewski, 2008; Maguire, 2005;

Williams, 1994) have argued, sports can symbolize local identity. Teams at all levels claim to represent local community as they compete for pride and glory at the expense of their geographically *othered* adversaries. Simultaneously, sport fandom, defined as a “series of acts of consumption” (Sandvoss, 2003, p. 17), is inextricably linked to the market economy. A professional team’s marketing campaign touting local authenticity is liable to be undercut by a roster of athletes sourced from a global labor market (Bale & Maguire, 1994).

Sport constitutes an intriguing site for fans to construct and perform local identity within contemporary western culture (Crawford, 2004). First, sports teams are visible symbols to which community members may attach amorphous notions of local pride (Dunning, 1999). Second, sporting events are popular public rituals in which people regularly and actively participate. Few public rituals allow for such large-scale public co-presence, and even fewer are as consistently effervescent or provide ritualized, embodied engagement, that is, singing, shouting, gesticulating, feasting, and costuming (Bromberger, 1999; Gaffney & Bale, 2004; Guschwan, 2007). Third, sports evince human drama staged with heroes and villains, neatly packaged into discrete, media-friendly units (Andrews, 2001; Rowe, 2004). Finally, the popular appeal of sports bridges many social, political, and economic gaps in ways that few social initiatives can. Though the cost of attending professional sports matches is becoming increasingly prohibitive, viewing games on TV or following the team in the news requires relatively modest expenditure.

Sport fandom must be understood within the context of globalizing forces marked by cultural disruption, fragmentation, and international flows of people, ideas, technology, and money (Appadurai, 1990). Dunning (1999) speculates that the growing significance of sport may be that it responds to, “a type of need which, for increasing numbers of people, is not met elsewhere in the increasingly secular and scientific societies of our age” (p. 7). Crawford (2004) describes communities of sports fans as “neotribes,” a term that bridges traditional notions of collectivity with present-day society. Similarly, Maguire (2005) asserts that the need for identification through sport “may be symptomatic of the sense of insecurity people feel in an increasingly globalised world and their rejection of more cosmopolitan values” (p. 3).

Globalization and its complex ramifications have been addressed by too many scholars to cite here. The relationship between sport and globalization has been covered elsewhere (Bairner, 2001; Miller, Lawrence, McKay, & Rowe, 2001; Tomlinson & Young, 2006). I would like to frame this article with the question articulated by Griswold and Wright (2004): “What cultural formations survive or emerge when the forces of global culture come bearing down on local cultures?” (p. 1415). My concern here is with demonstrating how actual people construct identities in a particular time and place set against the backdrop of global capitalism with its limitations and opportunities. Griswold and Wright borrow Raymond Williams’ (1994) typology of “residual” (steeped in the past) and “emergent” (building and rebuilding) culture to consider how *the local*—typically marked as residual—might incorporate the emergent in new forms of locality. The two argue that a return to the local should not be understood as a rejection of cosmopolitan values, but instead as a cosmopolitan strategy for constructing

identity. They add regional literature as a form of “place-based cultural expression” (p. 1411) to the standard repertoire of regional food, dialect, and music as incarnations of the local; I would add football fandom.

In Italy, football (aka soccer or *calcio*) teams become important vessels of local identity. In Rome, constructing a civic identity is enriched by extraordinary cultural history, but complicated by the realities of contemporary life. Football fandom provides a viable, contemporary possibility to construct, organize, and perform a powerful sense of Roman-ness, or *Romanità*. While there is no single authentic way of being Roman, this essay demonstrates how particular fans use culturally available resources to construct deeply felt civic identities. One reason why this social form is worth studying is because of the depth of feeling experienced by fans. They know fandom not as a trivial hobby but as a lifestyle. This article describes fans expressing *Romanità* within the context of organized fan clubs and pays particular attention to the spaces in which fans construct identities. In the first example, the space is a physical, neighborhood clubhouse; in the second, the “clubhouse” is online. In both instances, fans create displays that exhibit Roman identity while creating the conditions for the performance of *Romanità*.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

My understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, media, and performance guides my research. This article is a product of a larger project rooted in ethnographic data collected in Rome during the 2005–2006 football season and in subsequent visits and continuing relationships sustained through modern telecommunications. In Rome, I attended dozens of games, conducted fan interviews in Italian, spent time at fan clubhouses, traveled to away games with fan groups, archived various forms of media, and developed strong relationships with numerous individual fans and organized fan groups. I attained fluency not only in the Italian language, but also in *Romanesco*, the Roman dialect, and paid particular attention to fan performances and to the numerous media used by fans to express themselves. I understand media in a wide sense to encompass the full range of communication, from the most primitive (grunting) to the hi-tech. Examples of pertinent media include fan-generated songs and banners displayed at the stadium, as well as newsletters, websites, and radio programs. I was also concerned with the circulation of mainstream media and how images, in particular, were assembled to express and bolster particular identities.

Identity

My understanding of identity is rooted in a constructivist and performative perspective articulated by Erving Goffman (1959), Judith Butler (1999), and Stuart Hall (1996). I understand identity not as a static, essential element of one’s being, but as a multifaceted nexus of features that emerge through discursive acts within particular contexts. In this view, identity is constructed in social life through myriad communicative acts, including the use of one’s body in physical movement and vocalization, as well as through the deployment of expressive mediated forms such as clothing and flags. This is not to ignore physical or biological difference, but rather to emphasize the way in which particular elements of identity are foregrounded (or even come into being) as salient to the situation. This definition acknowledges personal agency in constructing identities, as “Individuals may engage in strategic communicative work that permits them to interactionally foreground or suppress specific

identities” (Kroskrity, 1999, p. 112). Conversely, societal mechanisms may limit individual agency. For instance, classification by skin color becomes a salient feature of identity in many sociohistorical contexts, but classification by a single element of identity risks masking and distorting similarities and differences in other relevant facets of identity. Identity is a relational concept that relies on what is excluded as much, if not more, than on who or what is included. In this sense, “Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall, 1996, p. 4) or, for Elias, as “they-groups” and “we-groups” (Dunning, 1999, p. 4). For the fans, being an avid follower of the A. S. Roma team is the opposite of being a fan of S. S. Lazio. To be Roman is defined, in part, by what is not Neapolitan.

Scholarly definitions of identity are not necessarily shared or understood in the same way by research subjects. For some, being Roman means being born and living in Rome, or by the strictest of standards, one must be of the seventh generation. In other words, popular notions of Roman identity carry essentialist features. Vital to my understanding of identity and to this article is the idea that even those who anchor their identity in place and blood continually express, communicate, and perform these identities. These performances are done for social affirmation, as well as to shore up the individual’s sense of authenticity, which is never quite complete. The need to display or reaffirm identity is motivated, in part, by the destabilizing forces of late modernity’s globalization that disrupt unified identities and force previously “settled” (Hall, 1996, p. 4) populations to confront the *Other*. Hall explains how identities might be constructed through representation:

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we came from” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (p. 4)

The ethnographic description and analysis I offer moving forward show how particular fans construct Roman identities through communicative acts that re-present identities drawn from a rich repertoire of “resources of history, language and culture.”

Fandom as Performance

Performance is a multivalent term connected to intellectual perspectives on theatre, linguistics, psychology, and literary criticism, among other disciplines (cf. Schechner, 2002). The framework of performance employed here is rooted in the multidisciplinary work of Richard Bauman (1992), who conceives of performance as a frame of understanding wherein a performer calls special attention to himself or herself, thus taking responsibility for a set of communicative acts. Performance is “an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience” (p. 41), or as Bauman (2004) states it more plainly, performance is, “A mode of communicative display, in which the performer signals to an audience, in effect, ‘Hey, look at me! I’m on! Watch how skillfully and effectively I express myself’” (p. 9). Performances are worth considering not only in terms of the aesthetic pleasure of the audience, but because performance “provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 61). The performance frame calls audiences to evaluate performances according to situationally relevant criteria informed by genre. For example, a performance of *Hamlet* invites comparison to contemporary, past, and future performances of *Hamlet*,

other Shakespeare plays, and theatrical performance, writ large. The critical reception of performance points to the imminently social aspect of performance. As such, “All performance, like all communication, is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within socially defined situational contexts” (Bauman, 1992, p. 46). Thus, the scholar of performance should pay close attention to the social and material context in which performances are staged and in which they are understood and appreciated.

I conceive of fandom as accomplished through everyday performances (Goffman, 1959) that foreground fans’ passionate attachment to a team. By wearing a special scarf, singing at the stadium, arguing in a clubhouse, or through modes of writing, these fans, communicate, in effect, “Look at me. Notice how passionately I support my team.” Fans’ declarations of identity take shape within the spaces of fandom. The individual fan or performer is held accountable to the standards of fandom that develop within the fan community. A fan’s authenticity may only be ratified by other fans. One of the underlying functions of a performance-based fan culture, if not the essential function, is to create the context in which fandom and its manifestations are accepted, understood, and encouraged, as well as disciplined and critiqued. This article, discusses, in ethnographic detail, the ways that fandom takes shape through performance in specific contexts. This article pays particular attention to the spaces of two contrasting fan clubs that not only provide a place to socialize, but in their artful construction also enact identities.

Regional Identity and Rivalry in Italy

For Romans, football fandom becomes a vital way to express civic identity. After Italy was unified in 1861, the Marquis D’Azeglio famously said, “We have made Italy, but now we must make Italians” (Doyle, 2002, p. 39). His comment underscored the deep economic, linguistic, and cultural divisions among Italy’s regions that have endured to the present day. Economic disparity between the relatively prosperous North and the struggling South has fueled regional antipathy and vocal sentiment for northern secession, spearheaded by Umberto Bossi’s xenophobic political party, the Northern League. In the early 1990s, Italian scholar Angela Zanotti (1993, p. 182) wrote, “Now, for the first time in the history of the Republic, there is an attempt to spell out the problems of the Italian state on the basis of [regional] ethnicity.” She finds that the region-based cultural and ethnic differentiation echoes the color-based racism found in other parts of Europe. Within this historical context, football has become a highly visible outlet for the expression of regional rivalry in contemporary Italy.

The organized fan groups that I describe are fans of *Associazione Sportiva Roma*, (aka A.S. Roma, or hereafter, Roma), a professional football team based in Rome that plays in Italy’s highest tier of competition, *Serie A*. The team was formed in 1927 through the merging of three smaller teams. Roma’s primary rival, *Societa Sportiva Lazio* (aka S. S. Lazio, or hereafter, Lazio), was founded in 1900. Lazio is a region of Italy of which Rome is the capital. The rivalry between the two teams distinguishes both fan cultures. Historically, Roma represented the working class and leftist politics while Lazio represented the aristocratic right. The link between fans’ political affiliation and team affiliation has never been absolute, though Lazio’s fan base retains a reputation for conservative politics.

Roma wears city colors (golden-yellow and deep red), and the team's official logo is the Capitoline she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus, mythical founders of Rome (see Figure 1). At the outset of every Roma home game, fans sing the anthem written by pop singer Antonello Venditti that features the lyrics, "Roma, Roma, Roma, heart of this city, the one great love, that takes the breath away from so many." This melodramatic song self-consciously invigorates the emotional connection between fans and city. The team's appropriation of Roman symbols strengthens the bond with (and weakens the distinction between) Roma, the football team, and Rome, the city.



Figure 1. Official Logo of A. S. Roma: The Capitoline She-wolf.

Roma fans are defined by rivalries with, or in the words of Gray (2003), the “anti-fandom” of opposing teams and fans. Roma’s primary rivalries with Lazio, Napoli, and Juventus are inflected by geography. Lazio is its crosstown rival, Napoli is the nearest big-city rival, and Juventus is Roma’s powerful rival from the so-called “cold, industrial” north. Roma fans construct their identity most strongly in opposition to Lazio and consider their team to be the one that represents the real people of the city, whereas Lazio is the team for “country bumpkins” outside the city.

The rivalry with Lazio peaks twice a year in the “derby” games between the two sides. These derby games are the site for the most exuberant fan performances of the year. Fans arrive at the stadium hours before the start of the match to shout insults, to sing derisive songs, and to display messages that mock their crosstown “cousins.” For example, Roma fans sing to the dainty melody of “Don’t Cry For Me Argentina”:

*Laziale pezzo di merda
Tutta la curva ti insulta
Questa canzone per te
Con tutto l’odio che c’è
Sempre piu grande*

Lazio fan, piece of shit,
all of us in the stands insult you,
this song is for you,
with all the hate that there is,
growing ever larger!

Lazio fans have their own repertoire of aspersing songs, as exemplified by the following lyrics sung to a melody stolen from Roma fans:

Dici a tutti che sei Romano You tell everyone that you are Roman *Ma sei solo un Napoletano!!!* But you are only a Neapolitan!!!

For a Roman, calling someone “Neapolitan” derides that person’s sophistication. It also asserts Roman authenticity. At one derby game, Lazio fans raised a banner that read, “Welcome visitors to Rome,” referring to the fact that Lazio was founded in 1900, 27 years before Roma was founded.

Singing in unison with thousands of others is a powerful mode of performance that creates a powerful sense of unity. Simon Frith (1996) writes, “Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (p. 110). Mark Slobin notes how performers work out “A shared vision that involves both the assertion of pride, even ambition, and the simultaneous disappearance of the ego” (p. 111). Slobin captures the intent of football fan songs: to invoke pride and ambition and to invite fans to lose themselves in the collective. Part of the attraction of the football stadium is clearly the validation of identity that can only be found in a crowd that momentarily comes together as one—akin to Turner’s (1982) *communitas*.

Fandom Sits in Places: The Roma Club Testaccio

The administrative “dirty work” of fan culture occurs in the organized fan clubs away from the intensity of the stadium. Organized football fan clubs have long been entrenched in the fabric of Italian social life (Podaliri & Balestri, 1998). In eras past, neighborhood fan clubs were an essential link between professional teams and ticket buyers, that is, fans. While fan groups are no longer the primary distributor of tickets, organized fan clubs remain a vital part of local social life for many Italians. Keith Basso (1996) laments fellow anthropologists’ disattention to, “the elaborate arrays of conceptual and expressive instruments—ideas, beliefs, stories, songs—with which community members produce and display coherent understandings of [the physical environment]” (p. 106). Basso’s words underscore the understanding that *meaning of place* is the product of a social process rather than of the predetermined effect of a stable and absolute essence. This article highlights the process in which fans understand and display the significance of their neighborhood.

The Roma Club Testaccio is a traditional fan club that supports A. S. Roma. Their clubhouse is situated in Testaccio, a working-class neighborhood located a few miles south of the historic center of Rome. This fan club, founded in 1968 with 15 members, has grown to more than 250 *soci* [dues paying members] as of 2008. Members tend to be male *Testaccini* [Testaccio residents] over 40 years old who speak with Roman accents. The long-serving president of the club, Sergio Rosi, is a sprightly man in his late 60s.

The Roma Club Testaccio is a space for Roman men to perform their version of Roman masculinity. The social life of the club consists of gathering at the clubhouse every evening after work to play cards or just to socialize. Similar to the “male spaces” described in other Mediterranean contexts (de Almeida, 1996; Driessen, 1992; Herzfeld, 1985), the Roma Club Testaccio is a gendered space where men use foul language, tell bawdy jokes, and play cards in a competitive atmosphere of masculine showmanship. At the club, the men seem to feel liberated from the demands and restrictions of home and work life.

Testaccio epitomizes a vision of traditional, working class Rome. It is both a residential and commercial neighborhood and is one of 22 central *rioni* [neighborhoods] of modern Rome. Testaccio is the site of the *Monte di Cocci* [Hill of Amphorae], composed of broken clay jars discarded by ancient Romans. At the outset of the 20th century, Testaccio housed the city’s stockyards that supplied the cheap pig intestines and ox tail that inspired distinctive Roman recipes. In recent decades, Testaccio has come to signify nostalgia for a simple life of manual labor and neighborhood sociability. The local news website (www.testaccio.roma.it) calls Testaccio, “The heart of the old Rome” and “Perhaps the last surviving neighborhood of the old Rome.”

Testaccio has mythic significance for A.S. Roma fans. In 1929, the team began playing and training in the *Campo Testaccio* [Testaccio Field], nestled in the middle of the neighborhood. In the 1940s, A. S. Roma moved to the other side of town, but Testaccio is still revered as the place where A.S. Roma was founded and as the spawning ground of authentic Roma fans. The largest national newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, has referred to the Roma Club Testaccio as the “Most Roma-crazed place that there is” (Menicucci & Stracca, 2006). The mayor of Rome recognized the club as “A historic place that has represented for almost forty years an important social place to congregate” (Menicucci, 2006). For members of the Roma Club Testaccio, the image of Testaccio as a bastion of traditional Roman life and as the origin of the football team is intertwined.

The Roma Club Testaccio’s clubhouse is the heart of the club, and it is the place where Roma, the football team, and Rome, the city, are conjoined. Every surface of the clubhouse is decorated with images or objects that represent Testaccio, Rome, and A.S. Roma. The clubhouse functions as a museum devoted to the exposition and celebration of culturally significant artifacts. Dondrea Thompson (2002) wrote, “Public displays of any cultural sort . . . are inescapably based on a constructed ideology intended to promote a shared vision of history, identity, and heritage” (p. 38). Roma Club Testaccio’s “shared vision of history, identity and heritage” is literally taped, painted, and tacked onto the walls of the clubhouse as a selection of highlights from Roman history. Carol Duncan (1991) argues that museums edit out messy details in preference for uncomplicated narratives. “In the museum, art history displaces history, purges it of social and political conflict, and distills it down to a series of triumphs,

mostly of individual genius” (p. 92). In this case, art history is replaced by football historiography that is spearheaded by the efforts of “individual geniuses” who score goals and command squads of players.

At the clubhouse, images of star players and championship teams are flanked by Roman columns. Alongside photographs of fans young and old, plastic centurions occupy the corners. Yellow and red, the colors of both team and city, blanket interior and exterior walls. Several images depict players in the guise of gladiators. The clubhouse contains artifacts that recall imperial Rome and present-day Testaccio. A replica *coccio* [clay jar] that symbolizes Testaccio rests in a corner near the ceiling. On separate walls are two large, framed, black and white photos of the Campo Testaccio, one of which bears the words “Testaccio the cradle of Roma.” On one of the main walls of the club is a billboard entitled, “From Testaccio—The roots and the history of A. S. Roma” (see Figure 2).

Under these words hangs a series of black and white photographs with captions that describe the early history of the team and the old stadium that stood a few blocks away. Above this billboard, black and white pictures depict the team from early in its history. Through these images, the fan club retains the memory of past players and managers. The images also imply: *Roma was born here in this very place, and there is a tradition that continues here*. Though the team now plays on the other side of the city, the Roma Club Testaccio documents and sustains Roma’s roots. These images create a sense of historical continuity among generations of A. S. Roma players and fans.



Figure 2. “At Testaccio—The Roots and the History of A. S. Roma.”

This display constructs what Bakhtin (1981) calls a chronotope—a narrative construct where “Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation.” Chronotopes “stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members’ images of themselves” (p. 7). The walls of the Roma Club Testaccio are where the identity of the club, the identity of its members are laid bare—the images connect the fans to the timeless community of A. S. Roma.

Current team captain Francesco Totti is the most celebrated player on the walls of the Roma Club Testaccio. Born and raised in Rome, he speaks with a thick Roman accent. Totti has spurned offers to leave his home team to play

for more glamorous and powerful teams in Milan, Turin, and abroad. He is Roma's *bandiera* [flag]: literally, the player who anchors the identity of a team. At the Roma Club Testaccio, images of Totti document his rise from 16-year-old prodigy to incomparable icon. He is framed as a soldier, fashion icon, gladiator, and philanthropist, as well as a football player. For Roma fans, Totti is not only the quintessential Roma player, he is the quintessential Roman.

Images of Lazio rivals serve as counterpoints to that of Totti. One derogatory poster reads: "A clean Rome depends on you" (see Figure 3). It features a cartoon image of a wolf attired in a Roma jersey and holding an eagle in Lazio colors over a garbage can. Another image shows the Roma wolf biting the championship emblem off the Lazio eagle's chest. This image commemorates the 2001 season when Roma won the championship, thus ending Lazio's one-year reign.



Figure 3. "A Clean Rome Depends on You!"

These images reflect, in a comical way, the strong feelings of identity and difference felt by the respective fan bases. Club President Sergio Rosi insists that he is an A.S. Roma fan because he was born in Rome. In other words, his fan identity is inseparable from his civic identity. He claims that the real Romans are Roma fans and that Lazio fans are *burrini* [country bumpkins] who live outside of the Aurelian wall, the 800-year-old wall that marks the old border of Rome). Sergio jokes that Lazio fans come into the city only to sell cheese, and when he speaks about the rivalry with Lazio, he speaks faster, uses Romanesco, and has a mischievous look in his eye. While much of the banter between fans of the two teams is often done with a sense of playful exaggeration, it reveals tactics by which the fans position themselves as authentic Romans. Their sense of identity is created in

contrast to those who most closely resemble them—the football fans who share the same city and to whom they sometimes refer to as *cugini* (cousins).

Linguistic Performance Through Romanesco

A vital resource for the performance of Roman identity is Roman dialect (Romanesco). Few have stated the strength of the ties between language and social identity as forcefully as Anzaldúa (1987) did when he wrote, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (p. 59). The power of language to express regional identity is embraced by Italians despite national education efforts that mandate standardized Italian and the power of national television to homogenize speech. As language scholar Kenneth Pratt (1966) noted, “However functional, rich and persistent their dialect, [Italians] have been taught that their way is divisive and déclassé” (p. 167). Roman dialect is alternately called *Romano* (Roman), *Romanesco*, which is associated with 19th century Roman poet G. G. Belli, and *Trilussa* (or *Romanaccio*), referring to slang or vulgar Roman language. I prefer Romanesco, as it implies a sense of artistry. In spite of—or perhaps more accurately because of—the notion that Roman dialect is considered “low,” vulgar, or inappropriate, Roma fans embrace Roman dialect as a resource for the performance of Romanità. Romanesco has distinctive pronunciation, phrasing, and unique vocabulary. For example, users may cut off the end of a word: Rather than say or write *arrivederci*, one might use *arrivedé*, or *ragà* instead of *ragazzo* [boy]. Roman speakers tend to talk quickly and accompany their words with demonstrative hand gestures.

The Roma Club Testaccio provides the setting for the linguistic performance of Romanità through Romanesco. As previously mentioned, an essential part of the social life of the club is for members to gather in the evenings for card playing and masculine socialization. Typically, club members tell stories and jokes and compete for attention by speaking passionately in an argumentative tone of Romanesco. These conversations are performances in which members may gain or lose status with every turn. Bauman (1977, p. 37) names this power the “emergent quality of performance” wherein, through a display of communicative skill, a performer may gain status and thereby alter the social structure of the group. The documentary, *Core de Roma* [Heart of Rome], directed by Gwin Sannia (2006), captures a sample of this banter. In one scene, a few members of the club are gathered around a table, playing cards. One of the members relates an anecdote about Testaccio, saying that the neighborhood used to be filled with “thieves and bandits.” A second member, Giorgio, questions the storyteller, “When?” and then asserts, “You come from the mountains of Abruzzo.” Giorgio then accuses the storyteller of being a thief himself, saying, “Look at the way you play cards.” This playful confrontation is met with laughs from the other members who witness this assertion of dominance. Giorgio’s performance is marked by his use of Romanesco and his general combativeness. He is the club vice president and has, no doubt, utilized his performance skills to gain a position of authority within the club’s hierarchy. Surrounded by images of Rome and Roma, these fans perform Romanità every evening.

Core De Roma [Heart of Rome]: Rise of the Online Roman Empire

Core de Roma, is the name of another fan club devoted to A. S. Roma. Unlike the local enclave of the Roma Club Testaccio, Core de Roma does not have a physical clubhouse, and its members are not bound by neighborhood proximity. Members of Core de Roma are located throughout Rome and around the world. While many its members meet at the stadium and at banquets, the bulk of their daily interaction occurs on the website, www.CoreDeRoma.it. The website houses an impressive collection of fan-produced material, ranging from an endless stream of commentary in its chat room to essay-length historical articles, songs by fans, travel photos of fans in front of world monuments, and other fan-friendly items. The Core de Roma is a website on which members perform fandom and Romanità on a daily basis.

The demographics of the Core de Roma community contrast with those of the Roma Club Testaccio. Members of the former tend to work in white-collar jobs that afford consistent online activity. Club members include a travel agent, a retired Swiss patent office worker, an advertising consultant who relocated to Miami, Florida, a former sports journalist, a contractor and a trader in the import/export business. The founding members of the group are family-oriented men over 30, though women are welcome to be part of the group as full participants. In addition to wives and girlfriends, who are regular members, there are “independent” members such as Paoletta, a devout Roma fan who regularly participates online and at club gatherings. In general, the membership of Core de Roma is middle-aged, Internet savvy, white collar, geographically dispersed around the periphery of Rome, and less confined by traditional gender roles. The group represents a generational shift away from the extremely localized social life of the Roma Club Testaccio and toward the media-dependent, mobile social life of a younger generation of Romans.

The Core de Roma homepage is designed to showcase the identity of the fans and provide an appropriate space for the daily performance of Romanità. The site promotes its Roman identity through visual imagery. The homepage features a banner with an image of the Roman Coliseum on the left and an image of a Roman soldier on the right, (see Figure 4). Yellow and red—the team colors—dominate the color scheme. The homepage also features an iconic Roman gladiator with sword unsheathed; a cartoonlike centurion beckons new members. The fan club’s logo is a football player in a Roma jersey, framed by laurels, a symbol of military victory. The focal point of the homepage is the “front page” image that illustrates the fan club’s preoccupation for the day. Many front page images contain visual references to Rome such as the initials, S.P.Q.R. (Senatus Populus Que Romanus), the famous acronym that marks property belonging to the Senate and People of Rome.



Figure 4. Core de Roma Homepage (w www.corederoma.it) from June 8, 2010).

The 2008–2009 membership campaign slogan, *L'Ultima Legione* [The Last Legion], refers to the 2007 pseudo-historical film about the “last legion” of Roman soldiers who, after having disbanded in Britain, heroically regrouped to defend the legacy of Rome. A 2008–2009 scarf was emblazoned with the campaign slogan. These club-produced scarves are an important marker of identity that club members wear proudly at the stadium. Core de Roma uses these pop culture texts to conjure a vibrant sense of Romanità.

The affinity for Roman military is highlighted in a section of the website that documents an historical reenactment of Roman soldiers marching on the Via Fori Imperiali in the center of historic Rome. Though Core de Roma has no explicit connection to this reenactment, the images serve as symbols of a shared Roman pride. Another section of the site showcases tattoos of proud Romans with Roman centurions, she-wolves, and various other overtly Roman symbols etched on their bodies. Imperial Roman images and references symbolize the group's general pride in Roman history, but the gladiators and centurions also symbolize more specific qualities of bravery and tenacity that the fans project onto the Roma players. These belligerent symbols are part of a widespread, agonistic sports fan culture that employs the metaphor of war to describe the actions of players and the competition between teams.

Romanesco announces, or serves as a “key” (Bauman, 1977, p. 16), to the performance of Romanità on the Core de Roma website. In written form, Romanesco often contrasts with standard Italian. Among its intricacies, the letter *l* becomes *r* when preceding a consonant such as in the case of the phrase *il capitano* (the captain), which becomes *er capitano*. Romanesco spelling condenses certain words by removing vowels such as in the name of this fan group, Core de Roma, which uses *core* in place of the standard *cuore* [heart]. As with its oral form, written Romanesco is a vibrant enactment of Romanità. Though Romanesco is intelligible to most Italians, it is still a barrier to participation for outsiders not versant with its form. On the website, Romanesco serves to punctuate ideas and to perform authenticity with its implied rebelliousness and pure Romanità.

Romanesco flourishes on the website. For example, the chat room (see Figure 5) is called *er muro* instead of *il muro*, (the wall), and the link to the merchandizing section is spelled *er merciandising*. The chat room is the primary forum for the use and proliferation of Romanesco. Participants habitually use the Roman saying, *Daje* [Let's Go!]. Club member Romanaico (2010) uses Romanesco (underlined in the following) to express his disagreement with the comments of an opposing coach: “NUN CE STO' A CAPI' PIU' UN CAZZOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO . . .” [“I don't understand a fucking thing anymore . . .”]. In addition to Romanesco, capital letters, curse words, and a string of Os frame this message as performance because they draw attention to the form and style of communication beyond its referential content. Through the inventive style of written text, this message conveys a belligerent attitude indicative of Roman fandom.

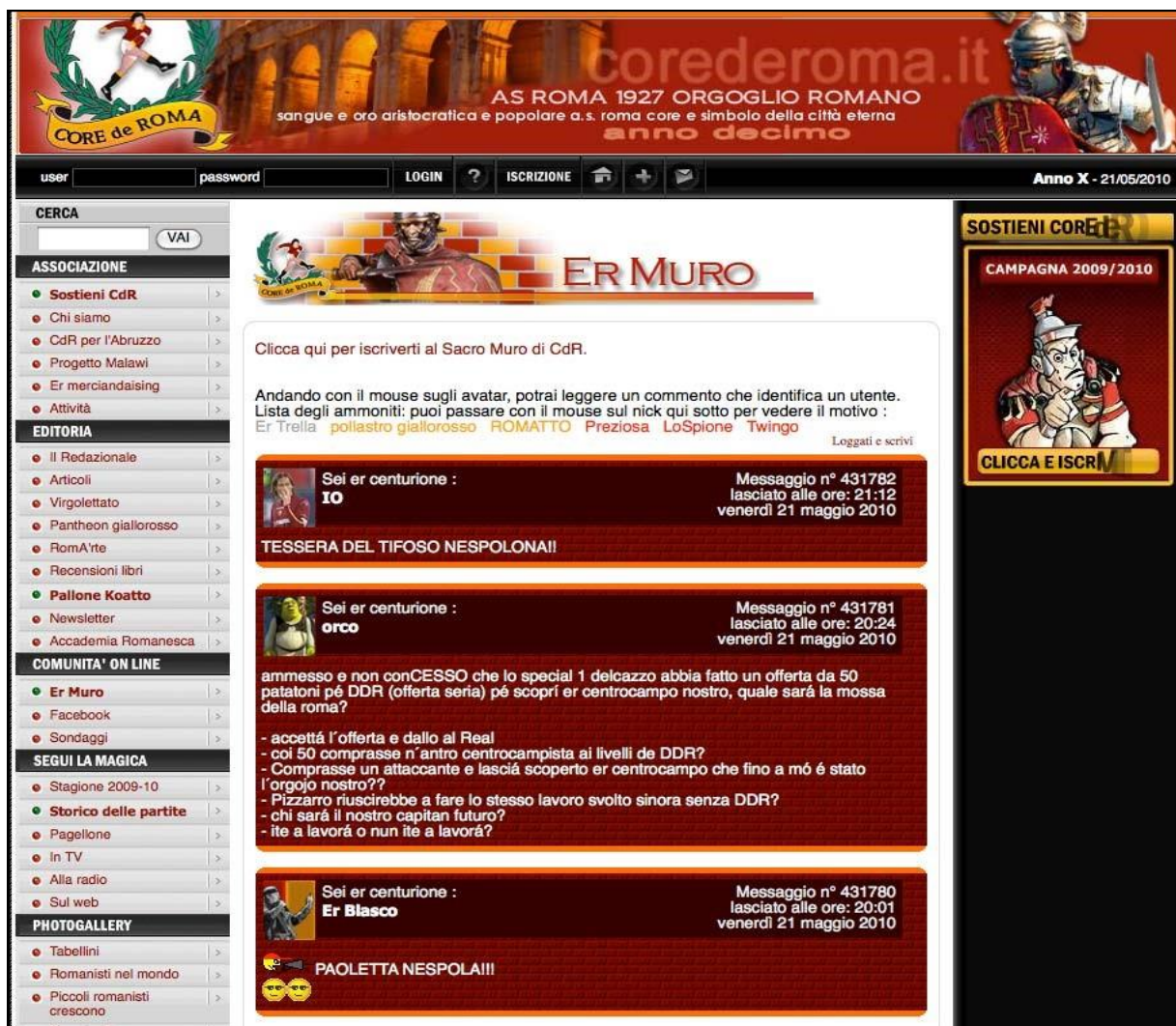


Figure 5. Screen Shot of Er Muro (The Wall) Chat Room from June 8, 2010.

Throughout Italy, Romans are stereotyped as being vulgar and rude. Core de Roma embraces this identity and performs it in the chat room through exaggerated claims and jests. The Core de Roma chat room fosters an environment where members foster identities that are more bombastic than would the circumstances of one's daily life allow. Core de Roma reserves a portion of its site, named *Pallone Koatto* [Trashy Football], for the most vulgar comments and provocations. The use of the letter *k* in place of *c* in the spelling of *Koatta* is another indicator of the unofficial nature of this section (at <http://www.corederoma.it/pallonekoatto/index.php>). The site section is introduced by the following disclaimer: "This section was born from the necessity to gather the typical language of the fan, who, transformed by the passion for their team, becomes . . . *coatto* [trashy]." In this section, fans regularly use vulgarity to amplify their rants and raves. Entries are structured into a format listing a victim,

motive, and the *Koatto* remark. In the following rant (with Romanesco underlined), *giacoparma* criticizes Roma's coach for not playing Jeremy Menez: "*Secondo me e sor claudio lo deve fa giocà e mannà a casa batista . . . menez potrebbe esse un foriclasse se solo je se da l'opportunità de giocà cò continuità*," ("In my opinion, sister Claudio must play him and send Baptista home . . . Menez could be a superstar if only given the opportunity to play consistently"). The writer refers to the coach, Claudio Ranieri, as "sister Claudio" [*sor Claudio*] and replaces standard Italian with Romanesco—for example, *giocà* in place of the full verb, *giocare* [to play], *esse* in place of *essere* [to be], *je* in place of *gli* [him]. The performance frame is invoked through a disregard for the standardized rules of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Instead, the author plays with language to perform a brusque attitude and Roman authenticity, as well as rhythm and rhyme with the repetition of the *à* sound. Participants in the chat room and in Pallone Koatto perform within the linguistic codes of written Romanesco, but they also play with formal elements of spelling and capitalization, and they invent language to suit their purposes. The website documents Romanesco—a specialized language that emerges from Italian—and improvised football fan discourse.

Performing the Roman Attitude

The display of imagery and the use of linguistic forms such as Roman dialect illustrate the attachment of Core de Roma's fans to Rome, but their Roman attitude is expressed through displays of brashness and defiance. For these fans, to be Roman is to be aggressive, resilient, and passionate rather than calm and reasonable. Roman self-perception fits into the spectrum of regional stereotypes that describe northern Italians as cold, logical, and materialistic and Southerners as warm, excessively emotional, and lazy. Rome is located in the center-south geographically and shares some of the southern stigma, but is culturally exceptional due to its unique history and its modern status as national capitol and urban center. Though Rome is popularly portrayed as a beautiful honeymoon destination, long-term residents grumble about inefficient government, stagnant economy, urban congestion, and damp weather that persists through much of the year. While proud of their city's accomplishments and beauty, Romans are accustomed to daily struggles. In response to these and innumerable other factors, many of today's Romans learn to be tough.

Fandom becomes a way of shaping and funneling Roman attitudes. Though A. S. Roma is an important team with a large fan base, they have won the Italian championship only three times in over 80 years. Roma fans have had to learn how to accept defeat while still taking pride in their team. Core de Roma co-founder Luca commented, "You do not become a Roma fan because they win a lot" (Luca, personal communication, May 5, 2006). Another co-founder, Gigi, explained that a fundamental part of being Roman is the combative and defiant spirit. He said, "You may not always win, but you must continue to fight" (Gigi, personal communication, February 10, 2006). This attitude is enthusiastically embraced by Core de Roma. In fact, the fan club was founded partly as an act of defiance when their team was struggling and archrival Lazio was enjoying great success. The Core de Roma founders reacted to Lazio's success by rallying support for their beloved Roma.

The members of Core de Roma embrace and embellish their civic identity. In an attempt to explain the connection between Rome and Roma (the football team), Luca said, “Sometimes, Roma (referring to the city) and La Roma (the team) become the same thing” (Luca, personal communication, November 5, 2005). Roma fans exhibit an immense pride in their city as well as in their team. Club member Claudia wrote in an article, “To be Romans and Roma fans is a *modus vivendi*, an attachment to a team, to a city.” Dedication to Rome is evident in the club’s “about us” identity statement. “The Core de Roma association has existed since 1997 with the aim/scope of promoting fan support for A. S. Roma football and to develop the study and dissemination of the city’s traditions.”¹³

Civic Identity in Contrast to National Identity

Though many Romans pledge allegiance to their city, many harbor ambiguous feelings toward the Italian state. The discourse on the Core de Roma website following Roma team captain Francesco Totti’s retirement from the Italian national team, reveals such ambiguity. In 2006, Totti announced his retirement from the Italian national team to focus on playing for Roma. In a survey hosted by the Core de Roma website, almost 80% of the 2,500 respondents were happy about Totti’s decision, implying the fans’ allegiance to Rome over national concerns. Members often display contempt for the nation in the Core de Roma chat room. For example, Italy was a finalist to host the 2012 European Cup, a major football tournament that crowns a European champion every four years and that is second only to the World Cup in terms of its economic and football significance. The European Cup gives the host nation a symbolic boost, as well as millions of dollars allotted by the European football federation to spend on projects such as transportation infrastructure. However, Italy lost to a joint bid by Poland and Ukraine, two nations that lack Italy’s football pedigree. In the Core de Roma chat room, the club members’ response to this loss was to ridicule Italy. Chat room participant Romatto referred to a recent refereeing scandal and to incidents of fan violence. He wrote, “Ha! These jerks really thought that they would have assigned the Euro Cup after all that has happened between the scandal and the fights outside the stadium??? What idiots.”

Criticism of the nation goes beyond mere football concerns. Chat room user, *er Pasquino* wrote, “We must not wait for a European Cup or World Cup to improve things in Italy. Now we need to do this without these resources.” The comment reflects dissatisfaction with Italy’s basic infrastructure and also reflects a widespread malaise that is echoed in many sectors. *The Economist* dubbed Italy, “The real sick man of Europe” (“Italy: The Real Sick Man,” 2005). In the Core de Roma chat room, participants commonly refer to Italy as *Itaglia*, a derogatory nickname that combines *Italia* [Italy] with the verb *tagliare* [to cut], implying a torn nation. Football is an institution that can symbolize a nation, but it can also invigorate local affiliation and rivalry antithetical to national unity. In the Core de Roma fan space, the themes of civic pride and regionalism are much stronger than are the themes of nationalism.

Conclusion

One aim of this essay is to document the expression of fan identity through communicative means—specifically, performance and mediated representation. Drawing from Bauman’s conception of performance (1977), I have

illustrated several instances in which fandom is accomplished through performance. In terms of representation, the analysis draws from museum studies to demonstrate how real and virtual clubhouses use images to evoke Romanità and its attendant modes of participation. This article uses ethnographic data in support of the theory that social identities are constructed and reinforced through multiple communicative means (or media), ranging from embodied forms such as voice and gesture to disembodied, “virtual” media (i.e., the Internet). Rather than focus on a single medium, this article embraces a view that contemporary social life, and the identities it produces, are ceaselessly and unrepentantly poly-, multi- and/or “trans-” mediated (Jenkins, 2006) and therefore, not easily reduced to online/offline dichotomies or other medium-centric strictures.

Another aim of this article is to highlight the function of fan groups as creating the necessary physical and social conditions (aka spaces or contexts) in which fandom can flourish. This article refers to the organizational labor that goes into creating such fan spaces. Fan spaces not only require mundane administration such as rent payments, but also the energetic efforts of committed followers to create the aesthetic, identity-friendly, social space in which exuberant fandom is openly exhibited and cultivated—a space where a fan can be a fan, learn to be a fan and teach others to be fans in the right way (by the standards of each fan club). Therefore, instead of conceiving of fandom as formed prior to social engagement with other fans, which is conceivable with media-text fans, this article demonstrates the power of football fan groups to shape and continually reshape fandom.

Finally, given the power of fan groups to shape social identities, this article highlights the particular ways that these fans have created distinctly Roman identities. Within the constraints and possibilities of a globalizing world, sport can come to represent a sense of place. This article shows the particular ways that these fans draw from the astoundingly rich history of the Eternal City to create identities that are relevant within the vibrant contemporary idiom of our time and their place: Roman football fandom. I find justification for this research in the sheer vibrancy of this social form and in the commitment of these fans. Within the discourse of globalization and modernization, the two fan clubs discussed here represent a generational shift in the conduct of social life.

The Roma Club Testaccio locates their identity in the territorialized, neighborhood-based community that features co-presence as the primary mode of sociality. Core de Roma is a group of fans geographically dispersed, primarily around the urban outskirts of Rome. In their online home, they attempt to reterritorialize through the conscious construction of an online Roman forum that features gladiators and centurions and that displays fan-written flourishes of Romanesco. In Raymond Williams’ (1994) terminology, the Roma Club Testaccio is largely “residual” culture while Core de Roma is “emergent,” but echoing the arguments of Griswold & Wright, (2004), the more cosmopolitan Core de Roma has turned to the local to inspire a strong sense of Romanità. Perhaps it should come as no surprise to find a Roman civic pride that embraces the past, given the current realities of a stagnant Italian economy and a less than laudatory political culture. These fans look to A. S. Roma to restore a sense of pride, as well as to find a new sort of empire on the football pitches in Naples, Milan, and abroad. They look to themselves when they raise their scarves to sing, “*Roma, Roma, Roma, tu sei nata grande, and grande hai da resta*” [Rome, Rome, Rome, you were born great, and great you shall remain].

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