



# FOOTBALL CHANTS AS A FORM OF PROTEST MOVEMENT

Marie Figoureux

In this period, the eyes of the European continent, and beyond, have been focused on the European Championship and the international competition. More than one national team has taken this international stage as an opportunity to protest racism. They do so by taking the knee before the start of the game, in line with the American protest tradition started in 2016 by Colin Kaepernick who refused to stand in pride in a flag of a country that oppresses black people<sup>1</sup>.

These moments of protest in football remind us of power transcending the game and the strength of representatives taking a stance. However, not only the players on the field hold the capacity of turning football games into protest, the fans surrounding them have more than once shown their strength and courage in doing so. A recent example is the Moroccan protest song<sup>2</sup> that went viral in which the singers address corruption, their longing for economic prosperity and an honest judicial system. Ironically, the

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<sup>1</sup> BBC news (2021). What is taking the knee and why is it an issue at Euro 2020?

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3-KhIVWj-4>



predecessor has been sent to jail. His freedom is dependent on the refraining from the chanting of this, or similar, protest songs in the stadium. Another example is the widespread song in support of Palestine<sup>3</sup>, during the most recent escalations of violence. The song addresses the silence of Arab countries on the Palestinian oppression and shows the support of the people for the Palestinians.

Historically, football had its role in the struggle for independence through the creation of a national identity, for example in Algeria<sup>4</sup>. Scholars have looked into the rhetorical function of protests songs, and have found these songs to perform different functions, among which the empowerment of the listener to overcome adversity and the communication of a message so consolidate a social movement as well as encourage societal change<sup>5</sup>. Through these such chants, a sense of brotherhood is created<sup>6</sup>. In Algeria, football chants have expressed the dissatisfaction with the regime, and travelled from the stadium to the streets<sup>7</sup>. One of the lyrics goes: “Who is to blame? The state is to blame, for our torment”. The songs are recorded in professional studios and spread to a broad audience, maximizing their empowering capacity.

In Israel, political football chants are not necessarily government oriented, but rather indicate a politicized hatred. For example, when studying Israeli protest songs, Tamir found references to Islam and Arabs, linked to terrorism, incorporating a political message in the football chants<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the Jewish Beitar

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8xd7iBoll0>

<sup>4</sup> Algeria’s songs of protests: from the stadium to the streets.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97ScffuJu7U>

<sup>5</sup> Cort, Mary (2014). The power of lyrical protest : examining the rhetorical function of protest songs in the 2000s.

<sup>6</sup> Tamir, I. (2019). ‘I am grateful that god hates the reds’: persistent values and changing trends in Israel football chants. *Sport in Society*, 1-13.

<sup>7</sup> Algeria’s songs of protests: from the stadium to the streets.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97ScffuJu7U>

<sup>8</sup> Tamir, I. (2019). ‘I am grateful that god hates the reds’: persistent values and changing trends in Israel football chants. *Sport in Society*, 1-13.



Jerusalem never had an Arab player and is known to have a right-wing, racist supporters' group. One of their chants includes the call for death to all Arabs<sup>9</sup>.

These examples, as well as the scholarly work on the function of protest songs, show the potential depth of football chants and how they can work as an inspiration for a revolt - or a potential genocide. There might be more to football than the kicking of a ball. Although many supporters might stick to the "You'll never walk alone" chants, inspiring in a different way.

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<sup>9</sup> Dorsey, James (2016). *Soccer vs. Jihad. The turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*. In Sadiki, Larbi (ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Middle East Politics*. C Hurst & Company.