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Book Review: Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave. By Tamir Sorek. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007. pp. 240. \$85.00 (cloth).

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Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave. By Tamir Sorek. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007. pp. 240. \$85.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0521870488.

Academic work on soccer has been on the rise and now covers an extensive range of topics from commercialization to nationalism. While this growing field has explored many interesting themes, much of the focus has been on the more developed leagues across Western Europe. Tamir Sorek's *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave* offers compelling insights on the less well known, but no less passionate, Israeli soccer league by looking specifically at the fandom of the minority population of Israeli Arabs of Palestinian descent. Sorek's argument, as the title suggests, is that supporting a team in the Israeli soccer league has the potential to create a space that promotes Israeli Arab integration into mainstream Israeli society. This space is referred to as the integrative enclave, 'a social sphere that is ruled by a liberal-integrative discourse of citizenship – in sharp contrast to the ethnic discourse that governs the Israeli public sphere in general' (p. 2). This enclave is not free of political meaning, and Sorek suggests that soccer is

becoming an increasingly disputed terrain with many social agents competing to either politicize or de-politicize the sporting sphere. What makes the case of Israeli Arabs' relationship to soccer so interesting is the role of the stadium as a type of liminal national space, in which they are able to express an identity that is neither explicitly Palestinian nor Israeli nationalist.

Despite what the title may suggest, it would be a great disservice to the book to present it as relevant uniquely to those interested in sports. Sorek's book also has a bearing on the wider Israeli-Arab conflict and is worthy of consideration by those interested in ethnic conflict, nationalist discourse and studies of nationalism. Indeed, Sorek's wide-ranging theoretical and methodological approach underlines the book's greater relevance. Sorek draws on theoretical frameworks from sociology to anthropology and history, and uses a diverse range of research methods including interviews, media discourse analysis and participant observation. Ambitious to be sure, but a failure to undertake such diverse research that draws on historical documents and extensive first-hand research would be insufficient to deal with the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This far-reaching approach contributes to the overall quality of the book's argument and makes it a valuable contribution to the study of national identity and sport.

The first two chapters are dedicated to establishing the historical context of soccer in Palestine (later Israel). Imported by the British colonizers, soccer represented a contested terrain from the beginning. On the one hand, it was used to co-opt local elites and transmit British-Christian values. On the other hand, it was the singular space where all nationalities could mix. Sport did come to figure prominently in some of the early Palestinian nationalist discourse around the idea that strong physical bodies reflected an equally strong nationalist body. Sorek ties the growing popularity of soccer to the proletarianization of the Palestinian population after the 1948 (and beyond) land seizures. With the expansion of the population's leisure time as a result of the move from agrarian to wage labour, there was a need to a) occupy the populace and b) rehabilitate the damage done to the population's sense of masculinity through the land seizures.

The book moves to a more contemporary setting in the third chapter, where the author discusses the role of Arab municipalities in supporting the development of sports, primarily soccer teams. Municipalities are responsible for the majority of a team's funding. In interviews conducted by Sorek with Arab mayors, it is clear that soccer serves three main purposes in the community. One, it helps to discipline the youth population; two, it fills a temporal vacuum that the youth might otherwise fill with less industrious practices; and three, it provides a dual integration into both the Palestinian village and the Israeli state.

Chapters Five, Six and Eight exhibit Sorek's most interesting arguments. One of the book's major strengths is inclusion of extensive fieldwork, especially interviews with fans that bring Sorek's argument to life as they reflect on the ways in which soccer actually fits into the lives of the Arab-Israeli minority. Particularly in Chapter Six, when Sorek discusses the Arab fans of Maccabi Haifa (a Jewish team), his argument about the integrative space that soccer might provide is fully elucidated. Particularly fascinating are the strategies that supporters employ in order to avoid embracing Israeli nationalist symbols,

for example changing the lyrics to Israel's national anthem, *ha-Tikva*, when it is sung before cup matches. Sorek writes, 'Support for a team opens a door for the Arab citizen to be loyal to a flag without being perceived as a traitor or extremist by one side or the other, and enables the supporters to do so without perceiving themselves as people who respect Zionist symbols.' (p. 109) These same resistive strategies apply to dealing with Arab support for the Israeli national team and on this front, Sorek expands his analysis to Palestinian newspaper coverage. The first Arab player appeared in the Israeli national team in 1976 and subsequently there have been several more Palestinians players to don an Israeli jersey. The ways in which the Arab players on the team are de-politicized is fascinating and complex, and comments made by both players and supporters stress a distance from the Palestinian nationalist movement. While the Arab press is supportive of Palestinian players on the national team, there is an effort to stress that they are 'guests' and not fully integrated in the team (p. 92). Soccer exists as a place where issues of identity and citizenship play out, but not along the traditional political fault lines.

One small criticism would be that Sorek did not further push his analysis of the gendered aspect of the sport and its fandom. While he does pay attention to the ways in which soccer support is tied to an attempt by Palestinians to reconstitute masculinity that was damaged by the establishment of Israel and subsequent policies, he does not fully examine where women fit into this discourse. He mentions the way in which women are discouraged from attending matches and that very few women frequent the stadium. While he does touch on the success Arab female athletes have had, including their presence on the Israeli national women's soccer team, he fails to examine in a substantial manner the consequence of excluding female bodies from the soccer enclave. If soccer is to present a space for defining a new kind of in-between national identity (a claim that he makes quite convincingly) then more attention needs to be paid to the absence of women from this space. What does it mean for the viability of this 'new' identity if half the population is excluded from participation? Indeed, Sorek also missed an opportunity to interview the minority of women who defy the unspoken sport gender rules by supporting their team anyway; here, he could have explored how gender fits into these women's decision to support their team as well as the game more generally. Do they face a stigma both inside and outside the stadium? What are the reactions of other women to their interest in an otherwise male-dominated sphere? While all these questions may have pushed the book too far away from the author's intended argument (indeed, it might present an interesting new project), a little more attention to where women fit or do not fit into this space would have been worthwhile.

One of the many strengths of this book is the opportunity that it creates for further study of soccer as a potentially integrative enclave. For example, future research could consider interrogating the other side of the equation. What are the reactions of Jewish fans to the presence of Arab ones in Israel? Does being able to share the stadium with the Arab minority open up an interesting or different national space for Israelis themselves? Can this space also present an interesting opportunity for Middle-Eastern Jews who feel both Arab and Jewish-Israeli at the same time? In addition, Sorek touches on the presence of Jewish players on Arab lower league teams, arguing that press coverage to this phenomenon is

negative because, 'bringing in Jewish players constitutes *a violation of imagined kinship rules* that affects society's borders' (p. 87, italics in the original). This might also be an interesting point of departure to study Arab attitudes toward Jewish players.

One of Sorek's main conclusions is that Arab soccer fans see their support as an entry into and a space for demanding equal rights as citizens of the Israeli state. While perhaps not the note that Sorek intended to end his book on, one is left with a conflicting feeling. Soccer clearly does matter. It is shaped by and reflects the historical, socio-economic and cultural values and experiences of its fans. It touches people's lives in a way that more traditional politics may not and thus becomes a vehicle for their very real and basic demands for rights and recognition. That these demands have not manifested themselves in displays more closely aligned to the Palestinian nationalist movement is interesting, which suggests that Arab-Israelis are perhaps looking for ways of defining their collective identity on their own terms. This opens up intriguing possibilities for understanding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unfortunately as much as soccer matters, the structure of the state does as well. Until the state changes, there is a sense that the integration that soccer might promise the Palestinian population will continue to remain an enclave rather than a viable political movement.

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