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Beyond Game and Fame; A Space and Place of Identities

Kaddouri Souad

University of El-Oued, Algeria

kaddouri-souad@univ-eloued.dz

Football Between unification and division

Abstract

The game of football is incredibly popular and has a widespread appeal. Whether it is about young or old people, living in urban or suburban areas, they are definitely fans of a local or national team. Football's close connection to people's lives is not accidental. Its simple rules and minimal requirements make it accessible to everyone, fostering a strong sense of connection. Despite the simplicity of football, it has undergone rapid developments that have made it a global empire that has transcended borders, policies and economies. Football has come to reflect the cultures of peoples and even create the cultures of some peoples and contribute to solving political or economic problems for individuals, federations and even countries. The present paper examines the power of this game in unifying people divided by borders and dividing people united by borders. The article reveals that Football's breaking of borders has made people from outside cities or countries fanatic towards a club or national team. For example, the ultra-group Manchester City, Manchester United, or even Real Madrid in countries such as Saudi Arabia, China, and Japan, which shows the dominance of football and its power in creating an international ties. Football can also be a reason for hatred and separation between some people in countries that share the same religion, language and customs.

Keywords: Football, Game, Global phenomenon, Hatred, International ties, Power.

Introduction

The love for football is deeply ingrained in many modern societies, often seen as a symbol of national pride and unity. Media and educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping societal values like respect and tolerance, while fostering a sense of citizenship and national identity. Individual and team triumphs are celebrated as national victories, inspiring people to strive for success in other aspects of life. Football serves as a universal language promoting peace, coexistence, and unity in a world marked by conflict. However, if the game is politicized, it has the potential to erode these bonds, highlighting the dual nature of football's impact on society.

1. Football: Mission of Solidarity and Coexistence

Sport is one of the bridges that connect peoples to each other, fostering love and communication through its valuable goals and entertainment. It smooths out obstacles, enhances relationships, and opens informal channels of communication between countries with political differences. Therefore, sport often repairs what politics has damaged and aims to promote affection and eliminate negative traits like fanaticism, aggression, and racism. Originally created to strengthen relations between people, sport is the universal language that transcends race and language differences, prioritizing love, brotherhood, and affection over competition.

Football offers numerous benefits, providing career opportunities for aspiring talents seeking fame and success. Jimmy Burns a journalist and author of *La Roja : A Journey Through Spanish Football*, describes football as a piece of art:

During the years of General Francisco Franco's dictatorship, the concept dovetailed with [his vision] of a militaristic, authoritarian, macho traditional Catholic society. What we see over the years — and I get at in the book — is this football evolve into what is known as the new Spanish

football, that of *La Roja*, or the kind of football that you've seen FC Barcelona play. It's more fluid, quick-passing, technical and creative. People call it like a kind of ballet, because it's almost choreographed. I call it poetry in motion (2012).

The relationship between sports and art often sparks controversy, yet upon closer examination, the essence of art can be found in the world of football. Art, defined as the expression of human emotion or creativity through physical or visual skills, can easily be associated with football, raising the question of whether football, when played with creativity and emotion, can be considered a form of art.

Football also serves as a platform for promoting peace, bridging political and economic divides, and fostering love and harmony among people. Additionally, it facilitates cultural exchange and brings joy to societies while promoting global unity. Despite not being involved in the profession, individuals can find entertainment and stress relief by playing football with friends. A notable example of its positive influence is the sportsmanship and mutual respect displayed as competing teams shake hands before and after matches, regardless of the outcome.

A recent friendly match between Algeria and Palestine (2022) exemplifies this spirit, as Palestinian players began by bowing on the martyrs' land and Algerian supporters wished for Palestine to win, emphasizing the importance of brotherhood over victory. This match symbolized unity, peace, and solidarity. It reflects the football's support for the causes of liberation in the world.

2. Politicization of football

Undoubtedly, football is the most popular and enjoyable game worldwide, transcending its sporting nature to become a symbol of national pride and glory. However, it has also been a source of strained relations between countries, particularly in cases where the line between sports and politics is blurred. The association between football and political power has often

followed similar patterns, with politicians leveraging its widespread appeal to convey political messages, effectively using it as a tool to influence and distract the masses. Marx's characterization of religion as the 'opium of the masses,' distorting reality and numbing the pain of proletarian oppression, can be applied to the way football influences people's minds today.

The 20th century witnessed significant political changes in Europe, encompassing shifts from monarchy to democracy and the rule of church and despotism, testing various political ideologies on the continent. Football, once the sport of the masses, was exploited by fascist leaders Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, who recognized its potential for propaganda to showcase their nations. Through manipulation, coercion, and corruption, they harnessed football's popular appeal to serve their agendas (2013).

Between 1934 and 1938, Italy achieved the unprecedented feat of retaining the World Cup title for two consecutive tournaments. However, the team's success was not solely due to the players' skills or the coach's tactics but was also attributed to the intimidating message from the country's president, Benito Mussolini, who demanded victory or death. The Italian team's triumphs were a representation of Mussolini's prosperous era, during which he sought to revive the glory of ancient Rome, diverting public attention from the prevailing oppression and subjugation.

The Nazi regime utilized sports as a tool to further their agenda of strengthening the "Aryan race." Hitler propagated the superiority of the German "Aryan" race and aimed to exert political influence through sports, particularly in preparing the German youth for war. The Nazis' efforts to promote sports, especially football, led to the establishment of numerous clubs across the country. Hitler demonstrated his disdain for democracy by withdrawing Germany from the League of Nations in 1933 and subsequently sought to showcase his country's potential through football. The game served as a means for Hitler to portray his nation as civilized to the international community and camouflage his true intentions as he prepared for war.

In 1935, the German football team visited London to play against the renowned home team, despite anti-fascist protests. The purpose of this visit, according to writer Ulrich Linder, was to demonstrate to the international community that Germans were capable of civilized conduct, contrary to prevalent beliefs at the time (2013).

During the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini dispatched substantial support to his ally in Spain, and Hitler swiftly provided military assistance to Franco's Nationalist forces, bolstered by economic aid. Franco's alignment with fellow fascist leaders garnered attention, and other countries were resolute in isolating Spain. Spain's lack of active participation in the war did not go unnoticed, as Franco's alignment with other fascist leaders led other countries to insist on isolating Spain.

Recognizing the positive impact of football, Franco envisioned it as a means to regain positive global attention and consolidate his rule at home, diverting attention from his regime's initial financial struggles and inadequacies.

Franco offered extensive material and moral support to help his club dominate the early Champions League, contributing to breaking the isolation imposed on his regime, which had been shunned by European neighbors due to its history and associations with Nazism and fascism during World War II.

Real Madrid was embraced by the leader of the capital city, aiming to embody his authoritarian rule. He astutely recognized that by backing Real Madrid, he could silence the influence of FC Barcelona, a representation of Catalan pride and dignity. Consequently, Barca would symbolize resistance against Franco's oppressive regime and its suppression of Catalan culture. Franco cunningly used the rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona to his advantage (2014).

In our context, football was utilized as a tool for political conflict between nations. The events surrounding the Algeria-Egypt match during the 2010 World Cup qualifiers are still evident, escalating after the speech by the ousted president Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak's statement, indicating that the government would not tolerate Egyptians to be insulted and humiliated, insults and humiliation, clearly referred to the aftermath of the football match. In fact, this was a result of political tensions fuelled by the rivalry between the two countries to assert their influence, and football only became a stage for their rivalry.

These examples highlight the significance of politicizing football as a contemporary method of controlling the masses in authoritarian regimes. Governments exploit football matches to manipulate the masses, garner their support, and secure their allegiance.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this paper was on the widespread impact of football on society, encompassing various social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Football is seen as a tool for promoting cultural exchange, bringing together fans from diverse nationalities and backgrounds to share their cultures and experiences. However, this popular and sportsmanlike game can be manipulated to advance specific political ideologies or propagate ideas that benefit particular groups. As evidenced by real-life examples, seemingly ordinary matches have led to the spread of animosity and loss of lives among people who are connected by bonds of brotherhood and affection rooted in a shared religion, languages and traditions.

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