

Football chants and youth political behavior in Algeria (Case study: Hirak protests)

هتافات كرة القدم و السلوك السياسي للشباب في الجزائر
دراسة حالة: مظاهرات الحراك

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Abstract:

Football chants make an integral part of the game; their sense can in one hand describe highlights moments on the pitch. But on the other hand, these chants seem to represent also a space for fans to express themselves in a collective way, most often their involvement with socio-political conditions. This study attempts to zoom-in on the Algerian case, where football has been interplayed with politics through different time stages of the country. The study seeks to understand how young fans have found in football a space to manifest their political behavior using chants in terraces. These chants have reached their zenith when they were discernibly repeated by protestors of the Hirak movement which started in February 2019.

Keywords: Football chants; Youth; Political Behavior; Hirak, Algeria.

ملخص:

تشكل هتافات كرة القدم جزءاً مهماً بالنسبة لمشجعي هذه اللعبة حيث يصفون من خلالها اللحظات البارزة على أرض الملعب، لكن هذه الهتافات يمكن أن توفر أيضاً بالنسبة لهؤلاء مساحة للتعبير عن أنفسهم بطريقة جماعية و بشكل خاص عن تفاعلهم مع الظروف الاجتماعية و السياسية. تحاول هذه الدراسة التركيز على الحالة الجزائرية، حيث تشكلت علاقة متبادلة بين كرة القدم و السياسة عبر مراحل زمنية مختلفة. تبحث الدراسة عن أسباب اتجاه المشجعين الشباب في هذه اللعبة لإظهار سلوكهم السياسي باستخدام الهتافات في المدرجات، و التي انتقلت هذه الأخيرة من الملاعب إلى ترديدها في الشوارع في أوساط تظاهرات الحراك الشعبي الذي انطلق في فبراير 2019.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هتافات كرة القدم، الشباب، السلوك السياسي، الحراك، الجزائر.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Football chants are essential to fans of this game, aside from physical presence of crowds and the use of flags and banners in different forms and colors, football is also featured by several chants repeated in terraces which not only describe moments of joy and entertainment during the match, but also could express a lot more beyond.

In fact, football as such has drawn many academic studies; it has been inscribed with issues like tribalism, protest and socio-political regulation.¹ It offers also an opportunity to the study of youth culture and politics² and relations between football, political regimes and societies. This interplay of football alongside with other fields makes a high importance to study of what triggers the connection between this game and such mentioned issues.

In our case, football chants are the focused-on element, considering that they make an integral part of the game which affects and get affected by what interplays with football as a whole. Furthermore, football chants have been actually used as a space for social and political protestations, as well as for the expression of certain nationalist sentiments in stadiums.

While that is might be the case of football in many countries of the world, this study zooms in the picture on Algeria, where football chants have changed fundamentally in the last 20 years, from simple and spontaneous which support players and favorite teams, into spaces where supporters manifest collectively and express rejection and resistance against repression and social injustice.³ Young Algerian football fans have fashioned their own spaces for expression in football stadiums, their chants and lyrics serve as a barometer of popular sentiment in the country. These chants and slogans reached their zenith when they were eventually repeated by thousands during the popular uprising that started in the 22nd February 2019 known as “The HIRAK”.⁴

This paper attempts to study how football has been interplayed with political and socio-economic conditions in Algeria, with giving a particularity to some famous football chants which have been embraced and repeated in street protests of the Hirak movement.

¹ Martin J. Power, Paul Widdop, Dan Parnell, James Carr & Stephen R. Millar, (2020), Football and politics: the politics of football, MANAGING SPORT AND LEISURE, United Kingdom, VOL. 25, NOS. 1–2, 1–5, Page 3.

² Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 1.

3 واسيني الأعرج، (2019) ، "لاكارا دال مرادية" تحولات أناسيد الحراك، القدس العربي

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA->

⁴ Boundaoui Assia,(2015),Algerian football fans sing songs of freedom MIDDLE EAST EYE: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/algerian-football-fans-sing-songs-freedom>, (consulted on 25/10/2020).

The study goes through methodological-organized chapters, in which at first we aim to explain the meaning of football chants and youth political behavior each apart; both literally and conceptually. The study considers football chants as an integral part of football game, thus it is important to analyze football ties with youth political behavior and politics in general. Here comes the second chapter to provide analysis, explanations and illustrative examples of football and politics reciprocal relationship both on a worldwide scale and the local Algerian case.

The third chapter highlights on a collection of chants which were remarkably performed in Algerian stadiums before they stepped in as devices for the Hirak movement. This transition leads us to derive results and important discussions which we try to break down at the end of the paper.

2. Understanding football chants:

In this chapter, the study tackles the constructive elements of the concept football chants; the literature and conceptual meaning of the word and its historical context. At last we try to understand the meaning of political behavior, mainly which is related with youth.

2.1 Literature and conceptual meaning of chants:

Merriam Webster dictionary defines chants as an act to make melodic sounds with the voice or to recite something in a monotonous repetitive tone.¹ Repetition is an important feature of chants as it is a means to make said things easy to remember or to symbolize the importance of it. Chants are also used to calm and relax the mind; it sometimes can even alleviate people's negative emotions, and cause them to have positive perspectives.²

Football chants have been variously understood as offering supporters ways to express their identity, demonstrate group cohesion and manifest a collective presence. It has been discussed as allowing fans to express their love for their team and their community as well as claim themselves stronger than their opponents.³

According to Tilak Dutta chants are an integral part of football, clubs and fans alike, it can be also described as a ritual that represents cultural identities. Many chants are inspired from opera melodies, Music Hall and nursery rhymes or lyrics rehearsed in pubs and bars.

Another opinion of Tim Marshall who differentiates between two chants categories, he claims that some chants are carefully constructed before the game, while others are just chaotic and spontaneous spring from the mind of a quick-witted fan in the heat of the moment, and are only relevant for the one specific match at which they are sung.⁴

¹ Merriam Webster, (2021), chant, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chant/> (consulted on 01/08/2020).

² Kyla Gladney-Enos, (2018), The power of chanting, Science Leadership Academy <https://scienceleadership.org/blog/the-power-of-chanting/>, (consulted on 23/03/2021).

³ Jorge Knijnik, (2018), Imagining a multicultural community in an everyday football carnival: Chants, identity and social resistance on Western Sydney terraces, International Review for the Sociology of Sport, London United Kingdom, Vol. 53(4) 471–489, Page 2.

⁴ Tim Marshall, (2014), Where do football chants come from? <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/10998153/Where-do-football-chants-come-from.html/> (consulted on 13/08/2020).

Academic analyses of football chants have tended to suggest chants as vehicles for expressing nationalism, regionalism and socio-political antagonism, and at times there are traces of such concepts in the chants.¹

Tilak Dutta refers to this point saying that chants vary from country to another; in England for example chants possess a potential of social chaos. He explains that by the affinities between football and masculinity, considering that football stadiums are much more like male events, that is why authorities has been adopting strict measures to induce a "family atmosphere" to make gender equality in the crowd.²

2.2 Origins and development of football chants:

Academic studies on football chants have compared them to a modern version of storytelling and folk music, with the influential folk musician Martin Carthy going as far as to label them the one surviving embodiment of an organic living folk tradition, Carthy considers that there are similarities between folk music and football chants, both are a network of songs which evolved out of existing songs, sung by the people and adapted to meet the specific needs of a geographical identity.³ Classical origins of football chants began with Norwich City's "On the Ball, City" composed in the 1890s and originally sung with full piano accompaniment, the oldest still sung today. "On the Ball, City" was originally written for a local works team, but in the same way modern fans take tunes and inspiration from popular culture, Norwich fans adopted the song as their own and 120 years later it still rings out in terraces. Once Norwich joined the Football League in 1920, "On the Ball, City" was exposed to fans across England.⁴

As football fans travel to other countries on away international matches, fans from around the world often copied chants from other clubs of other countries. An example is the familiar "Ole, Ole, Ole" chant sung by international soccer fans at matches around the world. An early version of the chant found its way into soccer stadiums through a Spanish league match in 1982 and was quickly

¹ Armstrong, Gary and Young, Malcolm,(2009), Fanatical football chants: Creating and controlling the carnival, Sport in Society, 2: 3, 173 – 211, Page 33.

² Tilak Dutta, (2015), A Brief History of Football Chants in England, <http://www.goaldentimes.org/a-brief-history-of-football-chants-in-england/> (consulted on 22/08/2020).

³ Jonathan Wilson, Dileep Premachandran, James Corbett, Stuart Roy Clarke, Ben Lyttleton, Scott Murray, (2011), The Blizzard - The Football Quarterly: Issue Sixteen, Blizzard Media Ltd, United Kingdom, Book preview page, <https://books.google.dz/books?id=TEUwBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT194&lpg=PT194&dq=martin+carthy+surviving+embodiment&source=bl&ots=5KuWacCwfH&sig=ACfU3U2oOpH8VOWIdlRJp6W3gkSj932V2g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiC0P7IzaruAhWVuaQKHafUCb0Q6AEwEHoECBAQAg#v=onepage&q&f=false> , (consulted on 30/08/2020).

⁴ Jonathan Wilson, Dileep Premachandran, James Corbett, Stuart Roy Clarke, Ben Lyttleton, Scott Murray, (2011), The Blizzard - The Football Quarterly: Issue Sixteen, Blizzard Media Ltd, United Kingdom, Book preview page, <https://books.google.dz/books?id=TEUwBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT194&lpg=PT194&dq=martin+carthy+surviving+embodiment&source=bl&ots=5KuWacCwfH&sig=ACfU3U2oOpH8VOWIdlRJp6W3gkSj932V2g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiC0P7IzaruAhWVuaQKHafUCb0Q6AEwEHoECBAQAg#v=onepage&q&f=false> , (consulted on 30/08/2020).

adopted by soccer fans across Europe. Eventually the chant proliferated around the world, and is now sometimes even heard at American football matches.¹

2.3 Youth political behavior meaning:

The political behavior of young people is of particular interest to social and political scientists. The term of political behavior refers to any form of (individual or collective) involvement in the political process, or any activity which has political consequences in relation to government and policy. This broad definition embraces both legitimate forms of political participation (such as voting in elections, activism in interest groups, or social movements) and illegitimate political activities (including coups d'état, terrorism, and revolutions).²

Although political behavior towards political participation and engagement is considered to be necessary conditions for democracy to function effectively, However researches into political behavior of disengagement is also a considerable subject across established democracies, not least because of what is considered to be an ongoing disconnect between citizens and their states.

Young people are frequently singled out as a problematic group, displaying low levels of electoral turnout, a lack of trust in democratic institutions and signs of skepticism and cynicism regarding politicians and political parties. While activities associated with traditional politics have declined, young people have also found interest in political issues and alternative forms of political participation.³

In our case, we discuss football as an alternative space for the public performance of identity for young people⁴ as well as an opportunity to the study of youth culture and politics in the Arab world,⁵ mainly to focus on the Algerian case at times of the Hirak movement.

3. Football and politics network: International and local examples:

Football has been an important platform for sociopolitical distinction and regulation. In many examples from the world, political actors have capitalized on football for social mobilization and political propaganda, which all often evidence of a network of relationships between football and

¹ Alex Baker, (2014), Soccer chants heard at the Brazil World Cup explained, <https://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/soccer-dirty-tackle/soccer-chants-of-the-brazil-world-cup-explained-221127198.html/> , (consulted on 12\09\2020).

² Oxford Reference (--) Overview Political behavior, Oxford University Press (OUP) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100334617?rskey=8AhQPL&result=8/> , (consulted on 12\09\2020).

³ Ana Pontes, Matt Henn, Mark D. Griffiths, (2018), Towards a Conceptualization of Young People's Political Engagement: A Qualitative Focus Group Study, Societies, Switzerland, 8, 17; doi:10.3390/soc8010017, Page 1.

⁴ Martin J. Power, Paul Widdop, Dan Parnell, James Carr & Stephen R. Millar, (2020), Football and politics: the politics of football, Managing Sport and Leisure, United Kingdom, VOL. 25, NOS. 1-2, 1-5, Page 3.

⁵ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 1.

politics.¹ This chapter aims to explore ties between football and politics stating some illustrative examples from the world, before to scrutinize on the Algerian case.

3.1 Football and international political issues:

In the contemporary context, football continues to be tied to political events and symbols, an example is the victory of Argentina in the 1978 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Argentina, this victory was used by the military Junta, which came to power after a military coup prior to the World Cup to soften their international image and to legitimize their internal authority. Another example includes the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, which was used by South Korea, under the military leadership of Chun Doo-hwan, as a showcase of the Korean economic miracle, an act of defiance to North Korea, and a distraction from the Korean population's growing discontent with the country's authoritarian regime.²

There has been a growing body of literature exploring the relationship between football and politics. One example of that is the article published by Martin J. Power, Paul Widdop and others which considers that it is an old adage that football and politics should not be mixed, however sports in general has always been political. Football as a focus is mixed with government, world trade agreements and global capitalism as well as with micro-politics of life and every-day decisions. An example discussed in the article is how football became a welcome space of escapism from social isolation and to promote social inclusion. Another example is the one of the SI (Sports Illustrated) which is an American sports magazine which has made a call for papers asked scholars of inside and outside sports management domain to submit papers about management, marketing or governance of association football at elite. The SI initial focus in this project was to discover the relationship between football and politics to bring enhanced and renewed attention to football and the relationship it has with politics and society and expand the existing knowledge in this area. The SI has received articles that responded in different ways. One article claims that football brings discussion about political issues such as Sport and national identity (stating the example of Palestine in which how football is being used as a mechanism to draw attention to the struggle for a Palestinian state and help stimulating discussions about the role of football for people living under occupation). Another article presented how football can show female civic participation by taking female participation in sport as an example, particularly in an international context where securitized practices and discourses are discouraging the socio-civic participation of females (Young Muslims as an example). Other Articles discussed the role of international football events for unrecognized countries by football's established governing bodies.³

¹ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 1.

² Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 1.

³ Martin J. Power, Paul Widdop, Dan Parnell, James Carr & Stephen R. Millar, (2020), Football and politics: the politics of football, MANAGING SPORT AND LEISURE, United Kingdom, VOL. 25, NOS. 1-2, 1-5. , Page 4-5.

3.2 Football and politics in Algeria:

Connections between football and politics in Algeria back to the time before the independence in 1962. These connections have been through different time stages of Algeria.

3.2.1 The independence era:

Football has played a role of an actual expression of Algeria's struggle for independence with the Algerian national team of FLN "Front de Libération Nationale" "National Liberation Front" which was formed in 1958 in clandestine circumstances as Algeria was under the French colonization. The FLN football team has called many best-known French-based Algerian professional players to secretly leave the country and go to Tunisia where the Algerian national team was formally established. Despite the difficult circumstances of colonization, the Algerian FLN team played around 90 matches over four years and helped win international attention for the Algerian struggle for independence.¹

In post-independence, mainly the 1960s and 1970s, football and politics has continued to be tied together, the game was internally a way for the mobilization of social forces (youth, students, workers) to support socialism, and externally, for the integration of independent Algeria into the world, especially through the Algerian participation in major regional games (Arab, African, and Mediterranean), as well as other major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games.² According to Fates, interest in sports and mainly in football has increased in the 1980s to become one of the privileged domains with a special status of in the political regime, he infers to that by the declaration of the Ministry of Youth and Sport that the Algerian team's victory against West Germany in the 1982 World Cup in Spain had done more for the nation than the work of any Algerian ambassador around the world, that victory also stimulated a sense of mobilization and a nationalist feeling in Algerian society, which had never been felt since the country's independence in 1962.

At the 1980s and as a consequence of the national economic crisis resulting from the reduction of oil revenues and the failure of the Algerian development programs based on heavy industrialization and agricultural reform, this period of time was marked by a profound transformation in the Algerian society which had impacts on sports particularly football. Fates argued that there was a correlation between the economic crisis in the 1980s and the increased interest of the political establishment in sporting spectacles. He considers that football was a tool to distract the Algerian population from the country's difficult economic circumstances.

The great interest of Algerians in football alongside with the hard repercussions of the economic crisis has found a ground in stadiums which were transformed into arenas for political agitation and social unrest. Fans of the game especially from youth groups have seen shouting openly against the

¹ Neil Morrison, (2017) Algeria - Equipe ALN and Equipe FLN - History and Matches, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/alg-fln-intres.html/>, (consulted on 15/09/2020).

² Mahfoud Amara (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, , Page 2.

regime and express their inquiries, sometimes even in the presence of senior state officials or even the president himself.¹

3.2.2 The 1990s conflict impacts:

In response to the internal social unrest and of 1988 and international developments in the world towards liberalization and openness, a new constitution was introduced and accepted by national referendum in February 1989 to put an end to the socialist doctrine of the party-state and to FLN hegemony, as well as to offer freedom of expression and to form associations. However, the political situation seemed to have enormous obstacles in the 1990s, after the cancellation of the 1991 legislative elections, in which the first round of voting seemed likely to produce the needed majority for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), doors of violence and atrocities were opened and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Algerians as well as profoundly affected all life aspects of the society.²

In football, the reigning atmosphere of insecurity and terror, particularly between 1993 and 1998 resulted in a decline in leagues' levels of activity and the increased instability in the organization of competitions, principally at a regional level, where weekly travel for events became dangerous for staff, players, and fans. However, despite all the violence, the Algerian Football Federation did not stop running the football leagues and fans did not completely abandon the stadia. Football became for some a symbol of resistance against the difficult social and political situation.

Within the 1990s, sport in general and football in particular were transformed into a political and ideological subject of debate. It became a tool for ideological positioning, a way to distinguish one movement or political party from another. Football chants in its turn have expressed the society debate of ideologies such as the pursuit of the recognition of Amazighia (the Berber language) as an official language, as exemplified by fans' chanting in Berber (Imazighen, Iamzighen) meaning: We are free, we are Amazigh, or the pursuit of an Islamic ideal, as expressed through the chanting of (Alyha nahya oua aliha namout) Meaning: In the name of Allah we live and we die), (Qala Allah Qala Errassoul) meaning God said, the Prophet said. The stadia were also employed to protest against the state's repression of the October 1988 riots. (Beb El Ouad...Beb El Ouad Al chouhada) meaning the martyrs of Beb El Ouad which is the song that become a football anthem in honor of the young martyrs of post-independent Algeria. Football fans' chants range from rejecting social inequalities to contesting the regime's official discourse on morality and history. The chanting of fans in stadia has replicated the political situation in Algeria in a very expressive way. At a football game, you can hear for instance, (Ya Ali Ya Abbass El Djebha Rahi Labass) in other words, the FIS still exists despite the state's court decision to ban the party in 1992).³

3.2.3 Early 2000s and post-conflict :

In November 1995, new amendments to the constitution were introduced, revising the legislation on political parties and elections and strengthening presidential powers. After the presidency of

¹ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 3.

² Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 4.

³ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 6.

Liamine Zeroual (1994-1999), Abdelaziz Bouteflika was elected in 1999. During his first two terms, the state held referendums on civil concord in 1999 and national reconciliation in 2005 aimed to put an end to violence and to join the platform for 'national reconciliation'. In 2008, the Algerian parliament passed a constitutional reform to allow presidents to be elected for more than two five-year terms. This allowed for the reelection of Abdelaziz Bouteflika on the 9th April 2010, for a third term. His re-election coincided with favorable oil and gas pricing in the international market, which helped the Algerian economy based on oil revenues.

The paradigm of civil concord and national reconciliation and the improvements of state's incomes were present in the sporting domain. During his speech on 23rd March 2009, Abdel-Aziz Bouteflika, who was then a candidate for the presidential election, reminded the audience that sport practices were a refuge for youths 'whom represent the brilliance of the country. He even claimed that Algeria has the means to organize two football World Cups. Some argue that this speech was a part of an electoral campaign to convince the Algerian electorate particularly the national sport community to vote for candidate Bouteflika for a third term. But his speech has clearly announced a beginning of a direct intervention of the presidential institution in sport affairs and football in particular.

At the same speech, Abdelaziz Bouteflika did not neglect the fact that there are forms of violence in sport, which could have grave repercussions on the society. Algeria is one of the richest countries in natural gas resources and it is also a very well ranked in proven oil reserves, but critics say it is failing to translate energy wealth into brighter lives for young people. Youth unemployment in Algeria is at least 25 per cent, and more than 60 per cent of the jobs come from the government while the private sector provides fewer work opportunities.¹

There is a little entertainment to lighten such a bleak picture, with movie theatres, malls and social clubs scarce. Football has stepped in to become a refuge for many youths, but also an outlet for daily frustrations of joblessness, weak institutions and sheer boredom, stadiums turn sometimes into a space for waves of hooliganism and violence of fans.² According to AMARA the phenomenon of violence in stadiums was mainly due to political and economical failures such as the high levels of unemployment among youth in particular, along with modest salaries as well as the overpower of presidency over other institutions which has created a pseudo-democracy. All mentioned have caused a sense of resentment among the Algerian population

A case in point on May 2008, in the city of Oran where riots broke out in response to the relegation of Mouloudia Club Oran (MCO) to the second division of the demonstrators, 120 were arrested and 300 injured; of those, 69 (including 37 minors) were judged for disturbing public order and destruction of public properties. Other similar incidents have taken place in different regions of Algeria, involving fans of clubs in the first league as well as those in lower divisions. These incidents were not only for sporting purpose, within the same years alongside, demonstrations of resentment have taken place and were led by independent trade unions in education, industry, and medical sectors in different parts of the country to protest against inequality and corruption. In a survey undertaken from 6–8 February 2009, by two private newspapers, El Khaber (arabophone)

¹ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 9.

² The Associated Press, (2014), Soccer violence in Algeria reflects social unrest, <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/soccer/soccer-violence-in-algeria-reflects-social-unrest-1.2751823/>, (consulted on 22\10\2020).

and Liberté (francophone), 74.4 per cent of a population of 1340 youngsters aged 15–39 indicated that there is a correlation between harsh socio-economic conditions in the country and violence in football.¹

As the era of early 2000s was not just characterized by difficult economic and social conditions which have had ties with football fans situation, but also it has witnessed a start of an increasing use of internet by Algerians which has had an impact on almost all aspects of their lives. The World Bank data indicate that in the beginning of the year 2000 a value of 0.49 per cent of the Algerian population were internet users, this number was incrementally increasing year in year out to reach 10.18 per cent in 2008, then 42.94 in 2016, and around 49 per cent by 2018.²

The rapid spread and growth of internet has many impacts on football life. Sports JOE a leading Irish media brand states that Internet and social media has allowed fans to connect with like-minded people and has made an easy access to so much more information for fans around the world.³ And with a growing interest of the Algerian media in European football alongside with a growing popularity among Algerian households of satellite television channels such as TF1, France2, and Canal+, these TV channels were devoting hours to the broadcasting of sporting events (including live matches, football documentaries, and analyses). Thus, fans became also more welcomed to buy international clubs' souvenirs and imported counterfeit football replica of European football clubs. These changes towards the European football were clearly apparent in fans' chants and dresses, an example of that is the names given to the new emerging groups of young people who specialize in football chanting such as: Group Torino, Group Milano and Verde Leone, which are nick names of fans groups of the clubs of Mouloudia D'Alger (MCA) and Union Sportive de la Médina d'Alger (USMA). This has resulted in diversity and change in fans' football culture, mainly their chants and slogans.⁴

4. Football chants: from stadiums to the Hirak movement:

Since February 2019, the Algerian authorities have faced a popular uprising After Abdel Aziz Boutefflika who then was the President of Algeria announced his candidacy for a fifth presidential term in a signed statement. The popular uprising known as The Hirak movement has been expressing a popular desire for radical change through protests and street marches every week. During these protests, Algerian youth have invented complex metaphorical slogans and chants to express their

¹ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 10.

² The World Bank, (--), Individuals using the Internet (% of population)-Algeria, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=DZ/> (consulted on 22/10/2020).

³ Nooruddean Choudry, (2019), How the internet and social media changed the game for football? <https://www.sportsjoe.ie/football/football-social-how-the-internet-and-social-media-changed-the-game-3-185811?cmpredirect/> (consulted on 25\10\2020).

⁴ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 5.

indignation and anger. However, those chants were not entirely new; they have always existed in Algerian stadiums, where they were traditionally composed by young football fans.¹

This chapter analyzes a collection of chants which were remarkably sung in Algerian stadiums before they stepped in as devices for the Hirak movement. The chants are a mixture of Arabic and French, but they are translated in this paper from Algerian slang to English in the intention of communicating their general sense and making them accessible to a non-Algerian audience.

4.1 Football stadiums: a space to express youth:

Football stadiums have been a place where young Algerians can openly express themselves, shout their frustrations, declare their desires and sing about their dreams.² Lively criticism and invitations to rally have been heard on the stands of Algeria's football stadiums for several years now. Faced with controlled public spaces and censored freedom of speech, stadiums have become a forum for promoting the expression of political criticism and grievances.³ Many of the songs are recorded on mobile phones and posted online, generating hundreds of thousands of views. The independent identity being fashioned by these fans in the stadium lives online, accessible to young people across Algeria.⁴ The following selections of songs are widely diffused in Web, Although the structures of these songs and posted videos may seem senseless, there are elements of creativity in the selection of lyrics, manners, tones, and rhythms, and it is evident that fans create the songs in an effort to decode the perplexing situations of their daily lives, which are characterized according to them by injustice, marginalization, and even self-denial.

For instance, a common theme of chants is that of (el-haraga). The expression comes from the Arabic word (haraka), that is (to burn) to refer to clandestine immigration, or defection, describing the act of crossing borders and burning passports and other IDs after entering a European territory. Associated with this theme are the metaphors of the boat (babor) and the sailor (bahri), which are commonly used in football chants by fans,⁵ a famous song produced by Ouled El Bahdja and adopted by fans of USMA Club Mouloudia D'Alger sings about a wounded by misery young man who wants to cross illegally the sea on a boat. The song's refrain says:

Khelini Nroh (Let me leave)

Kalbi Majrouh (My heart is tired)

¹ Nassima Balla, (2019), Shouting for a New Algeria: Slogans as Foundations of a Political Project? <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/shouting-for-a-new-algeria-slogans-as-foundations-of-a-political-project/> (consulted on 13/11/2020).

² Assia Boundaoui, (2015), Algerian football fans sing songs of freedom, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/algerian-football-fans-sing-songs-freedom/>, (consulted on 25/10/2020).

³ Sarah Melloul, (2019), Algeria sounds cape of a popular revolution, https://www.auxsons.com/en/focus/6-algeria-soundscape-of-a-popular-revolution/?doing_wp_cron=1600966038.4748880863189697265625/ (consulted on 26/10/2020).

⁴ Assia Boundaoui, (2015), Algerian football fans sing songs of freedom, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/algerian-football-fans-sing-songs-freedom/>, (consulted on 25/10/2020).

⁵ Mahfoud Amara, (2012), Football Sub-Culture and Youth Politics in Algeria, Mediterranean Politics, United Kingdom, 17:1, 41-58, Page 15.

Khelini Nroh (Let me leave)

Fi Babor Loh (on a boat of wood)¹

The lyrics describe the hard life conditions of young people such as lack of jobs, government oppression and social inequalities. Fans of USMA chant the song with harmony body manners from clapping hands up and down swing together to describe the boat's sailing.

Algeria has always had soccer chants, but in the past 15 years they have become a distinct musical culture. Such mentioned chants show how youth express themselves with very open and harsh words. Some supporters consider stadiums as the only place where they can express their fury.²

On April 2018, Ouled el Bahdja, a supporter organization of the Sports Union of the Medina of Algiers (USMA.), one of the most important football clubs in the country, released a song titled La Casa del Mouradia. The song was recorded many times in Algerian stadiums, where young fans showed very harsh words that might be not tolerated by the authorities like expressions of (F'Rabaa L'boubiya matet w'mazalat l'kadiya)³ which means that even the president was then very sick and has not shown in public for years, and referred by fans as a "doll", the regime hasn't shown any attention to the situation. About a year later, that song was to be intoned in almost each of the Friday protests.

4.2 Football chants: devices for the Hirak movement:

Since the 22nd February 2019, largely peaceful mass demonstrations have been taking place across Algeria opposing a fifth mandate of then-President Bouteflika and call for a complete change of the political system.⁴

Protestors have created dozens of songs and slogans imagined and sung every week. These slogans carry explicit and powerful political messages demanding the dissolution of the entire regime and express a sense of social malaise, the need for solidarity and union against the regime, and defiance. Protesters choose to send messages to the regime through the slogans, sometimes responding to official speeches or decisions with new slogans or completely disregarding the existence of the government through subtly humoristic songs. These slogans have helped the Hirak pull off important concessions from the regime by demonstrating the social cohesion and the political consciousness of the masses and setting a common tone for usually contradictory demands. The movement of the Hirak has shown an ability to voice clear and articulated claims via simply worded slogans, which helped maintain cohesion between diverse social groups of Algerians. If these songs and slogans were born in stadiums, they sum up what Algerians aspire to: a civilian state replacing a long-lasting military tradition, the departure of the figures of the former regime, an end to corruption, more participation in political life, and well-designed economical strategies that guarantee better living conditions.

¹Ouled El Bahdja, (2018), Babour Elou7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29GkFyAL10Y>, (consulted on 23/11/2020)

² Sarra Grira, (2011), Afraid to protest in the street, youth criticize government during football matches <https://observers.france24.com/en/20110928-algeria-protest-street-youth-criticise-government-football-matches-algiers-stadium-chant-songs/>, (consulted on 28/10/2020).

³ Ouled El Bahdja, (2018) La Casa Del Mouradia YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHZviPhZQxs> (consulted on 24/11/2020)

⁴ Amnesty International (2019), Hirak Algeria Monitor, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/12/algeria-hirak-protests/>, (consulted on 11/11/2020).

The 22nd February movement is in many respects particular: it is pacifist, rooted in popular neighborhoods, and dominated by a young generation of activists, and most importantly to focus on in our case is the use of complex metaphorical slogans and chants as way of expressing demands. These chants, however, are not entirely new, they have always existed in Algerian stadiums, where they were traditionally composed by young football fans.

In the last decade, though, these chants saw an important revival and began encompassing strong political messages deeply anchored in an assessment of the current context. Young football fans and groups specialized in chants excelled in creating slogans and composing songs often very hostile to the regime. In general, the government did not consider these chants a threat to their authority. Indeed, the authorities underestimated the capacity of football chants to mobilize beyond their own ranks and fight for social recognition and justice. Yet, it is precisely here football chants have played such a vital role in the mass movement of the Hirak.

The songs, written by fans groups like Ouled El Bahdja or Verde Leone in Algiers, as well as other slogans shouted by supporters, openly expressed what most of the population felt in silence. Since the beginning of protests in February, these slogans have been widely adopted by protesters of different backgrounds as they draw on shared grievances and collective symbols of protest. These songs and slogans became mantras for the galvanized crowds, with the ultras becoming conductors of sorts, setting the tone for thousands of people who repeat the songs introduced.¹

(La Casa Del Mouradia)

The very well-known song “La Casa del Mouradia” was recorded in April 2018 by Ouled El Bahdja, a music band of fans of the Algiers football team USMA. La Casa Del Mouradia,² whose title refers to the famous Spanish Netflix series “La Casa De Papel,” sarcastically compared the Presidency, whose headquarter is El Mouradia Palace in Algiers, to a gang of robbers. It expresses the revolutionary mindset of its protagonists and addresses issues of freedom, the political conscience of the youth, and the unanimous rejection of Bouteflika’s system.

The refrain of La Casa Del Mouradia is a declaration of a young man living in very modest conditions and mourning with anger and anxiety with a limited ability to identify who is responsible for their situation.

Saat Lafjarr w’majani noum (It’s dawn and sleep won’t come)

Rani n’consomi ghir b’chwiya (I’m taking [drugs] in small doses)

Chkoun Sabba W’Chkoun N’loum (Why? Who should I blame?)

Mellina L’Miicha hediya (We’re sick of this life)

Further verses make a short summary of each of Bouteflika’s four terms through their negative milestones. The first one was marked by the end of the civil war. Ouled el Bahdja reminds that Bouteflika’s election (or nomination) was not contested because most of the population was still shocked by a decade of violence. The second term was marked by a clear positioning of Bouteflika and his entourage as a ruling clan. The third term was marked by a substantial reinforcement of the power of the president, partially with the suppression of presidential term limitations but also with

¹ Nassima Balla, (2019), Shouting for a New Algeria: Slogans as Foundations of a Political Project? <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/shouting-for-a-new-algeria-slogans-as-foundations-of-a-political-project/>, (consulted on 13/11/2020).

² Ouled El Bahdja, (2018), La Casa Del Mouradia YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHZviPhZQxs>, (consulted on 24/11/2020)

increasing power given to corrupt businessmen. During the fourth term, Bouteflika is referred to as a “doll,” as a stroke made it difficult for him to talk or to move, let alone govern and as he became a “puppet” in the hands of his clan.

La Casa Del Mouradia has been sung in stadiums since 2018 and was very quickly adopted by the Hirak in the first weeks of the movement. Although its simple words, the song has a poignant melody, and an intense messages about the state of the country.¹

(Goulou lel Gaïd, ynavigui carte Chifa, ou chaab rahou faye, nahina Bouteflika)

The original song was with different lyrics, released by a music band of USMA fans named (Mouh Milano) in August 2019. Protestors have adopted the same melody of the song but with a modification of lyrics from football purposes to political ones.

After the resignation of Bouteflika in April 2019, Ahmed Gaïd Salah, who was then Vice Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Army, stood out as the highest authority in the country and was recognized as the new face of the regime. This slogan is the first one explicitly mentioning Gaïd Salah as the main target of the Hirak. It satirically calls on him to get medical coverage, an implicit manner to ask for him to retire. Moreover, the second part of the slogan reminds Gaïd Salah that Bouteflika was removed by the people and not by him. Protesters used this slogan to ask for the unconditional departure of Gaïd Salah, undermining his role in their previous successes. A second verse is usually added by protestors, which emphasizes the Hirak's rejection of the military ruling the country since independence in 1962 and the demand for a civilian government.²

(Makach Raiis Kayan Taswira)

Another song released by the music group of USMA fans (Mouh Milano) in October 2018 titled as Y'en a marre³ meaning I'm sick of it which addresses in a direct way the situation of the Algerian president Bouteflika. The president has largely disappeared from public view since a stroke in 2013 and When he is meant to attend a public ceremony or a meeting, his handlers place a framed picture of him on an easel which has erupted protestors across the country, especially after the FLN party announced Bouteflika would seek a fifth consecutive term.⁴ The refrain of the song describes the situation saying (Makach Raiis Kayan Taswira) meaning that the president is disappeared and government has been using a picture of him instead. This slogan was repeated several times by young fans of USMA and recorded in Hamadi Bouloughin stadium, later on, it became also a slogan that protestors sung and repeated in the Hirak.

¹ Nassima Balla, (2019), Shouting for a New Algeria: Slogans as Foundations of a Political Project? <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/shouting-for-a-new-algeria-slogans-as-foundations-of-a-political-project/>, (consulted on 13/11/2020).

² Nassima Balla, (2019), Shouting for a New Algeria: Slogans as Foundations of a Political Project? <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/shouting-for-a-new-algeria-slogans-as-foundations-of-a-political-project/> (consulted on 13/11/2020).

³ MILANO MOUH Y'en a marre | Official Audio - [Video Lyrics] YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EA-pVOEVzoi> (consulted on 13/11/2020).

⁴ Chikhi Lamine, (2018), Rare appearance fuels speculation Algeria's Bouteflika will run again, Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-algeria-politics-idUKKBN1HH2FJ>, (consulted on 26/11/2020).

Since the beginning of protests in February, these chants have been widely adopted by protesters of different backgrounds as they draw on shared experiences that are relatively recent and that became part of collective memory. In basing them on widely shared grievances and collective symbols of protest, the chants led to “reconciliation” between football fans and other groups of the Algerian society. They all agreed on adopting the same messages of the “oppressed” against the “oppressors” in the face of a historical liberation. These chants and slogans became mantras for the galvanized crowds, with the football fans becoming conductors of sorts, setting the tone for thousands of people who learn the songs by heart whenever new ones are introduced. In this sense, the football chants have been able to unify the protestors by drawing on shared tropes, allowing for a shared diagnosis of the causes of grievance and shaping the collective understanding of the envisioned way forward.¹

5. Conclusion:

Football has been interplayed with politics in Algeria since before the independence of the country. The study has shown a complexity and richness of the Algerian football context in politics particularly football chants which have been playing a role of the articulation of political behavior of youth groups in Algeria.

We believe that such studies can show that it is crucial to opt for participative mechanisms that start from the local level. In our case, football chants are the bottom level in which young people have been expressing their political behavior more characterized by socio-political discontent, feelings of disagreement and social agitation.

However, it is important to mention that football chants were not a sudden-to appear element to articulate political behavior of youth, but football as a game as whole has been tied with politics of Algeria since before the independence when football was played to help to gain international attention for Algeria’s struggle for independence, similarly was the case right after the independence when football was played with political intentions to integrate the independent Algeria into the world.

Besides international purposes, football was also mingling internally with political interests of Algerians; from mobilization to support socialism in 1960s and 1970s into a way to express political agitation and social unrest in the 1980s. This phase of time helped to create a foundation for football fans in which they join football terraces for more than sporting purpose, but rather to express their political behavior, this latter was mostly apparent in their chants.

It is at early 1990s when these chants have clearly appeared as a trend amongst young football fans. With the new technologies era, young fans have recorded many of their chants which seemed to reflect their opinion on politicians, authorities and social situation. Young fans also criticize through these chants the high living cost in Algeria and the privileges enjoyed by the country’s elite. Some of the listed examples of chants in this paper notably those from Algiers’ stadiums showed these youth performed strong and harsh worded songs that the authorities may not tolerate in the streets.

¹ Nassima Balla, (2019), Shouting for a New Algeria: Slogans as Foundations of a Political Project? <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/shouting-for-a-new-algeria-slogans-as-foundations-of-a-political-project/>, (consulted on 13/11/2020).

Youth political behavior showed roots in football stadium, these have become one of the only spaces where young people could feel a sense of belonging and freely assemble whilst rejecting other democratic channels. The increasing use of internet in the 2000s has helped young fans and their specialized music groups to create chants, post it on web and let it go viral. The popularity of chants was clearly apparent in streets when football fans showed presence in the Hirak, their politicized football chants were expressing the popular resentment with the political system.

This study aimed to show to what extent football chants have articulated youth political behavior in Algeria. the study has spotted a transition of chants from stadiums to street protests of the Hirak movement. We may conclude at the end of this paper that both football chants and the Hirak seemed to share similarities, both reflect a long-lasting dissatisfaction, as well as both made a success in creating cohesion between different social groups, categories and background of fans and protestors in the streets.

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