
Violence in Tunisian Football: Analytical Essay

Tunisian football has always been one of the jewels of the African continent, the country holds more than five champions league split between Esperance Sportive de Tunis, Club Africain, and Etoile Sportive du Sahel.

What is shameful however, is that though Tunisia shows pride in its football, its stadiums and atmosphere between supporters has grown terribly across the years especially after the Tunisian revolution of the 14th of January, 2011 and violence has spread across Tunisian football and causing problems for teams.

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Tunisian football is what makes Tunisia quite popular around the world, it is known to have one the highest appearances in the world cup and is known for its attractive and fast paced football.

It has known many legends across the years such as the legendary goalkeeper of Club Africain, commonly known as Attouga is the leading goalkeeper of the Tunisian national football team for many years and has proven to be very aggressive and high demanding player in the pitch.

Other legends include Tarek Dhiab, who is most known for his time with the Esperance Sportive de Tunis and has won many trophies with his club.

But what really makes Tunisian football atmosphere interesting and intriguing is its high passion from their supports, notably Club Africain and Esperance Sportive de Tunis who are both rival clubs from the Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.

These two clubs are known to have one of the fiercest derbies in all the African Continent but also in my opinion, the entire world and the reason behind is the passion for their respective clubs from the fans.

Many problems have erupted in a derby match and I myself remember very well the atmosphere of each derby, you can feel the atmosphere being tense and the whole country just stands still and the whole nation just awaits the derby.

Both supporters are invading the streets with pyro techniques and flags and cars are honking all the way to the stadium of Rades and that is how our derby is known for.

The entire freeway up until the entrance of the stadium of Rades is filled with fans chanting their respective clubs' songs but there was no fighting whatsoever and all fans were just trash talking before the game but there was no violence at all.

Even after the match, no matter what the outcome of the match is, there will still only be trash talking but no violence at all, the fans would simply go home and celebrate in their neighborhoods and there will be no sort of interaction between the two fans.

After the revolution, things changed, the people started to get more violent, still feeling angry due to the promises of the government not fulfilled for a better Tunisia and the violence then started to show in the stands of stadiums across the Tunisian nation.

The public then started to go stadiums to cause problems, as stadiums has been considered a place where the normal person could just unleash his hatred and angry in the 90 minutes of the match and many games have since been described as “dangerous” especially the Tunisian derby which hosts two of the most famous football clubs in Tunisia.

Many cases of violence in the stadiums have been reported and especially since the violence has not only been limited between the supporters of both clubs but also between other people such as journalists and among these events is the match between Etoile sportive du Sahel and Club Africain in 2018 where journalists found themselves injured in altercations between both fans. (Arabnews.com, 2018).

The Tunisian channel “El Wataniya 1” even threatened to stop broadcasting matches after the injury of both journalists and they have the absolute right to do so, stadiums in Tunisia have become more like a civil war, not football games anymore, it became a war zone between both supporters who want to show their superiority by committing various acts of vandalism and violence. (Arabnews.com, 2018).

Arabnews.com even states that “Football violence has escalated so much in recent years that sports minister Majdouline Cherni has described it as “stadium terrorism..”

In February, a riot sparked by a contested penalty and a flurry of red cards left 38 police officers injured at a league match between Etoile Sahel and bitter rival Esperance.” (Arabnews.com, 2018).

As we can see, every topflight match in Tunisia could end in violence and even sports minister Majdouline Cherni has even taken notice of this uprising issue within Tunisia, measures should be taken so that Tunisian football can once again be recognized as beautiful and clean from violence and other acts of vandalism.

The problem that these fights cause unfortunately is the civilians who simply go to football matches to support their respective teams, but I have seen cases where young teenagers would come home either beat or robbed due to the violence between both supporters.

Sometimes the fights would get so intense that sometimes, civilians who are caught in a fight are beaten up as well and this is proof that the violence in Tunisia has turned into hooliganism and this is quite dangerous.

The Tunisian security should take measures and should increase the security in stadiums to make sure that the regular supporter will not be harmed in the stadium and that the fights should be contained as well.

At one point, things between fans have got so bad that even the police got injured in the match that opposed Etoile Sportive du Sahel and Esperance Sportive de Tunis and this is quite a rare incident because the stadium is usually packed with more than hundreds of police officers and are well equipped by anti-riot materials to contain these situations. (en.as.com, 2018).

The pitch of the stadium got covered by plastic chairs and bottles coming from the supporters stands and even players had a rough time playing due to the constant interruption of the match due to the violence and projectiles thrown in the pitch. (en.as.com, 2018).

But what is most surprising is that policemen were injured by the supporters, though they were wearing protective gear which means that supporters threw sharp objects at them and responded with a lot of violence to the point that 19 police officers were hospitalized. (en.as.com, 2018).

The high violence seen in Tunisian stadiums can also be caused by the chants from supporters as many songs from various clubs in Tunisia are known to have respective songs that are offensive to other clubs and at sometimes even insults them according to Bedhouifi Hafsi. (Hafsi, 2014).

One of the notable songs that encourage violence is the use of the slogan “ommek naachakha” which translates roughly to “I adore your mother” which is a known song within the Esperance Sportive de Tunis supporters and is quite offensive to be truthful and these lyrics can be the reason behind why there is such hostility between football fans of rival clubs. (Hafsi, 2014).

Club Africain as well have chants that insult other football clubs in Tunisia and among the lyrics that are quite popular is “CSS, Taraji, L'étoile jboura” which translates to “CSS (Club Sportif Sfaxien), Taraji (Esperance Sportive de Tunis), L'étoile (Etoile Sportive du Sahel) are hopeless” and this shows hostility and supposed superiority from Club Africain over the other Tunisian Clubs.

We can see that even the lyrics that are mentioned in their songs inspire hatred and it comes naturally that the other clubs will find ways to respond and most of the times it comes through violence.

What makes Tunisian football dangerous as well is that the neighborhoods in which there exists a high number of supporters would generally fight between each other.

Each football club in Tunisia has its own respective group or “Ultras” who are a group of supporters known for massive to use massive flags, smoke bombs and many other dangerous measures to show their support towards their club and are very confrontational against the police forces. (urbandictionary.com, n.d).

Each of these groups are known to have fights between them in stadiums and even in their respective neighborhoods and has slowly turned into an all-out war between them rather than uniting in order to support the club.

The other issue that this violence in stadiums is causing apart from causing violence to the police force and innocent civilians is that they also hinder their club's image and they will even injure them financially.

There are laws that could fine clubs who their supporters are proven to have caused violence within matches and there have been many fines issued to various famous Tunisian football clubs because of the outrage that their football fans cause.

The groups fight for territory in order to show their superiority and even fight with groups from rival football clubs, most notably the fierce rivalry between Esperance Sportive de Tunis and Club Africain or Etoile Sportive de Sahel and Esperance Sportive de Tunis, these confrontations always leave violence in its path and most of their encounters end in disaster for both clubs.

The violence in Tunisia has reached its highest peak when a young supporter of Club Africain was found dead in a canal next to the stadium of Rades. (Khmira, 2018).

The young boy who was only 19 the time he died, has caused an outrage in Tunisia and many supporters have blamed the police for what happened to the young boy and many fights with the Tunisian police have followed after this event as an act of revenge. (Khmira, 2018).

An interview between a journalist and a young Tunisian football fan explains what happens exactly between police officers and football fans and explains why they are so violent towards them and have fights with them, according to Goal.com: "The police officers start provoking us from outside the stadium, calling our mothers names, taking away our scarfs and banners, and making us wait in line for hours while sometimes beating us,". (Khmira, 2018).

This testimony shows that the police force is also to be blamed because of their provocations towards the fans and as we can see they insult the fans and even take away their materials to support their football clubs such as slogans written in big papers and their scarves which are very symbolic to them.

The interview shows how exactly the violence erupts within the football stadiums in Tunisia specifically in high tension matches in the stadium of Rades and according to goal.com:" There are two main scenarios. The first scenario is fans light up flares and throw them onto the pitch, aiming them at police officers. In response, the cops come barging in towards us.

"The second scenario is Ultra groups fighting between themselves. These fights start outside the stadium and end up in the stands. The cops then intervene with tear gas to break up the fighting.

"The fans used to break chairs and use them as weapons to throw at cops, but now with no more chairs left, the fans are squeezed out of the stadium and into the parking lot through narrow gates.

"All the while, the beatings continue, with police using batons. It ends with five or six people being chased by dogs and motorcycles, and arrested." (Khmira, 2018).

This scenario resembles a war, not a football match, this testimony proves that football matches are turning into war zones that are not safe for families to attend especially in matches such as derbies.

The death of young Omar, has caused many questions to be asked due to the unknown circumstances of his death and due to the lack of information provided, the main assumption is that the police is directly related to his death and a movement has started in Tunisia with the hashtag "taalem 3oum" which translates to "learn how to swim". (Khmira, 2018).

Fans have shown outrage after a testimony from an eye witness has told the story of Omar's

mysterious death and has directly blamed the police for his death by saying that Omar was part of a group of supporters who were running away from police forces but were countered against a canal and when Omar said that he cannot swim, a policeman gave him no choice but to either receive a beating from them or to jump in the canal and unfortunately, Omar could not swim and eventually drowned. (Khmira, 2018).

The autopsy has shown that Omar has drowned in the canal near the Rades stadium and the only logical explanation according to fans is that the police have watched him drown rather than helping him which made the fans even more violent towards the Tunisian police force after this unfortunate event. (Khmira, 2018).

Tunisian supporters have for once shown support between each other and have even shown signs of unity after this event and according to goal.com:” Thousands of fans, from different clubs, attended Omar’s funeral in a stirring show of solidarity. They demanded justice and for the truth to be revealed, as well as an end to the excessive use of force by police officers during football matches.

Clubs are also joining in the ‘fight for justice’, with Tunisian giants Club Africain piling on the pressure politically and providing financial and legal support to the deceased’s family.” (Khmira, 2018).

The unfortunate death of this football fan is the consequence of the instability in the Tunisian stadiums and actions should be taken against this growing issue in Tunisia, though the Tunisian federation has issued fines such as not allowing fans to attend matches but the solution is not permanent because as soon as the club finishes its penalty, the violence returns immediately.

One of the ways that Tunisia could provide safety in stadiums is for starters making sure that only above the age of 21 should be allowed to enter the stadium, I believe that those above the required age are mature enough not to fight between each other in a stadium and are especially aware that the consequences of their actions could affect their beloved football team negatively.

As a conclusion, I believe that Tunisia will once again find its stadiums clean and free from violence in the near future, the current government is finding way to eradicate this violence and this through implementing new monitoring technology in order to identify these bandits and hooligans who are causing terror in the stands of Rades Stadium and also having new anti-riot material to better counter the high number of supporters who are showing violence against the police force.

Football players of Tunisian football clubs have also launched a massive campaign to stop the violence in the stadiums by talking to football fans and explaining to them that their fighting