

Arab football in Israel as an 'integrative enclave'

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, football (soccer) has become a major institution within the popular culture of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel. The centrality of football has given different identity agents opportunities to impose different meanings on the sport, depending on the agents' definitions of collective identity. This article utilizes ethnographic observation in the football stadium and coverage by Arab and Hebrew sports media to illustrate and analyse this battle over meaning. The Hebrew sports media, the Arab sports press, and the Arab audience are three different agents that attach divergent meanings to the notable presence of Arab players in the Israeli football leagues. The article argues that the overlapping interests of the Hebrew sports media on the one hand and the Arab football fans, players, and bureaucrats on the other lead to the construction of the football sphere as an integrative enclave in the general Israeli public sphere. The article considers the relevance of Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explain the production of the integrative meaning of football, and it suggests integrating this explanation with other recent theories regarding the tensions between different discourses of citizenship.

Keywords: Nationalism; citizenship; minorities; sports; Israel; Palestinians.

Introduction

The Maccabi Kafr-Kana football team is one of the several hundred Arab football clubs that take part in the Israeli Football Association. At the end of the 1995–1996 season, after climbing to the second division, the team went on a trip to Jordan. The tour's highlight was supposed to be a game against the al-Wahdat football team, which represents the Palestinian refugee camp near Amman and bears its name. In Jordan, al-Wahdat is identified with Palestinian nationalism and the Palestinian struggle (Tuastad 1997), and this particular sportive encounter was intended to emphasize the shared identity of Palestinians from both

banks of the Jordan River. A few minutes before the scheduled beginning of the game, al-Wahdat's managers appealed to Kafr-Kana's manager and sponsor, Faysal Khatib, with an irregular request in the world of sports: to exclude his three Jewish players from the match,¹ or at least to ensure that no Hebrew would be used during the game.

Khatib rejected this request firmly, arguing that in his view his team includes only football players, and he never distinguishes between Arabs and Jews. In addition, he pointed out that the Jewish players on the team do not speak Arabic, and they would therefore communicate with the coach in Hebrew. In the end, after a long debate and a delay of several days, the game took place as a mini football match in a closed hall and without a crowd. In that game, Maccabi Kafr-Kana beat the famous Palestinian team 3: 2. Three different players who did not speak or understand Arabic scored the goals for Kafr-Kana....

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This incident illustrates the well-known complexity in the collective identity of the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. The Palestinians in Israel are a 'trapped minority': a minority that lives as formal citizens (although alienated from political power) of a nation-state hegemonized by others, while the majority of its mother nation exists outside of the country (Rabinowitz 2001). While their marginal political position constitutes a challenge to the conventional discourse of the nation-state, the Palestinians in Israel also have been compelled to produce creative solutions to the discrepancies between this demanding discourse and social reality.

The participation of Arabs from Israel in the sportive encounter in Jordan stemmed from a sense of the shared identity of Kafr-Kana residents and the Palestinian refugees in al-Wahdat, some of them originally from Kafr-Kana itself. However, the encounters that were enabled following the Oslo accords have taught both sides that long-term socio-political processes have shaped divergent definitions of collective identities.

The Kafr-Kana-al-Wahdat incident does not indicate that the 'Israeli-fication process' (Smooha 1999), or the assimilation into the Jewish Israeli majority, has become a realistic or desirable option for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Nor does it imply that they are alienated from their identity as Palestinians. Instead, I interpret it as an expression of the paradoxical role that football plays for the Arabs in Israel: a kind of 'integrative enclave' – a social sphere that is ruled by a liberal-integrative discourse of citizenship – in sharp contrast to the ethnic discourse that rules the Israeli general public sphere. Furthermore, in spite of the declarative integration, the football sphere is not realistically a social force that can change the inferior status of the Arab minority in Israel.

The dominance of the integrative meaning of football can be seen as a

sum of several interpretative vectors, implemented by different social agents with contradictory interests. Football is, undoubtedly, the most popular sport in Israel, among both Jews and Arabs. As a popular sport it has significant potential to produce interpretations, and therefore it may generate available political resources (Allison 1986). Sport by itself, however, does not inherently possess any value system; rather, it is a flexible tool with the potential to express different ideas and agendas (Hoberman 1984). Therefore, it is not surprising that this sphere has become an important field for negotiating the complicated civic status of the Palestinians in Israel.

In this article I shall first locate the particular case of Arab football in Israel in its context among other instances of ethnic empowerment in sports. Then, I will use ethnographic observations and the Arabic and Hebrew media coverage of football to illustrate and analyse this battle over the meanings of Arab identity and citizenship.

As a general tendency, the Hebrew sports media consistently favours an integrative approach in its coverage of Arab football. The Arab sports press, on the other hand, prefers to use football to promote Arab-Palestinian national pride. It therefore emphasizes the conflicting nature of the sportive encounters. However – and this is the most significant finding in this article – the popular perception of football among Arab football fans, players, and bureaucrats tends to be compatible with that of the Hebrew media rather than that of the Arab media. Namely, the Arab audience tends to adopt the integrative image of football.

Finally, I will suggest a possible explanation for this seemingly paradoxical finding, using a combination of Gramscian perspective and relevant theories about citizenship in multi-ethnic societies. My study relies on the typology of different discourses of citizenship suggested by Peled (1992): liberal, republican and ethno-national. The creation of the integrative enclave, I argue, results from the ambivalence of the Jewish majority towards the liberal discourse, and at the same time from the need of the Arab minority to relieve the tension created by the contradictory expectations stemming from their identities as Palestinians by nationality and Israelis by citizenship.

The dialectic nature of Arab presence in Israeli football

The Arab-Palestinian independent sports infrastructure collapsed after the 1948 war along with the flight of urban elites who generated the infrastructure and maintained it during the 1940s (Sorek 2000). The development of Arab football since the 1950s has been closely related to the deliberate endeavours of Israeli authorities to channel the energy of young Arabs into a sphere that is considered both apolitical and under inspection (Sorek 2003). But while state-supervised Palestinian sports teams were encouraged by Israeli authorities, the independent Arab

teams and tournaments, self-regulated by Arab athletes, faced hostile treatment by the military government, which feared that these clubs would serve as an organizational infrastructure for insidious initiatives (Jiryis 1969, pp. 138–139; Lustick 1980, p. 128). Arab football players had no option but to join the general Israeli Football Association [IFA].

Still, the integration of Arab athletes into the Israeli sports institutions was limited until the late 1970s, mainly due to *de facto* segregation in most spheres of life between Arabs and Jews. The limited readiness of the Jewish majority to integrate Arab athletes into the various sports field was a result of top-down policy driven by instrumentalist considerations, and was not translated into a policy of large-scale inclusion.

However, the relative liberalization of Israeli society after 1967, accompanied by steady economic growth, had considerable implications for Israeli football. Since the early 1980s, the meanings of football in Israeli society have gradually changed: instead of ranging between entertainment and politics, football increasingly has been seen as a type of commodity (Ben-Porat 1998). This development has immersed football in ethnic-blind discourses, such as professionalism and achievement, which have been used so effectively by the Arab citizens to penetrate into the Israeli public sphere.

Thus, in a relatively short period, football has become a major institution in the public culture of Palestinian men in Israel. This centrality has several quantitative indicators.

First, the popularity of football in the Arab public developed during the 1980s and dramatically accelerated during the 1990s. The current over-representation of Arab teams in Israeli Football Association is striking. While the Arabs in Israel make up only 19 per cent of the population, in the 1997–1998 season 42 per cent of the senior clubs in the IFA represented Arab villages or cities, or Arab neighbourhoods in the mixed cities. With the exception of one case, every Arab town or village with a population of over 5,000 has at least one football team registered in the IFA.

Second, the success of Arab teams is disproportionate to the sizes of the Arab villages and towns. In Israeli football there is a strong correlation between the size of the team's hometown and its probability of being represented in the higher divisions. The Arab teams consistently defy this rule. To bring this point home, the median number of residents of settlements that were represented in the second division in the 1997–1998 season was about 50,000.² In contrast, the three Arab teams which played in the second division that same year represented settlements whose number of residents ranged between 15,000 and 25,000. In the third division, the general median number was about 29,000,³ while the median number of residents of the ten Arab settlements represented in this division was about 13,000.

Third, Arab teams sell significantly higher numbers of tickets for their

games compared to Jewish teams with a similar hometown population.⁴ Fourth, the television rating of football programmes among the Arabs is much higher: among the first twenty most popular programmes watched by Arabs in Israel between January and November 2001, fifteen were football programmes (compared to only 4 programmes among Jewish spectators).⁵ Furthermore, Arab local authorities tend to be significantly more generous with their financial support to football clubs. Considering the size of their budget, the financial support of Arab local authorities to sports clubs in general is 67 per cent higher than Jewish local authorities' support, and the support for football clubs is 140 per cent higher.⁶

Football, therefore, constitutes a unique sub-sphere of Israeli public life where the Arab citizens are highly involved and achieve remarkable heights compared to other realms. Arabs in Israel suffer from inferiority in the political and economic spheres, in the level of education, and in practically every realm where they have to compete against Jewish citizens (Dichter 2000; Dichter 2001). The uniqueness and the duality of the inclusive strategy of football are well expressed in the public discourse on the involvement of Arab teams and players in the Israeli leagues.

The potential power of the football game to produce symbols and denotations has made it a battleground of meaning: different social agents try to articulate various meanings based on their ideology or their immediate interests. These meanings reflect different definitions of collective identities for the Arabs in Israel. Hence, the football game in Israel is played on two different levels: the first level is on the field, where professional excellence is needed for winning. The second level is the large public sphere, in which the power relations between various agents of identity are expressed in the battle over consciousness. The main axe of this battle is the above-mentioned subtle dialectic – an opportunity for integration into Israeli society and acceptance by the Jewish majority versus a stage for promoting national pride. These aspirations are not totally contradictory and can even be complementary (Smootha 1999). Nevertheless, their simultaneous appearance entails an inherent tension (Bishara 1999).

This tension is related to a wider dualism that characterizes the empowerment of ethnic minorities in sports. One can distinguish between three ideal types of institutional strategies that promote distinct definitions of collective identity through sports. The first is the *cultural distinction strategy*. In this mode, the group develops or adopts a particular sports field that is presented inwardly and outwardly as an expression of the distinct ethnic or national character. The second strategy is *structural separation*. By establishing separate institutions for global sports fields, minorities emphasize their independence and uniqueness. The third strategy will be termed *intensive inclusion*. It is the most common strategy taken by ethnic minorities: intensive involvement as individuals and as teams in the most popular sports of the majority,

sometimes achieving notable over-representation in certain fields. The third mode of involvement is the one taken by the Arab citizens of Israel in the football sphere,⁷ and it should therefore be the focus of our discussion. Inherent in the intensive inclusion strategy is the dual nature of ethnic minorities' empowerment.

On the one hand, ethnic empowerment always has its subversive aspect, which is identified with separatist tendencies or aspiration to construct isolated social enclaves. On the other hand, when this empowerment is achieved within the framework of a state-oriented institution, it reaffirms the legitimacy of the majority domination and represents integrative tendencies. These complicated relations are exemplified by Werbner (1996) in the context of the Pakistani minority in Britain, and by Wiggins (1994) and Hartmann (2000), in the context of the African-American minority in the United States.

This dualism is common in the football world. The success of national minorities in football often turns the sports arena into a central location for the expression of nationalist feelings. For example, the Celtic football team in Glasgow represents the Irish-Catholic minority in the city (Boyle 1994), and the Athletic Bilbao team represents the Basque minority in Spain (MacClancy 1996). The Barcelona football team represents Spain's Catalanian region (Allison 1986), and al-Wahdat – the Palestinian team in Jordan – gives its fans an opportunity to vocalize their identity as a national minority (Tuastad 1997).

At the same time, supporting a football team with a clear ethnic identity may constitute an opportunity for collective integration into the majority's society, especially when the minority faces serious difficulties adopting the common symbols of the majority. For example, for some of the Catholic working-class fans of the Celtic team in Glasgow, fandom is not only an expression of their ethnic identity but also a collective integrationist channel into Scottish society. Except for football, these fans consider all other symbols and institutions of the majority as Presbyterian (see Gallagher 1987; Finn 1991).

Methodology

The findings that will be presented and analysed hereafter are a product of comprehensive fieldwork in the football stadium and follow-up on the Arab and Hebrew sports media between April 1998 and October 2000. This material collecting included:

1. Scanning of all the articles regarding Arab sports in the sports sections of the three main Hebrew daily newspapers: *Yedi'ot Akharonot*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Ma'ariv*. During the same period I also followed the coverage of Arab sports in the electronic media in both languages.

2. Systematic reading of all the sports sections in the main Arabic newspapers in Israel: One daily newspaper, *Al-Itihad*, one bi-weekly, *A-Sinara*, and two weekly newspapers: *Kul el-Arab* and *Fasl el-Maqal*. In addition, I interviewed all four editors of the sports sections of these newspapers, as well as four additional sports journalists.
3. Observations of twenty-one games in the Israeli second division, seventeen of them Arab-Jewish games and four of them Arab-Arab games. My impressions are also based on informal conversations with Arab football fans during and after the games.

The battle over meaning

This section of the article will illustrate the diverse meanings attached to the involvement of the Arab citizens in the football sphere, focusing on the battle over the dominant meaning – a stage for the expression of nationalist feelings or an opportunity for integration. Using the research described above, I shall analyse the construction of meanings in the football sphere by three major agents: Hebrew sports media, Arab sports media, and Arab football officials and fans. The Hebrew media use Arab success in football to portray Israel as a liberal and impartial society that ignores the ethnic/national identity of the players. This message is reflected both towards the Jewish audience as a self-flattering practice and towards the Arab audience as evidence for a possible shared citizenship. I shall then illustrate how the Arab sports journalists try to promote Arab-Palestinian national pride through their interpretation of Arab success in football. Finally, I will analyse the actual practices of Arab football officials and fans. These practices, I argue, are oriented mainly to construct the football sphere as a space of integration and liberalism.

The state and the Hebrew media: football as an integrative sphere

As I have already mentioned, during the first decades after the birth of the state of Israel, football was used as a political tool by the state for controlling a ‘subversive’ national minority. However, the more Arab football players have integrated into Israeli football, the more dilemmas of identity and loyalty have become a focus of public debate. Since the late 1970s, the most symbolically significant phenomenon concerning Arab football in Israel has been the noticeable presence of Arab players on the Israeli national team.

By representing the state of Israel, Arab athletes Rif’at Turk (played in 34 international games between 1976 and 1986) and Zahi Armeli (capped 28 times between 1982 and 1986) were the first to symbolize on the field the tensions and contradictions inherent in being an Arab citizen in the Jewish state.⁸ The presence of Armeli and Turk on the

national team presented Jewish and Arab football fans alike with fundamental questions as to what they shared in common, as well as what separated them. Ultimately, Armeli and Turk's representation of the state of Israel raised few objections from the Arab population. Furthermore, Shlomo Kirat, an Israeli international defender, was dismissed in 1983 following racist comments he made about Armeli and Turk, clarifying the fact that the Israeli national football team played an inclusive, and not exclusionary, role with regard to the state's Arab citizens. Turk and Armeli, as well as other Arab stars who played in the top teams of Israel's senior league, were role models for many young Arabs, who saw in football a path for upward mobility and a way to escape the marginality of being Arab citizens in a Jewish state.

The centrality of football in the relationship between the Arab-Palestinian minority and the Jewish state received notable attention during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the state in 1998. The Israeli Broadcast Authorities produced a special television series called *Tkuma* (redemption), exploring the history of Israel. The chapter about the Arab citizens opened with a black and white film of a football match, showing Rif'at Turk scoring a goal. Likewise, in the central exhibit of Israel's fiftieth anniversary, in the separate hall that was dedicated to 'the Arab of Israel', the most noticeable characters were the Arab football players.

The choice of the football sphere as a starting point for the discussion about Arabs in Israel – in addition to the choice of representing them in a national exhibit with their football players – is symbolic and reflects the Jewish majority's relative convenience of dealing with Arabs as athletes. In both cases, the ahistorical perception of the Arabs in Israel helps to dim the Palestinian dimension of their collective identity in the eyes of the Jewish majority. In addition, the success of individuals helps to avoid the inconvenience of discussing issues of inequality and discrimination.

Zuheir Bahlul, a leading Arab sports broadcaster, argued recently that for the Jewish majority the football sphere is a mechanism for 'consciousness cleaning',⁹ where Arab athletic success is waved as proof of the majority's assumed liberalism. A few years earlier, before Bahlul had begun to publicly express his political opinions, his name was mentioned as a candidate for being the first Arab ambassador in the Israeli Foreign Service. Bahlul had neither prior experience in diplomacy nor intimate familiarity with the target country (Finland). However, because he came from the sports sphere and was famous for his virtuosi sports descriptions in Hebrew, he was considered 'Israeli enough' to represent the state abroad.

In 1998, the year of the state's fiftieth anniversary, after a decade in which there were no Arab players in the national team,¹⁰ two players were called up: Najwan Grayeb, from Nazareth, and Walid Bdeir, from Kafr-Qassem. The familial biography of Bdeir immediately attracted the Hebrew media. Walid Bdeir's grandfather was murdered in the

Kafr-Kassem massacre in 1956 by Israeli troops.¹¹ After an excellent performance in an international match against Austria in October 1998, Bdeir was shown on Israeli television, wearing the national uniform, stating that he felt pride on hearing the Israeli national anthem. When asked about his grandfather, he answered: 'This matter belongs to the past; we don't speak about it at home'.

In this incident, the Hebrew media took advantage of Bdeir's professional aspirations (a permanent place in the national team exposes him to players' agents in Europe) and contributed to the integrative image of the football sphere. The most traumatic event for the Arab citizens of Israel since 1948 became 'something that we don't speak about', thanks to the excellence of the victim's grandson on the football field. Instead, by physically participating in a national symbol such as the national football team, the Arab citizens are expected to identify with the national anthem (which actually excludes them from the Israeli collective by its lyrics).

In October 2000, a few days after Israeli police killed thirteen Arab citizens during violent demonstrations, Bdeir went with the Israeli national team to an official international match in Spain, and became the focus of the Hebrew media. The mass daily *Ma'ariv*, quoted Bdeir in the title of a report about the preparations of the team in Spain: 'Badir:¹² I have a goal: to win the game for everyone'. In the report itself, journalist Ron Amikam quoted the national team's captain, Idan Tal:

For us, this day is like any other day. Walid is one of us, and he is not different from anyone else. In order to win the game, all the players should be united.

Then, the journalist added:

Badir, by the way, did not understand what the big deal was about. Yesterday he even asked cynically, 'What happened that you came up with all these questions today? You never ask this kind of question'.¹³

Bdeir's interactions with the Hebrew media are not an exception. Most Arab football stars do their best to blur their identity as Arabs and emphasize their identity as football players. This argument is explicitly expressed and illustrated in a report on eleven Arab players in the Israeli first division, published in the *Yediot Akhronot* sports section. Each of the players was asked about his main future aspiration; and seven out of eleven players answered that they wanted to make it to the national team. The journalists interpreted this response: 'While the Palestinian street sharpens his national identity and hones his opinion, the Arab football players go the opposite way and do their best to be integrated into an Israeli-cosmopolitan environment'.¹⁴

The sports journalists in the Hebrew media, most of the time very

conformist to the political and ideological orientations of the mainstream Jewish public, use the professional aspirations of the Arab players in order to produce the hidden message: after all, although we face some difficulties in Jewish-Arab relations, the Arabs in Israel can be 'normal citizens'.

To conclude, the public treatment of the state agents and the Hebrew media of Arab sports in Israel reflects self-satisfaction with the opportunity to demonstrate Israel as an equal-opportunity society. Actually, sports is almost the only public sphere in which Arab excellence is tolerated by the Jewish majority.¹⁵ In contrast to the political, judicial, or military spheres, the Arab presence in sports has not produced a reaction of fear and has not been seen as a threat to the 'Jewish character of Israel', and hence has not faced a selective membrane of formal and informal barriers.

The Arab sports press: the construction of Arab-Palestinian national pride

The attempts to construct Arab-Palestinian national identity is evident in the sports sections of the Arab press in Israel. In spite of style divergence between the various newspapers, the intentional and conscious attempt to develop a sense of Arab pride and identification around the Arab football clubs and players is noticeable. The rhetorical bricks of this construction include an explicit call for solidarity between Arab teams; an emphasis on the Arabness of the teams; and the use of warlike metaphors, including specific references to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Arab solidarity

Maher Awawde, editor of the *Kul al-Arab* sports section, has a regular column called 'Cocktail' in which he frequently calls for Arab solidarity.

It warms my heart when I see two Arab teams on the high peak of the table – Ha'poel Majd El-Kurum and Maccabi Tamra on the Everest summit. The meeting between these two reflects the Arab light in the fourth division.... [T]his is the peak of the good for us. The meeting between Ha'poel Majd El-Kurum and Maccabi Tamra is a meeting between brothers ...

From this journalistic platform I call upon the crowds of both teams to take clean air into their hearts, regardless of the results. First of all and after all we bear the same number (Mahmud Darwish still lives among us).¹⁶

The text includes several layers of construction. First, the high ranking of the two Arab teams (the first and the second place) constitute proof of an

'Arab quality', tested in the objective conditions of the football game – and hence endowed with a quasi-scientific seal. Secondly, the use of familial imagery – brothers – to describe the shared national identity contributes to the primordial and natural perception of this identity. Finally, the hint that Awawde is sending to his readers is clear even to those who have only a basic and superficial familiarity with Palestinian poetry. He refers to the famous poem of the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish, '*Raqam Hawia*' (Identity Card Number). The poem symbolizes the proud standing of the Arab person in the face of the Israeli state's attempt to undermine his identity. By recalling this poem in this context, Awawde attempts to take the Arab reader beyond the immediate context of the game and to make the question about the winner's identity in the sportive encounter irrelevant.

Beyond that, the call for an Arab fraternity in the football field has its background in the reality of the Israeli football leagues. The intermediate and low divisions are organized according to geographical region. As a result, from the fourth division downward, the Arab teams form a majority in some of the sub-divisions, and hence inter-Arab encounters are very common. In the lowest division, where the Arab teams constitute the total majority (54 per cent), the inter-Arab competitions form 38 per cent of the games. Even in the second and third leagues (which are not divided into geographical sub-divisions) there are several Arab teams, so inter-Arab games take place. As I mentioned earlier, the inter-Arab competitions tend to be tense and tumultuous compared to other games.

The nurturing of national pride around successful teams is easier than dealing with average achievements of the Arab teams. The sports section in *Fasl al-Maqal* (the weekly newspaper of the Democratic National Assembly party that emphasizes an Arab nationalist line and calls for more autonomy for Arabs in Israel) covers mainly the games in the second division. In the 1998–1999 season, it solved the problem of the dull achievements of Arab teams by referring to an imagined internal table between the Arab teams themselves, emphasizing the relative ranking of each Arab team compared to other Arab teams. The main title of the sports section frequently refers to the Arab team that is ranked highest, even if it is ranked eighth place in the general table. For example, the title 'The Second Division is Kanawia' means that among Arab teams in the second division, Kafr-Kana is ranked first place. The creation of this internal table constitutes an imagined autonomous space in which an independent Arab division is acting outside the auspices of the Jewish majority. In times when athletic achievements are scanty, this discursive strategy may be an option for those who seek to nurture Arab national pride.

Sometimes the Arab newspapers even call for mutual assistance among brother teams. At the beginning of the 1998–1999 season, Ha'poel

Taybeh (an Arab team) was beaten by Nes-Tsiona (a Jewish team) 1: 5. A week later, Sakhnin (an Arab team) beat Nes-Tsiona with the same score. The main title in the sports section of *Kul al-Arab* associated the two games: 'Support Your Brother, Either as an Oppressor or as the Oppressed!' Then it reminded the reader about the Taybeh defeat and added: 'Sakhnin thought and responded – for your eyes Taybeh!'¹⁷

Another example of this construction of solidarity is shown in *Fasl al-Maqal*. Following the 'Arab Derby' on the second division between Sakhnin and Nazareth (Sakhnin won 3: 0), the editor, Walid Ayub, summarized the game by writing: 'Indeed, these points are Arab – Sakhninian, Nazarethian, Shfa-Amrian, and Tibawian – even though the victory was Sakhninian'. Namely, the points stayed at home and Sakhnin's victory is the victory of all the Arabs. Sakhnin gained particular sympathy from Arab sports journalists, partly as a result of the exceptional unification between the two old local teams in the city, Hapo'el and Maccabi. The magic word 'unification' awakens dreams about Pan-Arab unification and concrete ambitions for unifying the efforts of the Arab minority in Israel at the state level. Another attempt at unification (which has ultimately been dissolved) in Kafr-Kana, excites Walid Ayub:

From this stage I call upon all sports zealots to put their hands together with Faysal and Youssef [the first names of the Maccabi and Ha'poel Kafr-Kana managers – T.S.] so that they will give us a Kanawian Arab team that will glorify Kafr-Kana. We say it concerning Kafr-Kana, and we all hope that the brothers will hear our voice and comply with our call. May they be a model that will be adopted in other Arab places, such as Nazareth, Taybeh, Um-El-Fahm, Shafa-Amr ... and more.¹⁸

A year later, when unification was almost realized with the support of Wasel Tah, the head of the Kafr-Kana local authority, Maher Awawde (*Kul al-Arab*) wrote:

And in order to open a new page everyone has to cover the past and its pains. The head of the local authority will be an ideal model for everyone, in spite of the future losses, and will be a breakthrough to Kanawian unity first and Arab second, as the one who paved the way to the noble unity (I hope the Arab members of parliament and Arab parties will learn this).

Awawde, whose Pan-Arabic ideas are frequently echoed in his writing, wishes to 'cover the past', when the Arabs were divided and quarrelled. He hopes that the unification in Kafr-Kana will be like a stone thrown into the water creating expanding circles of unity by a ripple effect, from

the local unity in Kafr-Kana to Arab unity, and from the sports sphere to the political domain.

The Arabness of the clubs

Almost any Arab team playing in the fifth division upward (Israeli football is currently organized into six divisions) includes Jewish players who strengthen the team. The high frequency of this phenomenon perturbs many Arab sports journalists, who repeatedly call on the clubs' managers to base their cadres on local players. *Fasl el-Maqal* even called upon the Arab teams to include only Arab players, arguing that their failures stem from their giving up on their Arabness, and referred their successes to their being based mainly on Arab players and coaches:

There are many reasons for Taybeh's location at the table's bottom and many reasons for its decline from the highest division. One of them (although not the most important) is the abundance of foreign strengthening players that has caused the loss of its Arabness and its particular character that distinguished it among the Arab audience that accompanied the team.¹⁹

Awawde's column in *Kul al-Arab* also takes a very firm position concerning the Jewish players:

Our Arab teams and their boards are always participating in the marathon race after the outside players, and the money is flowing [to the outside players] in times of unemployment and deficit in the municipalities and the local councils... Personally, I feel senses of failure and embitterment when I enter our Arabic stadiums and the Hebrew language is increasingly heard and when I look upon the players, searching – maybe I will find our children. However, we are a minority – like in the parliament.

The dominance of the Hebrew language in the audience's cries and in the instructions for the players annoys Awawde. He sees the football sphere as an opportunity for the strengthening of Arab national pride through supporting teams with a clear national identity. However, his frustration is twofold. First, contrary to his previous expectations and hopes, the football sphere reproduces the power relations between Arabs and Jews that prevails outside of it, and the chance provided by football to eliminate it is balked. Secondly, it is a 'self goal' – the Arabs themselves perpetuate their inferiority by preferring to invest money in Jewish players.

The Arab-Israeli conflict in the Arab sports press

The comparison of the football field to a battlefield is a common rhetorical tool used by sports journalists everywhere. However, although the Arab sports press in Israel reports on many Arab-Arab games, the warlike images appear only when it describes a game between Arab and Jewish teams. Very often the journalists interweave the plays of the game and concrete historical contexts relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, before an important game of Sakhnin against Hapo'el Be'er Sheva (a Jewish team representing this southern Israeli city), Awawde wrote:

The Sakhninian Commando unit and its weapon (and I hope it is modern) are going out to Be'er-Sheva. The line they have to cross is the Negev's Bar-Lev Line. The Egyptians succeeded and Ittihad Abna Sakhnin likes tradition. Tomorrow is the moment of truth. Will it be a fake or a cruise toward the target?²⁰

In Arabic, the last sentence contains a rhyme, a-tazyif or a-tagzif, the cruise hints at the crossing of the Suez Canal by Egyptian soldiers during the first hours of the 1973 war. In a few hours the fortification line that had been built by the Israeli Army, named after the IDF head of general staff Haim Bar-Lev, was collapsed. Awawde's mention of the Suez crossing and Bar-Lev line are not lapses. They genuinely represent the newspaper's consistent attempts to construct Arab national pride around the Arab football teams through cognitive associations with Palestinian and Arab national myths. An Arab-Jewish competition taking place in the south of the country is associated with the Egyptian-Israeli battles of the 1973 war, and Sakhnin's players are requested to keep the tradition going and defeat the Jews (ignoring temporarily the presence of several Jewish players on the Sakhnin team).

The Lebanese-Israeli frontier is also used to assist in the pride-construction project. In March 2000, it was already quite clear that the Israeli Defense Forces were soon going to withdraw from Lebanon. At the beginning of that month, the Nazareth team hosted Hapo'el Be'er Sheva. Nazareth led the game 2: 1 but in the ninetieth minute, a Be'er Sheva player scored a goal with his hand. The Jewish referee, Arik Haymovich at first confirmed the goal, and faced a shower of fruits and bottles thrown by the infuriated audience. After a minute the line referee reported to the main referee that, from his angle, he saw clearly that the goal was scored by hand, which caused Haymovich to cancel the goal. Awawde links the events of this game to the fights between the IDF and the Shiite Lebanese guerilla militia, Hizballah. The material thrown at the referee is likened to the Katyusha missiles Hizballah launched over the Israeli border city, Kiryat-Shmona:

Arik Haymovich remembered Kiryat-Shmona and its missiles and asked for a real peace process. The borders of the Nazareth team refused the agreement that he wrote and took back their legal rights, which are recognized by the [Israeli Football] Association and by the refereeing rules. Nazareth fans have drawn the map of the rights.

Further, Awawde said of Be'er Sheva players and the team's manager, Eli Jino:

Jino thought that he is the Maginot line in the Association, and Hapo'el Be'er Sheva players wanted to rob the legitimate and real rights.²¹

In this text, Nazareth fans are compared to Hizballah warriors and Be'er Sheva players are the state's representatives who surrender only after being hit by missiles.

The warlike metaphors are also used to describe the players' characteristics. For example, an article from *al-Ittihad* states: 'Sakhnin can be proud of several Arab players who became stars. The team continues this tradition today and offers the Arab audience the human tank, Wissam Ismi, and the fida'yi, the son of Arab, Abed Rabah'. The fida'yi (literally, the one who sacrifices himself) is an image taken from the modern Palestinian national mythology. The image of the fida'yi – adorned with a kafiah, holding a Klachnikov gun, and ready to sacrifice himself in the battle against Zionism – has symbolized the Palestinian armed struggle since the mid-1960s (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993). The choice to use warlike symbols to describe the Arab players is especially deliberate because of the noticeable presence of Jewish players on the Arab teams. These players are presented as mere appendages to the real fighting power, the Arab players.

The Arab bleachers: constructing the 'enclave of normal citizenship'

Ben-Porat (2001) emphasizes the dependency of the Arab football fan's identity on the behaviour of the Jewish audience. Being a part of the majority, the Jewish fans have the power to define the Arab audience members as 'Arabs' or, alternatively, as 'ordinary football fans'. Although this observation is not untrue, it underestimates the role of Arab football fans as active agents who construct social reality. In this section I shall illustrate how, in contrast to the accentuation of the Arab-Jewish conflict by Arab sports journalists, the Arab audience on the bleachers, as well as the Arab players and coaches, make noticeable efforts to abate national tension, to promote the liberal discourse of citizenship, and to mark the football bleachers as an integrative territory.

These efforts are expressed in diverse modes, including an extensive

use of Hebrew, an ungrudging attitude towards the Jewish players, the exclusion of Palestinian identity symbols, selective and cautious reactions to provocations launched by the Jewish audience, and extra enthusiasm in demonstrating hospitality to visiting Jewish teams. In this article, I will refer to the first three modes, each one of them representing one aspect of the integrative aspiration. The use of Hebrew blurs ethnic distinctions by adopting the language of the 'other'. The sympathy towards Jewish players locates the Arab fans in a relatively comfortable position from which they seek integration not only on the basis of being included but also as having the power to actively include others. Finally, the interaction is defined not only by what *there is*, but also by what *there is not*. In this context, the Palestinian national identity of the Arab fans, which might undermine the conditioned acceptance of Arabs as normal citizens, is suspended and excluded from the bleachers.

The extensive use of Hebrew

Most of the Arabs in Israel are bilingual, speaking both Arabic and Hebrew. Arabic is the spoken language in most Arab homes and in Arab schools. Hebrew is used for daily interactions with Jews and with most of the state's institutions. In addition, Arab citizens are consumers of the Hebrew media as a main source of information and entertainment. Many Hebrew words have also been integrated into the day-to-day language of the Arabs in Israel.

The level of Arabic use may be seen as an indicator of the speaker's frequency of interactions with Jews (Amara and Kabaha 1996). Although the adoption of Hebrew by Palestinian citizens undoubtedly stems from the power relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel, Arab citizens should not be conceived as merely passive actors in their linguistic behaviour. Their bilingualism enables them to manoeuvre between different social spheres; and to construct the character of these spheres. More specifically, the relative use of Arabic or Hebrew in a certain social interaction draws attention to the level of the integrationist orientation of the interaction.

For the Arabs in Israel, as a national minority among a majority of non-Arabic speakers, the Arabic language has become central to their Palestinian national identity (Suleiman and Beit-Hallahmi 1997). Meanwhile, Hebrew, which was first acquired in order to survive, has become a signifier; whenever the Arabs in Israel want to colour an interaction as integrative, they use Hebrew. For example, Arab Knesset members use Arabic in their addresses to the Knesset assembly only when they want to demonstrate extreme protest. By doing this, they remind the Israeli establishment of their separatist aspirations, culturally or even politically. On the other hand, the choice of an author such as Anton Shammas to write in Hebrew is compatible with his desire, at least in the past, to be

recognized as an Israeli. The extensive use of Hebrew in the football field should be interpreted in this context.

The songs, cheers, and curses heard in football stadiums are largely taken from the verbal repertoire of Israeli football supporters as a whole, and lack any national-based uniqueness. For example, the fans of Ittihad Abnaa' Sakhnin, the most successful Arab club at the end of the 1990s, cry: 'yalla, yalla Sakhnin, ha-rishon ba-derekh'.²² The fans of Maccabi Kafr-Kana shout 'Maccabi, Maccabi!', imitating the intonation of the Maccabi team's Jewish fans. Fans of both teams encourage the players with Hebrew expressions such as 'ten lo' ('give it to him; hit him') and 'hu gadol!' ('he is great!'). The curses are also in Hebrew: 'zevel' ('garbage'), 'titpater!' ('resign!'). An extreme example, even though not very frequent, is the adoption of anti-Arab racist cries. These curses, such as 'Aravi melukhlakh' ('dirty Arab') are shouted, self-ironically, by Arab fans against Arab players who play on Jewish teams.

One could dismiss the extensive use of Hebrew by describing it only as a tool that enables the minority to communicate with the majority. It is true that the football sphere exposes the Arab citizens of Israel to a long-term interaction with the Jewish majority. Every Saturday, thousands of Arab fans face a Jewish football audience, in addition to the Jewish players on the Arab teams. Majority-minority relations dictate that the main influence of this interaction will be the adoption of behaviour and expression patterns of the Jewish audience by the Arab audience.

And yet, inter-Arab public interactions in the football sphere are also immersed in Hebrew. The Hebrew language is dominant even when all involved are Arabs. For example, an Arab referee is compelled to hear Hebrew curses, and even in inter-Arab games the fans of opposing teams taunt each other in Hebrew. A striking example of the status of Hebrew as the 'football language' appeared during a game between the two most successful Arab teams from Sakhnin and Nazareth in the 1998–1999 season. During the week prior to the game, the managers of Nazareth attacked Sakhnin's coach, Azmi Nassar, in the Arab media as a part of their long and complex relationship with him.²³ Sakhnin's reaction was more than symbolic. Two large signs were set on the field, facing most of the audience and the television cameras, which stated in Hebrew: 'Azmi, ohavim otkha lanetzah' ('Azmi, we love you forever'), 'Azmi, Hame'amen ha-bakhir bamigzar he-'arvi' ('Azmi, the best coach in the Arab sector'). In this case, the writers are Arab, the readers are Arab, and the context is an internal Arab quarrel of which the Jewish fans are totally unaware.

As I have already pointed out, Hebrew for the Arabs in Israel is the 'public language' that enables them to communicate with the state's institutions and the Jewish majority. But choosing Hebrew as a language for announcing messages regarding an internal conflict between Arab football fans indicates that there is something beyond Hebrew's status as

a public language; Hebrew is undoubtedly the football language in Israel. In order to maintain the role of football as an integrative sphere, Hebrew has gained importance and prominence on the field and on the bleachers.

Jewish players on Arab teams

The Jewish players who play in the Arab teams provide an outstanding opportunity for the Arabs involved in football to implement the liberal discourse and claim for integration. One can find at least one Jewish player on almost every Arab team that plays above the lowest division. This presence is partially a result of the 'commodification of Israeli football' (Ben-Porat 1998), but it is also a concrete practice used by Arab sports functionaries in order to influence Arab-Jewish interactions. The participation of Jewish players on Arab teams reduces the potential of the event to become an Arab-Jewish conflict, and it is plausible that the Arab managers who hire them are well aware of that.

Indeed, most of the Jewish players gain sympathy and respect from the Arab audience. Whoever witnessed the excited farewell of thousands of Arab fans of Sakhnin to the Jewish goal keeper, Me'ir Cohen,²⁴ crying 'stay, stay!' could recognize that Arab-Jewish relations on the football field are ruled by different dynamics than those of most of the public realms in Israel. Sakhnin's manager at the time, Mazen Ghnaim, emphasized his love and appreciation for Cohen in the media, saying he would miss Cohen not only as a player but also as a person. In the context of Arab-Jewish relations, the subtext of this statement and similar others are clear: Although we are an Arab team and he is a Jewish player, our national identity is irrelevant when it comes to football. Likewise, the violent turmoil in Arab-Jewish relations that erupted in October 2000 has not translated into hostility towards the Jewish players by Arab audiences (in sharp contrast to the accelerated hostility towards Arab players on Jewish teams by Jewish audiences).

Azmi Nassar, a former player in the Israeli first division and the most successful Arab coach in Israel provides another striking example of the noticeable demonstration of sympathy towards Jewish players. In an interview to the Hebrew newspaper *Ha'aretz* he referred to the differences between the social condition of Arabs in Jewish teams and Jews in Arab teams:

We, in Bnei Sakhnin and Akhi Natzeret²⁵ have progressed several years ahead of the state of Israel. We don't see any difference between Arabs and Jews. And we also want to integrate into Jewish society. We are tired of looking at people as Arabs or Jews. We feel good with the Jews; we want to live with them. We are happy that they are in our society and accept them. But for Jewish society – this is difficult. In football, as everywhere, they look at us as second class.²⁶

As a fascinating illustration of Nassar's argument, some of the Jewish players on Arab teams even gained Arab nicknames. For example, a Jewish player in Sakhnin, whose name in Hebrew is *Tsabar*, was named by Sakhnin's audience *Sabri* (a common Arab name). These nicknames are not only an unambiguous expression of acceptance and sympathy but also another attempt to blur the ethnic-national boundaries between Arabs and Jews.

Like the extensive use of Hebrew, the sympathetic inclusion of Jewish players aims to haze the boundaries between Jews and Arabs and contribute to the production of liberal discourse of citizenship. This production is complemented by excluding the element of identity that is considered the most threatening for the Jewish audience: the Palestinian national identity.

The exclusion of Palestinian symbols

Rabinowitz (1993) describes the discursive ways in which the state of Israel has denied the Palestinian national identity of its Arab citizens, and how it has tried to create a new, local Arab identity, loyal to the state of Israel. Indeed, in the first decades of Israel's existence, its Arab citizens played down the Palestinian elements of their identity. The absence of the Palestinian exiled leadership, as well as many years of worry about the reach of the arm of Israeli law and the reaction of the Jewish majority, forced demonstrations of Palestinian national identity into the private sphere. Today, as in the past, the interiors of many Palestinian houses in Israel are decorated with national symbols, such as maps of Palestine or Palestinian flags. On the other hand, the few public attempts to express a national identity, such as the political organization of the al-'Ard group in the early 1960s (Jiryis 1969), were so efficiently suppressed as to increase their rarity in the years to come.

Nonetheless, since the Land Day of 1976, and even more so since the first Intifada, the uprising of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip beginning in 1987, manifestations of Arab and Palestinian nationalism are no longer rarities in the public discourse of Arabs in Israel. The collective calendar contains certain 'dates of national identity', such as the Nakba (the destruction of Palestine in 1948), and Land Day (in memory of the six Arabs who were killed by Israeli police in March 1976 during protests against governmental land expropriation); these days are marked by public and widespread rallies and demonstrations, at which the Palestinian flag is raised and national songs are sung.

Memorials to the dead – important pillars in the construction of European nationalism (and, following that, in Zionist nationalism) – have been established in Arab settlements: in Shfa-'amer to the victims of the 1948 war, and in Sakhnin to the dead of Land Day. Some Arab schools even take their students on 'heritage trips' to destroyed

Palestinian villages, trips that emphasize the fate of the Palestinian collective destiny more than that of the actual villages that were razed. Furthermore, since the signing of the Oslo Accords, Palestinian national symbols are no longer illegal, and the Palestinian flag is commonly seen at political demonstrations held by Arabs in Israel.

Against this background, one might expect that the football arena would provide a dramatic expression for the conflicts between two social groups and would turn the bleachers into a sphere in which the Arab-Palestinian minority's national identity would be strongly emphasized. However, this is not the case. Despite the significant place that Arab men in Israel give to sports in general, and to football in particular, football bleachers are far from a site of national identification. One does not see Palestinian flags in the bleachers of Arab football teams and the songs lack any national-based uniqueness. Even though the conflict between Jews and Arabs constitutes the deepest chasm in Israeli society, the processes of Palestinization, undergone by the Arab society in Israel since 1967 and accelerated by the Intifada, have not broached the football bleachers.

Football in Israel is identified by the Arab fans with 'Israeliness', with taking part in a shared public sphere with the Jewish majority. Even though the Israeliness that stems from the involvement of Arabs in the general Israeli public spheres is latent and is not developed into a shared national pride with the Jewish majority, it is conceived as contradicting Palestinian nationalism (Bishara 1999). Football is seen as an opportunity for integration, while expressions of Palestinian nationalism within the sports arena are taken as a threat to that opportunity.

Discussion

Based on the ethnographic discussion above, we can see that Arab fans and players attempt to blur national and ethnic tensions, emphasize the common denominator with the majority, and suspend protest. Under the assumption that the sports arena is basically value-free and potentially multi-vocal, how can we explain the dominance of the liberal-integrative interpretation of football in the popular discourse of the Arabs in Israel? Why do the fans not express their distinctive national identity, as do the Palestinian fans in Jordan or the Basque fans in Bilbao? Why have the Arab football players in Israel never used their empowerment for explicit political protest like the African-American athletes in the 1968 Olympic Games (Hartmann 1996) or like the Algerian football player, Rashid Mekloufi, who left the French league and the French national team during the war in Algeria, leading a group of Algerian players in the French league to establish the FLN team (Lanfranchi 1994)?

It is tempting to analyse the results as a mere reflection of the power

relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. I do not refer to the raw Marxist explanations that conceive sports as an opium for the masses (Brohm 1989 [1975]), but rather to the Gramscian conception of hegemony and political power as the combined result of force and consent (Gramsci 1971). Gramsci's dialectic has been adopted warmly by sociologists of sports in order to analyse the role that sport plays in class relations (Hargreaves 1986) and in ethno-religious conflict (Sugden and Bairner 1993). According to this theory, Arab football is one of the semi-autonomous institutions of civil society that ultimately promote the acceptance of the worldview of the dominant political group by the subordinated population.

We could support this argument by noticing the gap between the Arab media's interpretation and the popular stance on Arab football. The overwhelming power of the Hebrew media compared to the Arab media leads to its triumph in the battle of meanings. Much of the power of the Hebrew media rests on the differential exposure of the Arab audience to Arab and Hebrew sports media. Indeed, the congruence of Arab popular stances with those of the Hebrew media and their discrepancies with those of the Arab media is reflected in the habits of sports press consumption of the Arab public. A survey based on a representative sample of the Arab men aged 18 to 50 in Israel reveals that 37 per cent of them read the sports section only in the Hebrew press; 22 per cent read the sports press in both languages; and only 15 per cent read the Arab sports press exclusively (Sorek 2001, p. 133). These numbers indicate that the Arab public is more widely exposed to the hegemonic interpretation of football than to the alternatives. This excessive exposure may be interpreted as a cause of the choice made by Arab fans to adopt the hegemonic integrative meanings of football.

At the same time, this gap also reflects class-based differences in the ways that the dilemmas of identity are experienced. As Al-Haj (1997) notes, the intellectual elites among the Palestinians in Israel have much more interaction with the Palestinians in the West Bank than the other parts of the society. In addition, this gap may be related to a higher national consciousness among educated people. In the case of the Arabs in Israel there is a positive correlation between education and pride in being Palestinian (Sorek 2001, p. 137). Higher national consciousness among the educated strata is probably related to a more critical perception of the meaning suggested by the Hebrew sports media. However, this critical position of the Arab sports journalists is not enough to overcome the un-expected 'alliance of meanings' stemming from ad hoc interests of the Hebrew media and the Arab masses.

I do not consider the Gramscian dialectic invalid for our case, and I certainly admit its relevance for understanding the historical development of the Arab football in Israel as a political tool used by the Israeli authorities (Sorek 2003). However, this theory is insufficient to fully

explain the current dynamics of Arab football in Israel, mainly because the Gramscian dialectic assumes that sports as a civil institution promotes the hegemonic political worldview not only within its borders, but also in the general public sphere. In this context, the relative isolation of the processes that take place in the football stadium from other realms of the public sphere requires a complementary explanation.

When writing about isolation, I do not only refer to the inability of the Arab minority to translate the cultural capital they gain in the football sphere into concrete social change. This lack of spill-over characterizes the situation of ethnic minorities even in societies where liberalism is much more embedded in the political culture than in Israel (Hartmann 2000, p. 549). My focus is on the differential implementation of discourses of citizenship in the football sphere compared to other spheres. I argue that the hegemonic interpretation in the football arenas is a by-product of the tensions between different discourses of citizenship in Israeli society and the central place of Israel's Arab citizens as the 'ultimate other' in these tensions.

For this purpose, my conception of citizenship emphasizes its subjective dimension and the dialectical process involved in shaping it. This is similar to Ong's conception of 'cultural citizenship' (Ong 1996, p. 738), which she defines as 'the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory'. However, while the dilemmas of Asian immigrants in America described by Ong or the predicament of the African-Americans described by Hartmann may be related to discrepancies between the ideal liberal vision on the one hand and the reality of racial and cultural hierarchies on the other, my analysis refers to a qualitatively different social context. In the context of Israeli society, the liberal discourse of citizenship itself collides with an alternative legitimate, explicit and contradictory discourse of citizenship, namely the ethno-national discourse. Under these circumstances, when both the hegemonic agents and the ethnic minority are ambivalent towards their integrative intentions, the need arises to construct a space for a limited encounter based on the liberal discourse.

Israeli political culture is characterized by a continuous incongruity between different powers and ideologies concerning the Israeli collective identity, while the status of the Arab citizens serves frequently as a main anchor of controversy. This incongruity has been conceptualized as a tension between the Jewish-primordial code and the civic code of identity (Kimmerling 1985) or as a tension between two political commitments, one for a Jewish state and the other for a democracy (Smootha 1990). Peled (1992) has suggested the existence of competitive relations between liberal, republican and ethno-national discourses of citizenship, discourses used in different ways by the various groups in Israeli society.

Both the republican discourse, which requires a commitment to the declared aims of Zionism, and the ethno-national discourse, which sets Jewish ethnicity as a criterion for inclusion, exclude the Arab minority. Blind to ethnic identity in its ideal form, the liberal discourse remains the only channel for Arabs in Israel to be accepted as citizens and gain access to resources. Therefore, negotiations over the relative importance of each discourse have significant implications for the status of the Arab minority.

Shafir and Peled (1998) argue that different discourses of citizenship are implemented differently towards various segments of Israeli society. I take their argument further: the existential predicament of Arabs in a Jewish nation-state and the dilemma of Zionist Jews, stemming from the tension between their self-perception as liberals and their commitment to the Zionist vision of a Jewish state (Rabinowitz 1997), have led to the construction of a fractured public sphere, where different discourses of citizenship are implemented. Both sides need a sub-sphere where they can implement liberal-integrative discourse of citizenship, without further commitment.

On a very fundamental level, the Jewish majority has no interest in expanding the integrationist discourse from the stadium outward. The Jewish majority favours the liberal perception of equal opportunities for Arabs – but only as long as the majority does not risk its superior political status. The Arab minority, on its part, implements a defensive version of isolation. Arab fans and players take advantage of some forms of discourse available in the sports field – such as equal opportunity and meritocracy – to supply their vital need for the implementation of the liberal discourse of citizenship.

However, since external political struggles consistently reproduce and emphasize the ethno-national identities, a particular effort is invested in excluding elements that can undermine this discourse in the football field. These elements are their identities as Arabs (which is a key identification for discrimination) and their identities as Palestinians. The latter is a highly charged issue in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. As long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict endures, the Palestinian identity of the Arab citizens is an irritant to many Israelis. The exclusion of Palestinian symbols from the stadium stands in sharp contrast to the enhancement of the Palestinian national identity since 1987.

To this point we should add the widespread belief among the Palestinians in Israel that in order to be a 'good citizen' an Arab should be apolitical (Sa'ar 1998). The popular belief that sports is an apolitical sphere serves here as wish-fulfilment – the Arabs in Israel incline more and more towards this sphere because they believe it is apolitical, and they invest much effort constructing its seemingly apolitical (namely, ethnic- or national-blind) character.

Arabs in Israel have a vital need for an enclave of normalcy, stemming

from the intensity of the contradictory expectations they face. Therefore, the dialectic of integration versus separation in the football sphere, known from other sportive contexts in the world, is biased towards the integrative pole. Two previous works on Arab-Jewish relations in the football sphere tend to over-emphasize the explicit conflictual dimension of the encounter and the nationalist emotions involved in it (Carmeli and Grossman-Eliav 2000; Ben-Porat 2001). This bias stems from considering a few rare games in the first league, in which Arab fans faced extreme provocation launched by the Jewish audience, or received extra attention in the media as representing the entire Arab-Jewish football relations. Virtually every Saturday, dozens of Arab-Jewish games take place all over the country in the various leagues, and national tensions in these games are rare. Statistically, Arab-Jewish games are much less likely to be ended by 'unsportive' circumstances than games between two Arab teams (Sorek 2001, p. 80).

Even the violent events of late September and early October 2000, which are considered to be a watershed in the relations between the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel and the state (Ghanem and Osacky-Lazar 2001), have not changed the place of football in Arab-Jewish relations. In the first weeks after the events, the lower Israeli football leagues were almost paralysed, since the police were afraid to attend the Arab towns and villages (police must attend every football match). However, the games have since been renewed, and until the end of the season they were interrupted only on Land Day (30 March) when the police again prevented the games from taking place in Arab towns. In the first season after these events, no notable expression of national protest has been marked on the football bleachers. Paradoxically, the tragic events increased the importance of football as an enclave of normalcy. Hence, it seems that the Palestinians in Israel continue to distance their national identity from the football sphere and channel expressions of nationalism to other spheres.

Concluding remarks

The meaning of Arab presence in the football sphere is dependent not only on the point of view of the interpreter, but also on the relative power of consciousness-shaping agents to wrap their desired meanings onto the game. While the Hebrew media tend to use Arab success in football as evidence for the possible shared citizenship for Arabs and Jews, the Arabic sports press tends to emphasize the distinctive national identity of the Arab teams and players. Arab football fans and players prefer to stress the common denominator with their Jewish counterparts.

The gap between the Arabic media and the Arab fans stems from the overwhelming need of the Arab audience to create an integrative

enclave. It is clear that the 'football language' in Israel is Hebrew, and the ideological language is the meritocracy that produces the image of football as an autonomous impartial sphere, where the formal and informal state-regulated discriminative mechanisms do not exist. Consequently, football is seen by many Arab fans as an opportunity to receive legitimacy as citizens from the Jewish majority. The integration into a public sphere that is identified with the state, and even represents the state, may enable them to feel a partnership with the Jewish citizens.

Let me emphasize, though, that while describing football as an integrative enclave or a space of normalcy, I do not follow the 'normal development' approach, a term coined by Rouhana and Ghanem (1998) to describe an academic tendency to see the Palestinian minority in Israel as moving towards normalization of its political orientation, seeking integration into the state's fabric and equality in the allocation of common resources, such as ethnic minorities in other states (Smootha 1992; Landau 1993). The Arab Palestinians in Israel are not 'normal citizens' in any sense except their formal citizenship. Israel is by definition a Jewish state, and the political practices that derive from this definition set Arabs in Israel in permanent marginality in Israeli society. This marginality is reflected in a multifaceted predicament that is not expected to be resolved in the near future (Rouhana and Ghanem 1998).

The involvement in the sports sphere by the intensive inclusion mode is a strategy to cope with this predicament. The intensive inclusion mode offers Arab football fans a diversified arsenal of meanings concerning their status in the state and their relations with the Jewish majority. Their choosing to adopt the integrationist interpretation and reproduce it does not change their inferior status. The normalcy felt by Arabs in the football sphere is contained in that arena. The Arab minority uses the sports arena only to maintain an enclave of integrative relations with the majority, and reserves protest for other occasions. Both sides exploit the potential of sports to produce nationality-blind discourses, such as professionalism and achievement, isolated from the discriminatory character of the state.

The significance of this article goes beyond the particular case of the Palestinians in Israel. In the last several years, European nation-states have experienced a growing pressure to redefine their boundaries of citizenship, facing the claims of ethnic and national minorities for individual and collective rights (Smith and Blanc 1996; Koopmans 1999). Where the ethno-national discourse of citizenship is dominant, such as in Israel and Germany, and the claim for minorities' rights is based on the liberal discourse, similar enclaves of integration may be constructed. Although other spheres, especially those with a professional orientation, may provide a similar sense of limited liberalism, football is a good candidate to play this role throughout Europe, due to its universal popularity and flexible interpretative range.

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Notes

1. Maccabi Kafr-Kana, as well as every professional and semi-professional Arab team, has players who strengthen the team. These athletes, many of whom are Jewish, come from outside the village.
2. This calculation only includes a settlement when the team representing it is the settlement's top team (for instance, teams based in Tel Aviv are not counted for the second division, because the city is represented in the first division).
3. As above.
4. Based on reports delivered to the IFA by the clubs in the second division in the 1997–1998 season (see Sorek 2003).
5. Noam Regev, "The neighbor's television is better?," Y-net news website, www.ynet.co.il, (in Hebrew) 29.11.2001.
6. Based on data from Israeli Ministry of Education, Sports Authority (See Sorek 2001: 57).
7. With the exception of the marginal Islamic League, which consists of about 400 players.
8. It is true that Arab athletes had previously represented Israel at the international level, but this had been in marginal sports, such as boxing and weightlifting, which do not receive the same amount of public attention as football.
9. A discussion followed the premier of a movie about Bahlul himself, entitled "Broadcasting from the Middle-line," Haifa Cinema Festival, 9.10.98.
10. This decade including six years (1987–1993) of Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which may or may not be connected.
11. On 29 October 1956, a group of peasants from Kafr-Qassem returned to the village from their fields, not aware that their village was under curfew. Forty-seven of them were shot to death by Israeli troops.
12. Bdeir's name pronunciation symbolized in a nutshell the relationship between him and the Hebrew media. The name first was distorted by some Jewish broadcasters who found it easier to pronounce as "Badir," and then it was adopted by all the Hebrew sports media. Zuheir Bahlul, an Arab broadcaster who is dominant in the Hebrew media, alerted his Jewish colleagues to the mistake. These colleagues went to Bdeir and asked him how he prefers to be called. Bdeir answered without hesitation: "Badir."
13. *Ma'ariv*, 11 October 2000.
14. *Yediot Akhronot* sports section, 9.4.2000, pages 12–13, 'Hareshima Hamitkademet'. Representative example may be found also in an interview with Salim Tu'ama, an Arab player of Ha-Po'el Tel-Aviv, in *Ma'ariv*, 26.5.2000.
15. This is true as long as we speak about players, who are represented in most of the first-division teams. An Arab was never nominated as a first-division coach, perhaps due to the fear of Jews in Israel of the inverted role of an Arab in an authority position (see Rabinowitz 1997).

16. Maher Awawde, *Kul al-Arab*, 25 February 2000.
17. *Kul al-Arab*, 16 October 1998.
18. Walid Ayoub, *Fasl al-Maqal*, 4 June 1998.
19. Walid Ayoub, *Fasl al-Maqal*, 4–5 June 1998.
20. Maher Awawde, *Kul al-Arab*, 23 April 1999.
21. Maher Awawde, *Kul al-Arab*, 14 April 2000.
22. *Yalla* means ‘move ahead’ in Arabic. *Ha-rishon ba-derekh* is Hebrew for ‘the first (goal) is on its way’.
23. In his career Nassar served as coach of both Sakhnin and Nazareth teams several times. Nassar also served as the coach of the Palestinian National Team in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
24. Cohen left Sakhnin in the middle of the 1999–2000 season after receiving an offer from a team in the highest division. In his half-season in Sakhnin he exhibited his excellent athletic skill and quickly became the crowd’s favourite.
25. He used the Hebrew pronunciation of the two leading Arab teams’ names, both having been coached by Nassar.
26. *Ha’aretz*, 2 November, 2000.

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