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## PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM HAS LEFT THE FIELD: A SHORTENED HISTORY OF ARAB SOCCER IN ISRAEL

This article examines the historical development of Arab–Palestinian soccer under the British Mandate, and then afterward under the State of Israel. It strives to explain why the Arab sporting grandstands—particularly those of soccer—did *not* become a site for the construction and expression of Palestinian national pride in Israel.

*“The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people.”*<sup>1</sup> This famous phrase of Eric Hobsbawm has been cited frequently in the current research on sports and collective identity. Social scientists as well as popular writers describe soccer and nationalist consciousness as two phenomena that tend to have at least an “elective affinity” relationship, to use a Weberian term. John Sugden and Alan Bairner even argue that “wherever there are national or regional conflicts between societies which share a passion for sports, those conflicts will be in and carried on through respecting sport cultures.”<sup>2</sup> This article, however, indicates that under certain conditions, sports may function in the opposite way. The particular case of Palestinian citizens of Israel is evidence that sports in general, and soccer in particular, may be used by the state as a tool to inhibit the nationalist consciousness of a national minority. The Palestinian citizens in turn tend to use soccer to smooth their tense relations with the Jewish majority rather than to emphasize the tension, and therefore they hide their Palestinian identity in the stadium.

Commonly, the success of national minorities in certain sports turns the sports arena into a central location for the expression of nationalist feelings. Through their performances, well-known soccer teams bear the flag of their supporters’ separate national identities. For example, the Celtic soccer team in Glasgow represents the Irish Catholic minority in the city,<sup>3</sup> and the Athletic Bilbao team represents the Basque minority in Spain.<sup>4</sup> The Barcelona team represents Spain’s Catalanian region,<sup>5</sup> and al-Wihdat, a Palestinian team in Jordan,<sup>6</sup> gives its fans an opportunity to vocalize their identity as a national minority. The British used the sport that they exported to the countries they conquered as a tool for co-opting the local elites. In many cases, however, those same sports that were adopted by the local population became, ironically

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enough, locales for the formulation of anti-colonialist nationalist sentiment. Such was the fate of cricket in India and of soccer in Egypt, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup> Against the background of these examples, the role of soccer for Israel's Palestinian citizens raises a number of questions.

Dan Rabinowitz describes the discursive ways in which the state of Israel denied the Palestinian national identity of its Arab citizens, and how it tried to create a new, local Arab identity, loyal to the state of Israel.<sup>8</sup> And indeed, in the first decades of Israel's existence, its Arab citizens downplayed 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. However, the few attempts at public expression of a national identity, such as the political organization of the al-'Ard group in the early 1960s, were so efficiently suppressed as to increase their rarity in the years to come.

Nevertheless, since the Land Day of 1976, and even more so since the 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 1948) and Land Day (in memory of 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—a pillar 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. These trips emphasize the Palestinian collective fate more than that of the actual villages that were razed. Further, 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 the Arabs in Israel.

Against this backdrop, one might expect that the potential latent in soccer to provide a dramatic expression for the conflicts between two social groups would turn the bleachers into an arena 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 soccer in particular, soccer is far from being a site for national identification. One does not see Palestinian flags in the bleachers of Arab soccer teams; the songs, cheers, and swearing are largely taken from the verbal repertoire of Israeli soccer supporters as a whole and lack any national-based uniqueness. Outbreaks of violence are no more common at games between Arabs and Jews than at other games. In addition, the Arab soccer stars who play in Israel's leagues seek to downplay their nationalism, instead emphasizing their professional identity. Even though the national cleavage constitutes the deepest chasm in Israeli society, the processes of Palestinization undergone by the Arab soci-

ety in Israel since 1967 and accelerated by the Intifada have not diffused into the soccer bleachers.

Arab Palestinian soccer in Mandatory Palestine, and later in the State of Israel, shows us the extent to which soccer has been defined by those social agents dealing with the shaping of meaning. This analysis deals with many decades of activity, but focuses mainly on two critical periods: the 1940s and the 1960s. Palestinian sports began to blossom in the 1940s following initiatives taken by sections of the Palestinian elite to promote a supra-religious particularistic Palestinian nationalism. It received a death blow after the war of 1948, at a critical stage of its development. In its reappearance after the creation of the State of Israel, Palestinian sports evolved under governmental supervision and control, while the “interpretative infrastructure” that had given it its nationalist meanings in the past disappeared as a result of the war. In the years to follow, political and economic developments held back the nationalist potential of Palestinian soccer, and the energies invested in it served to confirm the status quo rather than to challenge it.

#### THE 1930s: LATE AWAKENINGS

Soccer was imported to Palestine by both Jewish and non-Jewish European immigrants at the beginning of 20th century and was played in larger cities by Arabs and Jews. However, the process of its institutionalization began after the British conquered the country in 1917. The main incorporating agencies in this context were British government schools in which soccer was played. In 1921, government officials founded a sports club in Jerusalem that included both Arabs and Jews, and this club began to manage regular cup games.

The initiative to establish a formal soccer association affiliated with FIFA, the international soccer association, came from the sports organization Maccabi. Maccabi was the first Zionist sports organization and was founded by the civic-liberal wing of the Zionist movement. Maccabi officials had considered the founding of such an association an integral part of the revival of the Jewish people in their homeland and a means for weaving a network of international relations for the Zionist project.<sup>10</sup> However, according to FIFA rules, only associations representing states could be accepted as members. Thus, Maccabi officials were compelled to invite not only its Zionist political adversary, ha-Po’el, but also Arab teams to join the Palestinian Football Association (PFA).

Therefore, in addition to the fourteen Zionist representatives that participated in the first meeting of the new soccer-association directorate, one Arab delegate took part—a member of the Nusseibeh family representing the Islamic Sports Club of Jerusalem. However, despite his involvement in this first session, Nusseibeh’s name never again appeared in the directorate’s protocol. Nevertheless, during the first years of the PFA, Arab teams participated in the games of the association. A report submitted to FIFA in 1929 describes three soccer divisions in Palestine: ten teams in the first, twenty in the second (five of them Arab), and thirty-nine in the third (six of them Arab).<sup>11</sup>

In the late 1920s, the Palestinian press did not ascribe much importance to sports,

and the sporadic reports on the subject were based on eyewitness accounts. On 4 April 1929, an exceptional report was published in *Filastin* about a match held in Jaffa between the Islamic Sports Club and one of the Jewish teams of ha-Po'el. The generous coverage appears thanks to a diligent spectator who recorded his impressions and sent them to the newspaper. He describes a large crowd and a high level of enthusiasm during the game, and he reports the Jewish team winning by a score of 5 to 1. He analyzes the reasons behind the Arab team's loss and calls for the introduction of professional training, "like the Jews and the Egyptians are doing." After two weeks, the return game took place, and ha-Po'el won again. This time, the newspaper accredited the result to the hostile calls of the Jewish referee, who disqualified two goals scored by the Arab team.

Despite the PFA's formal claim that it represented all of the country's inhabitants, Zionist officials and players dominated it on all levels. Besides the 1932 championship, won by British police, all the other champions were Jewish teams. The Palestinian National Squad that participated in international soccer matches was boycotted by the Arab Palestinian players, and in official games the Zionist anthem "ha-Tikva" was played alongside "God Save the King." Not surprisingly, Arab willingness to serve as a fig leaf for the association's neutrality did not last long. In 1934, the General Palestinian Sports Association (PSA) was founded, which managed many sports competitions in addition to soccer. The immediate result of the founding of this new association was the departure of Arab soccer clubs from their prior associations to join the Arab sports association. Similar to what happened to organized soccer in Ireland and South Africa around the same time, the institutional structure of soccer in Palestine was reorganized according to ethnic and national divisions of society.

Throughout the 1930s, sports reports became more substantial and prevalent in the Palestinian press. Sports continued to be conceived mainly as an educative mechanism. Therefore, it is not surprising that some newspapers dedicated significant space to reports about sports competitions in schools. The nationalistic and militaristic meanings of these events proved to be very explicit. Examples of this are the Arab flag that was displayed at these competitions and the fact that youth sports teams were named after historically renowned Muslim and Arab military commanders, such as Khaled Ibn al-Walid and Salah al-Din. In May 1935, the association organized a big sports festival in Jaffa, in which more than 5,000 Arab athletes competed in track and field, sword fighting, and horseback riding.<sup>12</sup>

The Arab rebellion against the British Mandatory government that broke out in 1936 led to the dissolution of the PSA. By 1939, when the rebellion subsided, Arab soccer players remained without any institutional framework. This, then, can explain the request of several Arab teams to rejoin the general (Jewish) association in 1941. These teams finally split once again from the association at the end of 1943.

#### 1944–47: TEMPORARY REVIVAL

In May 1944, the National Sports Club of Jaffa initiated the re-establishment of an Arab sports association. Representatives from twenty-one clubs assembled in response to the invitation and decided "to establish an association to be called 'The General Palestinian Sports Association.' The directorate of this association should be exclu-

sively Arab, without consideration of the citizenship of participatory teams.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the National Sports Club of Jaffa decided to establish a preliminary committee for the drafting of a constitution. For this purpose, it enlisted the help of all of the Arab clubs and urged them to send their proposals for the constitution. On 22 July of the same year, the inaugural meeting of the new organization, which was held in Jaffa, was represented in the media as “The Arab Palestinian Sports Association.”<sup>14</sup> In the meeting, the representatives of fourteen clubs from across the country were present.

This association had a number of committees, each assigned to a different sports branch. In addition to soccer, the association appointed committees for boxing, table tennis, volleyball, weightlifting, swimming, athletics, and basketball. It must be noted that some of these frameworks, such as the table-tennis association, were active before the general association was founded.

The association was managed in accordance with six different regional sub-associations: Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Gaza, Nablus, and the Galilee. In 1945, the sports section of *Filastin* estimated that the number of active sports players exceeded 10,000. Eight months after its official founding, the association included forty-five clubs, spanning from Acre in the north to Bir-Saba’ in the south. By 1947, the number had increased to sixty-five clubs. During this period, the PSA decided to publish a bi-weekly periodical called *al-Gil*. These years also saw the rise of women’s sports. The media reported on women’s sports, but it is unclear whether the PSA was involved in managing this activity.

During the first year of the PSA’s existence, it founded a countrywide soccer league, managed on a regional basis. The champion of each of the six regions advanced to the Palestine championship. It seems that, as a lesson learned from the Zionist dominance of the PFA and as an expression of the escalating hostility between the two collectives, the PSA’s laws explicitly prohibited the participation of Jewish players. Soccer gained the recognition of the Arab leadership, and national and local leaders honored the players with their presence at important sporting events. The final game of the first Palestinian soccer championships took place in Jaffa on 3 June 1945 under the patronage of Ahmed Hilmi Basha, a dominant leader in Palestinian politics in the 1940s, leaning toward the secularist Istiqlal party.<sup>15</sup> All of the Arab mayors of Palestine and the honored citizens of numerous Arab villages were invited to the competition between the Islamic Sports Club of Jaffa and the Orthodox Union of Jerusalem. As many as 10,000 spectators witnessed the Jaffa club win the game 2 to 0, and receive a silver plaque that had been donated by the Arab National Bank. As Issa Khalaf mentioned in mid 1945, Ahmad Hilmi launched a campaign to promote himself to a dominant position in Arab political life, as an opposition to the Hussaynis, through the financial tools he controlled.<sup>16</sup> The support of the Arab National Bank and its chair, Ahmad Hilmi, as well as the generous coverage of the event by *Filastin* are significant. They imply the parts of Palestinian society that were interested in the promotion of sports: relatively modernized elites who opposed traditional familial authority. In addition, the use of soccer by Hilmi and his supporters to mobilize popular support indicates the popularity of the game among Palestinians in the 1940s.

Two moments of silence in memory of the war victims in Syria and Lebanon preceded the game, during which both the players and the observing crowd stood at attention.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the solidarity with Syria and Lebanon was not limited to ceremon-

ies. The PSA organized boxing, weightlifting, and wrestling competitions, in which all profits were donated to the war victims. At the end of June 1945, the central committee of the PSA decided to send financial support to the war victims in Syria and Lebanon via the Syrian sports association. Likewise, it implored the Palestinian sports clubs to aid in gathering donations.

Despite the humanitarian motivations that surely stood behind the united efforts of the PSA to help their Arab neighboring states in need, these efforts did not lack pragmatic considerations. During these years, the PSA worked to create international relations with other countries, and Arab Palestinian athletes participated in competitions in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iran. However, this activity met with political problems. The PFA, the official representative of Palestine on FIFA bodies, vetoed competitions between national teams that played against the teams that had been established by the PSA. Therefore, the management of the PSA attempted to enlist the help of the national associations in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria in their struggle for international recognition. On 15 March 1945, the following excerpt appeared in the sports section of the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*:

A sports delegation led by the PSA is expected to travel to Egypt in order to plan games between Egypt and Palestine at the beginning of next month. We are asking the delegation to discuss the issue of the Palestinian Football Association, which is not Arab, and is recognized internationally and representing us against our will. Likewise, we are asking Egypt to intercede on our behalf and insist on the elimination of the PFA. This association [the PFA] does not represent anyone but itself and its community, and not the Arab–Palestinian people. If this is impossible at this time, then we demand two-thirds of its seats, and the last third will remain with it according to the governmental laws of the country. This association was founded in 1922 [*sic*; 1928] and represented Palestine internationally while the game among the Arabs was still in its formative stage. Twelve members managed this association. None of them are Arab, it is located in Tel Aviv, and until this day it still represents Palestine. It will be a great injustice if this association continues to represent Arab Palestine internationally when our games and our association are already organized and among our youth there are stronger, better and more professional athletes than them. The Arab teams cannot visit Palestine and play with us if this illegal association refuses to let them. Egypt is also forced to comply with this if it wishes to keep the international order and laws that are followed in other countries. As long as this irregular and exceptional situation does not come to an end, efforts must be invested in Egypt in order to establish an Oriental Sports Association that will begin operation immediately.

The frustration of Arab athletes, as reflected in the newspaper, led them to seek additional solutions. For instance, the option of merging Palestinian soccer with the Syrian Association was raised (something that caused *Filastin* to revert to a one-time use of Palestine’s forgotten nickname from the time of Faisal’s revolt in Syria, “Southern Syria”), but this proposal was dropped for reasons that are unclear. In contrast, however, the Weightlifters Association became in practice a subsidiary of the Egyptian Association.

In 1946, with support from the Lebanese and Egyptian associations, the Arab Association made an official appeal to FIFA to be accepted as a separate association, (or, according to a different version, to found an independent association in Mandatory Palestine). In November 1946, as a result of this request—and worried that it would lose its international legitimacy—the Zionist Association was spurred to invite the

Arab teams to join its ranks. The Arab Association formulated a letter of refusal, which all the Arab teams were asked to send to the Zionist Association.

Meanwhile, the Arab Association's request to join FIFA was rejected, leading to the convening of a joint conference of the region's Arab associations. The Arab associations expressed their protest and demanded that FIFA reconsider the issue. Accordingly, in the summer of 1947, FIFA's executive committee proposed that the next conference form a neutral association in Palestine, headed by people not belonging to either of the two "races" (as said in the source, according to the association's protocol).<sup>18</sup> As it was, the country was deeply mired in battle when the conference took place, so no meaningful decisions were made.

To conclude, in the Mandate period, Arab Palestinian sports spread over the country from the big cities to the periphery. Its organizational momentum in the 1940s is related to attempts made by educated elites to shape a secular Palestinian nationality.<sup>19</sup> These attempts also are reflected in the relatively large coverage of sports events by *Filastin*, a newspaper that was identified with the same social circles.<sup>20</sup> The national struggle between Zionism and the Palestinian national movement was reflected in the organizational structure of sports in Palestine, with both the political and sporting confrontations taking place on parallel tracks over a period of time. Prior momentum for the Zionist sporting organization allowed its initial advantage to be turned into an accumulative one, thus enabling it to win international recognition, which pulled the carpet out from under Palestinian sports.

In the mid-1940s, Arab sports gained an impressive organizational momentum, and it was even on the brink of international recognition. However, the 1948 war halted that momentum when the institutionalization of soccer in the periphery was still in its initial steps. The modern Palestine, and especially the new urban elites who had generated the sports infrastructure, collapsed. After the war, no independent Arab infrastructure survived. Instead, the organizational vacuum was filled by a new power that used soccer as a political tool for its needs.

#### THE 1950s AND 1960s: ABSORPTION INTO THE ZIONIST FRAMEWORK

Antonio Gramsci argues that in complex capitalist societies, political power is the combined result of force and consent.<sup>21</sup> According to Gramsci, a civil society includes semi-autonomous institutions, such as the church, the media, and sports. Even though some of the officials in a civil society may be alienated from the dominant group, the majority of the population under normal conditions tends to accept the worldview of the dominant political group. The consequence is an ideological and economic dominance of the ruling group, referred to by Gramsci as *hegemony*. Gramsci's ideas about the subtle dialectic between force and consent have been adopted warmly by sociologists of sports to analyze the role that sports plays in class relations and in ethno-religious conflict.<sup>22</sup>

The case of Arab soccer in Israel is an extraordinary illustration of the relevance of Gramsci's arguments about the relationship between a nation-state and a national minority. The way that the State of Israel established its hegemony in the soccer field—and the way it used soccer to acquire hegemony over the general public

sphere—may be described as the combined result of its use of force as well as the needs of Arab men for some of the crucial features of the newly created soccer sphere.

A study of the development of Arab sports in the 1950s and 1960s reveals two main elements in the state's policy: dependency creation and co-optation of the young elite. These efficient and repressive mechanisms of control were mentioned, among others, by Ian Lustick as he tried to explain why, despite the clearly uncomfortable situation of the Arabs in Israel, there were no significant outbreaks of political agitation.<sup>23</sup> One must not underestimate the importance of these strategies in the realms of employment, licensing, and other day-to-day areas. But sports has certain unique characteristics of its own. Pierre Bourdieu claims that sports can serve as a tool for extracting agreement from the body in cases where the spirit refuses to give it.<sup>24</sup> Through sports, the state can assimilate the Arab *body* and mobilize it for further aims. In addition, sports' apolitical image actually can assist the state in using it as a political tool.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the exact same practices that parts of the Palestinian elite tried to employ in the name of their national struggle against the Zionists and the British later served the state in establishing its rule over a population whose loyalty was seen as fragile and context-dependent.

In the state's first years, most Arab sporting activity was unofficial, and the participation of Arab athletes in the more general frameworks, such as the Israeli Football Association, was rare. In this context, it is worth mentioning the sporting clubs that represented Christian religious institutions, such Terra Santa in Jaffa, and the Orthodox Club in Haifa, as well as the soccer clubs that made up ha-Brit (the alliance)<sup>26</sup> in Nazareth and Haifa. Gradually, however, organized sporting activity began to appear in places that had not known it before the war.

Two main factors influenced the development of Arab sports in Arab villages and towns in the 1950s and 1960s: the change in the structure of employment and the overlapping interests of the government and the Histadrut (the General Federation of Labor Unions). Arab villages underwent far-reaching changes in their social structure following 1948. Massive confiscation of Arab land, on the one hand, and the increasing dependence on the Jewish economy, on the other, both led to accelerated processes of proletarianization in Arab society.<sup>27</sup>

There were a number of consequences with bearing on physical, bodily activity. First, wage labor creates a clear distinction between work and leisure time; indeed, "leisure" is a result of counting work hours in industrialized society.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, urbanization and proletarianization tend to bring about an increase in sporting activity. The sharp change from a mainly agricultural society to one that supported itself from wage labor also had an anomic affect on the social tapestry of the Arab village, which became detached from traditional village life and the relatively stable regularity of the agricultural year. The local attempts at forming sports clubs constituted an effort at reorganizing the society around alternative fulcra that were more suitable for the changed conditions. The initiatives came mainly from the young, while the traditional leadership in the Arab villages in the 1950s and 1960s regarded sporting activity with suspicion mixed with disparagement. At best, they considered the sight of barely dressed young men purposelessly running around after a ball a waste of time, and at worst as a licentious, "unmasculine" activity.

This generational gap should be viewed in the context of the conception of moder-



nity within the fractions of Palestinian society that remained in Israel and the role that soccer played in shaping the image of modernity. As Azmi Bishara describes it:

To the Palestinians, as a people, Israeli modernism severed the historic continuum of the Palestinian process of modernisation. This process had begun well before 1948. With the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian society lost its political, cultural and economic elite. More importantly, Palestinian society lost the Palestinian city, having been reduced to a village society, separate from but dependent for its subsistence upon a Jewish city that refuses to allow integration. Moreover, with the loss of agriculture as a basis for subsistence, village society became neither rural nor urban. The only avenue to modernisation that remained open to the Palestinians, therefore, was that laid out by the Jewish state and the only alternatives available to Palestinians were marginalisation, imitation or, in the best of circumstances, pressing for some rights.<sup>29</sup>

Consistent with Bishara's argument, I suggest that since the 1950s soccer has symbolized for the Arab citizens a viable representation of modernity. "Modernity," with all its positive connotation of progress and optimism, was identified with the state that supplied the sporting facilities. This development was in part a result of the opposition expressed to the game by the traditional leadership. The young Arabs who were looking for material support for their sporting activity found a receptive ear in the Arab department of the Histadrut. In the Histadrut's archives one can find a large number of letters from inhabitants of Arab villages requesting help so that their village could also set up a sports club. The Histadrut's functionaries portrayed themselves to the young Arabs as people who understood the spirit of the modern generation, frustrated as it was with conflicts with the traditional power-holders.<sup>30</sup> Being appointed to the position of sports coordinator under the auspices of the Histadrut was one of many possible opportunities that the Histadrut could offer young Arabs who were prepared to serve its interests in Arab settlements.<sup>31</sup> The "Arab Department" of the Histadrut was de facto an important political tool in the hands of the ruling party Mapai, which it used to garner political power in the Arab sector.<sup>32</sup> Investments in Arab villages were made in the light of this fact. Cost-efficiency analysis probably led to the conclusion that investing in the establishment of sports clubs and in training sports coaches was cheaper than investing in other institutions also aimed at gaining political support. Hence, in the mid-1950s the Histadrut started running courses for training Arab sports coaches.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, ha-Po'el (the Histadrut sports organization) soccer teams were set up in the Arab villages of Lid and Jaljulia, which started playing in the Israeli Football Association.

A significant change took place in 1959, when the Histadrut decided to open its doors to Arab citizens. From this point on, the matter was no longer one of local solutions offered to specific settlements but, rather, a wide-reaching, uniform policy. In the 1960s, dozens of ha-Po'el sports branches were opened in Arab villages, and the teams that were organized in the various villages received the prefix "ha-Po'el." In a few isolated cases, mainly in places with the relevant local or personal connections, teams joined the Maccabi group (Furaydis and Me'ilya). In 1964, ha-Po'el teams from Nazareth, Kafr Kana, Tira, Kafr Kasem, Jaljulia, Taiba, Aka, Kafr Yassif, Tarshiha, Majd el-Kurum, and Me'ilya; Maccabi teams from Furaydis and Me'ilya; and three unaffiliated teams all played soccer under the auspices of the Israeli Football Association.

The government of Israel generously supported the Histadrut's activity. An examination of the joint action taken by the Histadrut and the government in the 1950s and

1960s reveals a clear policy, the basis of which was the creation of dependency on the part of Arab citizens on the sporting infrastructure provided by the state. Sporting activity that took place within the accepted frameworks was warmly supported, but independent Arab sports organizations were prevented from taking root.

Government and Histadrut involvement in the development of Arab sports took on a range of expressions. From 1959 onward, the Ministry of Education organized local sports competitions for Arab schools on Israeli Independence Day. At these festivals, speeches stressed that this was the way for Arabs in Israel to express their joy at the state's celebrations.<sup>34</sup> Starting in 1960, the newspaper *al-Yawm*, which worked in cooperation with the Histadrut and the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs, began publishing a sports section.<sup>35</sup>

Similar to *Filastin's* sports section, that of *al-Yawm* also was characterized by a tendency to see sports as an educational tool; this time, however, the focus was somewhat different. *Al-Yawm's* sports section mainly reported on games from Israeli soccer's National League (the first league), as well as on the games of Arab teams, both within the framework of association as well as outside of it, and stressed the positive role of sports as a source of fraternity between the peoples. Starting in 1964, the sports section was published as a weekly two-page section (out of the newspaper's six pages). The section's editor, Na'im Zalkha, an Iraqi-born Jew, believed that sports had an important role to play in improving the relations between Jews and Arabs. The column he wrote, as well as the general tone of the sports section, expressed this belief. The Histadrut's Arab department sent Zalkha to Arab villages to lecture on the importance of sporting activity, which, as mentioned earlier, was not kindly looked on by the villages' local leadership. In May 1963, the Israeli broadcast authority began airing a weekly Arabic sports program on the radio, and within a year this had risen to three programs a week. Every year, at the end of the season, a game took place between a top Arab club and an "All-Star" Arab team, with the players taken from other teams. The prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs and the head of the Arab department of the Histadrut were regular guests of honor at the games. The Histadrut helped in establishing sports grounds by raising money from the Islamic waqf funds, as well as from the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs. In addition, the Histadrut held many training workshops for sports coaches, which the Ministry of Education and Culture helped finance.

The Arab teams that joined the Israeli Football Association articulated the duality of a national minority's attempts to gain some kind of status for itself within the institutions identified with the state. On the one hand, the Arab teams constituted the potential to serve as the focal point for the identity of Arabs in Israel, while on the other, they gave recognition to and cooperated with the establishment at a time that the military government still dictated how Arab citizens lived their lives.

A striking example of this complexity can be seen in an incident with ha-Po'el Bnei Nazareth, a team that joined the Israeli Football Association in 1960. On 16 March 1964, the Hebrew newspaper *ha-Boker* reported that the team had been involved in a violent incident between the fans and players of both ha-Po'el Bnei Nazareth and ha-Po'el Migdal ha-Emek, the neighboring Jewish village. The incident reverberated far beyond the soccer field. Following the event, the Communist Party called for a general strike in protest of violence against "the Arab sector"—and indeed, the

following morning, hundreds of workers from Nazareth failed to appear for work in nearby Migdal ha-Emek. The paper noted that “the events of last Saturday are none other than a spontaneous outbreak that demonstrates, in an extreme fashion, the ongoing shaky relationship between the populations of Nazareth and Migdal ha-Emek.” Radio Cairo even interrupted its broadcasts to report on “an armed ambush carried out on an Arab sports team from Nazareth by a Jewish sports club.”

Two months later, in May 1964, the city of Nazareth celebrated the promotion of its team from the third to the second division. More than 6,000 spectators from Nazareth and the surrounding area came to watch the promotion game against Beitar Kiryat Shmona—a game that Bnei Nazareth won 8 to 0. When the match was finished, thousands of fans stormed the field and carried the players on their shoulders through the streets of Nazareth, accompanied by encouraging cheers from the city’s inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> For more than fifteen years, ha-Po’el Bnei Nazareth was the dominant Arab team and as such was a source of pride for many Arabs.

The 1960s also witnessed the appearance of the first Arab player in the National League (the first division). The first player, Hassan Boustouni, started to play in Maccabi Haifa team in 1963.<sup>37</sup> In 1967, ‘Ali ‘Othman, a fifteen-year-old from Beit Safafa (an Arab neighborhood in west Jerusalem), was recruited to play for ha-Po’el Jerusalem’s senior team. Out of a sense of identification with Boustouni and ‘Othman, many Arab fans came to watch these athletes play in games throughout the country. While Boustouni was admired for the goals he scored, ‘Othman gained a reputation for being a stubborn and determined player, a “real man” who would stand up to anyone. For more than a decade, ‘Othman was seen as the symbol of the Arab as fighter and resister, so different from the collective Arab self-image shaped by the wars of 1948 and 1967 and by the military government. Identification with ‘Othman contained the possibility of reinforcing masculine, national self-respect without having to risk the potential sanctions involved as a result of identifying with other heroes, such as the Fatah movement, which was starting to gain momentum at exactly the same time.

However, the opportunity presented to ‘Othman was very rare for Arab athletes. Along with the tendency to integrate came the final admission of the Zionist state’s hegemony. The connection between the Arab ha-Po’el teams and the Histadrut and the ruling Mapai party gave them an establishment look, and even though they did not give rise to popular opposition, they did pose a challenge to political elements with a national consciousness. Accordingly, the 1950s and 1960s saw the formation of independent teams with Arab names, such as al-Ahali and Abna al-Balad. In the beginning of the 1960s, an independent Arab league was run in the Triangle area in north-central Israel. This league included teams from Tira, Kalanswa, Kafr Kassem, and Taibeh.

Al-’Ard (lit., “the Land”), a political movement with an Arab nationalist agenda that was banned by Israeli authorities in 1964, was involved in running these independent sports clubs. Having run into difficulties in setting up a nationwide political group, one of al-’Ard’s dominant activists, Saleh Baransi of Taibeh, tried to use the sports clubs as an organizational and symbolic infrastructure. These attempts appear to explain the military government’s intervention in 1964, when it cancelled independent sports competitions and arrested the leading organizers, apparently out of concern that they were dealing with the establishment of a subversive organizational infrastruc-

ture.<sup>38</sup> This independent movement was supposed to solve the “dilemma” of cooperation with the state. But the response of the military government clarified the structural boundaries within which the Arabs in Israel were permitted to form their collective identity. Sabri Jiryis, active in the al-ʿArd movement and exiled from Israel for his political activity, wrote about this subject in his book *The Arabs in Israel*:

Al-ʿArd has therefore been “accused” in an excessively heavy-handed way, of helping to open independent sports clubs in certain Arab villages. On one occasion, the Military Governor of the Central Region declared a village in the Triangle a closed area, in order to prevent a soccer match between teams from Galilee and the Triangle. The establishment of sports clubs among the Arabs of Israel is regarded as an unforgivable sin by the Military Government and its associates. Indeed, what need is there to form independent sports clubs? It was long ago decided that the Arab department of Histadrut, the General Federation of Jewish Labor, which is under absolute control of the Mapai Party, is alone allowed to establish clubs in the Arab villages, which clubs alone, are allowed to form soccer teams, and that these circles alone are empowered to decide how soccer shall be played, and with whom.<sup>39</sup>

The attempts by nationalist activists to use soccer as an organizational and symbolic platform again prove the political potential of soccer. However, considering the power relations between the state and al-ʿArd activists, the potential of soccer as a producer of national consciousness could not be realized. In an interview I conducted with Shmuʿel Toledano, the prime minister’s adviser on Arab affairs between 1965 and 1977, Toledano explained the outlook that guided the government regarding sports clubs in the Arab areas:

Regarding sports, we asked ourselves whether it would be good that the Israeli Arabs will have sports, and we came to the conclusion that it would be. Why would it be good? We knew that it was impossible to set up a youth movement for them with nationalist outlooks like ours. The Arabs did not have any ideological, nationalist youth movements in the State of Israel. So we thought that sports was definitely the right answer, given the times. After all, they were working a lot of the time. But we preferred for it to be within the framework of existing clubs—Maccabi, ha-Poʿel, and so on—and not separate sports clubs. This was the policy for years. The policy was no Arab banks and no Arab factories, nothing.

Regarding sports, we were concerned, we had an interest, definitely, that Israeli Arabs, the Arab youth, would have something to do, that they would be busy with sports and not with other things. So we took things into our own hands and supported and encouraged—again, as far as it was possible, within existing frameworks—Maccabi and ha-Poʿel. . . .

As soon as a youngster is unemployed, has nothing to do, he hasn’t got anything to do with his nationalist aspirations in the way that a Jewish youth does—Gadna, the army—he hasn’t got all that, so obviously the concern about nationalist tendencies is bigger. Not that that is for sure—someone can be unemployed for a long time, someone might have nothing to do, but he won’t go in that direction anyway. But starting to take drugs and so on, from a broad national perspective, we saw that as a negative thing.

They didn’t have any power or money or a leadership that would organize them independent teams. So most of the teams came into the existing frameworks. The Histadrut, and us, we supported that. And when you’ve got a body that is giving you financial help, and soccer shirts, and helping with the field, one can assume that they’ll come to it. They’ve got no problem of belonging here. It’s not like the party issue. We wanted them to join the existing parties and not to set up independent parties. For years that was the policy, and in the end it failed. The Arabs have got a problem—why should an Arab join the Labor Party, Meretz, or Likud? But

with sports, there's no problem to be in ha-Po'el Taibe or Maccabi Tamra. It doesn't hurt their pride or nationalist feelings.

Toledano implicitly justifies Jiryis's claims: the State of Israel purposely prevented the establishment of independent Arab sports clubs out of awareness of the mobilizing potential in the hands of whoever is running the soccer team. However, as a counter-balance, the state supported whoever wanted to be incorporated within the state-supervised system. According to Toledano, this support achieved two aims: it eliminated the dangerous vacuum of free time, which could threaten stability by way of crime or Arab national identity, and it blocked the alternative—-independent sports clubs that could develop into a base of political or organizational power. The sports clubs that the state provided could be attractive for young Arabs because of sports' apolitical image (as opposed to parties, which are declaredly political organizations).

Unconnected to this, Maccabi's management discovered that ha-Po'el's organization within the Arab population was giving it a political advantage in the various sporting associations. In the football association, as well as in other sports, representation was determined by the number of active athletes.<sup>40</sup> Also, the ha-Po'el teams in the Arab settlements could not answer the needs of all of the young athletes; there was just not enough room in their ranks. Therefore, starting in the mid-1960s, many Maccabi-affiliated sports clubs were set up.

In many Arab villages, the division between the Maccabi and ha-Po'el soccer teams overlapped with the villages' familial alliances, political coalitions, and class-based dividing lines. The competitive and achievement-oriented character of soccer matches, as well as the clear demarcation between two distinct organizations that made the game possible, allowed the different teams in the settlements to turn dramatic representation into conflict between them. A repetitive pattern that can be seen, for instance, in the villages of Sakhnin, Kafr Kana, Um al-Fahem, and Judeideh was division along class lines. It is historically difficult to determine the extent to which the financially strong families moved closer to the Zionist establishment and the extent to which that increase in proximity contributed to an improvement in their financial situation. Yet it is clear that many of the Arab villages developed a positive correlation between financial standing and the width and depth of contact with government and Histadrut officials. Accordingly, the ha-Po'el teams were very often identified with the rich families, while Maccabi became "the people's team."<sup>41</sup> On the political plane, ha-Po'el's establishment image meant that Maccabi attracted social groups whose political tendencies were more nationalist.

Despite the importance of the rivalry between ha-Po'el and Maccabi, Arab soccer nevertheless remained within the state's rules of the game. Attempts to form an independent and separate Arab framework ceased after the failed effort of 1964 and reappeared only after about two decades with the formation of the Islamic League.

#### THE 1970s AND 1980s: REPRESENTING THE STATE AND THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE GAME

In 1974, the government of Israel discussed the issue of Arab sports in Israel and received the recommendation made by the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs to the effect that sports in the Arab sector should be encouraged, but not in independent

frameworks.<sup>42</sup> Thus, official validity was given to the policy that had in fact been pursued for the fifteen years preceding the decision. In light of this decision, the 1970s saw a continuation of the gradual process of incorporating Arab teams into the soccer leagues. On the individual level, Arab players rose to fame, and in the 1976 Montreal Olympics an Arab soccer player (Rif'at Turk) represented Israel on the international stage for the first time.

At the end of the 1970s, the generation of Arab players from the beginning of the 1960s reached positions of leadership in the local authorities, which accordingly started to be more generous in their support of soccer teams. As a result, at the start of the 1980s a new generation of young soccer players began to set the tone of the Arab teams. A period of success for Arab teams was in the making, which might have led to the formation of an Arab "flagship team."

But the beginning of the 1980s also constituted a historic turning point in Israeli soccer. Instead of the social meanings of soccer ranging between entertainment and politics, soccer increasingly began to be seen as a type of commerce.<sup>42</sup> The rules of the market gained an ever-increasing influence over the dynamics that channeled soccer players between clubs. Jewish clubs with a distinctive ethnic characteristic that until then had been successful (the Bulgarian Maccabi Jaffa, the Yemenite Shimshon Tel Aviv, and so on) began to wane, and big money became the language of sports. The rules of the market determined that a club's success depended mainly on the extent of its support—and indeed, since 1983, no team that plays outside of the three big cities has been crowned champion.

According to one significant criterion, a correlation between the size of a club's hometown and the league it played in began to appear. The absence of any large Arab towns in Israel (Nazareth, the largest Arab town in Israel, had a population of 65,000 in 1999 and is the twentieth-largest city in the country) immediately ruled out the possibility of continued Arab representation in the top league. Young talents in Jewish or Arab settlements of a similar size are quickly scouted by the senior clubs and move to play for them, where their economic future and social prestige look far more secure. The rules of the market that became dominant in soccer prevented the coalescence of a successful Arab team supported by a traditional core of fans, as was the case with the large teams in Israel. In the lower leagues, the two-way flow of players between Jewish and Arab clubs increased, as well. Jewish players were bought as reinforcements by nearly every Arab team that aspired to promotion, a further factor that reduced the possibility of crystallizing national pride around these clubs.

Instead of the formation of an Arab flagship team, the position of Arab players improved on an individual basis. The most symbolically significant phenomenon was the dominant presence of Arab players in the Israeli national team. By representing the State of Israel, Rif'at Turk (thirty-four international performances between 1976 and 1986) and Zahi Armeli (played twenty-eight times between 1982 and 1986) symbolized the tension and contradictions inherent in being an Arab citizen in the Jewish state. It is true that Arab athletes previously had 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 soccer. The presence of Turk and Armeli on the national team presented Jewish and Arab soccer fans alike with fundamental questions as to what they had in common, as well as what separated

them. Ultimately, Turk's and Armeli's representing the State of Israel raised few objections from the Arab population. Further, the dismissal of Shlomo Kirat, an Israeli international defender, following racist comments he made about Turk and Armeli clarified the fact that the Israeli national soccer team played an inclusive role with regard to the state's Arab citizens. Turk and Armeli, as well as other Arab stars who played in the top teams in Israel's senior league, were role models for many young Arabs, who saw in soccer a path for upward mobility and a way to escape the marginality of being Arab citizens in the Jewish state.

These integrationist practices could not help but arouse an isolationist reaction. For the Islamic Movement, which was starting to flourish in the mid-1980s, successful integration in the sporting world presented a two-fold threat. The first was soccer's secular orientation, which threatened Islamic identity; the second was the way that soccer threatened to "Israelize" the Arabs in Israel. Responding to the steady flow of Arab youngsters to soccer, the Islamic Movement founded the "Islamic League" in 1986.

The Israeli Football Association did not take kindly to the establishment of a separate Islamic League, and the Parliamentary Committee for Education, Culture, and Sport raised concerns about the consequences of this new organization. However, the steps taken against the al-'Ard movement of the 1960s in the context of military rule were no longer options, given the public atmosphere of Israel in the mid-1980s, and the formation of the Islamic League was duly completed. The Islamic League is not a professional one, and all of its activities are carried out voluntarily. It therefore did not presume to constitute an attractive alternative to the games played under the Israeli Football Association's auspices. The players in the Islamic League are either veterans of other teams or players who for various reasons had not managed to integrate themselves into the regular leagues. However, the people behind the Islamic League saw themselves as offering a "moral alternative." The declared aim behind the setting up of the league was to create a sporting framework that would preserve Islamic values.

According to oral testimonies of two key officials in the Histadrut, an additional significant development took place in the mid-1980s, when the Israel Lands Authority began to allocate pieces of land to the Arab local authorities with the express purpose of building sport fields.<sup>44</sup> Against the background of the traditionally hostile relationship between the Israel Lands Authority and the state's Arab citizens, the decision to allocate land purely for sporting purposes raises the hypothesis that the Israeli power-holders, even in the 1980s, saw sports as a political tool for ruling over the Arab minority. Figure 1 shows a gradual rise in the number of Arab clubs playing in the Israeli leagues from the mid-1980s, and this could be related also to the authority's decision. A further noteworthy incident was the conference organized by the Supreme Tracking Committee for Arab Israelis in 1988, which was dedicated entirely to sports and at which it was even decided to create a tracking committee for sports affairs.

#### THE 1990s: ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

The 1990s saw a marked rise in the number of Arab teams playing in the Israeli leagues, and in the 1996–97 season an Arab team, ha-Po'el Taibeh, was the first to play in Israel's senior league. Taibeh's promotion inspired a wave of hope among

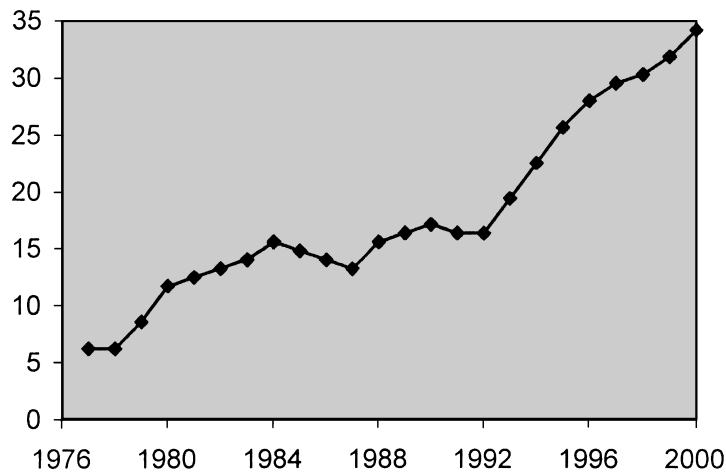


FIGURE 1. Percentages of Arab teams in the Israeli Leagues, 1977–2000 (excluding the lowest division).

many Arab soccer fans that there might be a permanent Arab presence in the top league, but to their disappointment Taibeh was demoted after only one season, partly because of the lack of a suitable home field.<sup>45</sup> Yet the story of ha-Po'el Taibeh, which reached the newspapers' front pages, is only the tip of the iceberg of a widespread phenomenon—that of more and more Arab teams reaching the middle divisions.

In the 1998–99 season, four Arab teams played in the second division, constituting one-quarter of the second-division teams, with the same trend found in the lower divisions. As can be seen in Figure 1, in the 1976–77 season, only eight Arab teams played in the top eight divisions (first and second divisions, two A divisions, and four B divisions). In 1992, twenty-one Arab teams played in those divisions, and within seven years that number almost doubled to forty teams.

The Arab teams' achievements are even more striking when one takes into account the strong correlation between the size of the team's hometown and its representation in the higher divisions. Because the Arabs in Israel are spread out in smaller settlements than those that the Jews live in, the starting point from which they must climb to the senior divisions is lower. To bring this point home, the median number of residents of settlements that were represented in the second division in the 1997–98 season was about 50,000, and in the third division about 29,000.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the Arab teams represented much smaller settlements. In the 1997–98 season, three Arab teams played in the second division, representing settlements whose residents numbered between 15,000 and 25,000; in the A division ten settlements were represented, the median number of residents of which was about 13,000.

Also, interest in Arab teams rose in the 1990s in comparison with Jewish support, which is demonstrated by the large number of tickets sold by Arab teams relative to Jewish ones. Table 1 presents the number of tickets sold by different clubs in the second division for the 1997–98 season relative to the settlement's population. The Arab teams are compared with Jewish teams that represent towns of similar sizes.



TABLE 1 *Ticket Sales for the Second Division in the 1997–98 Season<sup>a</sup>*

Team <sup>b</sup>	Population in 1996 (1,000s)	Ticket Sales in 1997–98 <sup>c</sup>	No. of Tickets per 1,000 Population
Kafr Kana (A)	13.0	5,651	434
Taibeh (A)	25.3	7,245	287
Sakhnin <sup>d</sup> (A)	19.4	2,925	151
Nes Tziona (J)	22.3	2,759	124
Kiryat Gat (J)	46.1	4,493	97
Yavne (J)	28.9	2,298	90

<sup>a</sup>Not including season-ticket holders. Only settlements represented by one team are included where that team is the senior one.

<sup>b</sup>A = Arab town; J = Jewish town.

<sup>c</sup>Data from the Israeli Football Association.

<sup>d</sup>Given a punishment of eight away games, five of which were closed to supporters.

The success of Arab teams was accompanied by success on the individual level. More and more Arab players earned positions on Israel's senior teams—and even in the international squad. After a decade in which there were no Arab players on the national team (six years of which saw the Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which may or may not be connected), two were called up in 1998: Najwan Ghayeb and Walid Bdeir. Ghayeb and Bdeir became heroes of Arab street culture; Arab journalists closely follow their successes; the players star in commercial companies' advertising campaigns; and babies are even named after them. On 16 April 1998, following Israel's victory over Argentina, the following was published in the Arab sports newspaper *al-Majala a-Riyadia*: "How proud we were when we heard the broadcaster Yoram Arbel cry out the name of that Arab star. . . . Najwan's goal was, and still is, a subject of conversation among Arabs, and I have seen the happiness of everyone who has spoken about the game, and I have noticed the pride of the Arab population in that Arab star."<sup>47</sup>

#### THE ABSENCE OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

Palestinian sports has come a long way since the formation of the General Palestinian Sporting Association in 1934—from the days that Jewish athletes were boycotted by the Arab Association to the goal that Najwan Ghayeb scored wearing Israel's colors. In its formative years, Palestinian nationalism used sports as a nation-building tool, but under Israeli rule, sports in general—and particularly soccer—became a tool for integration and assimilation, underplaying the national identity of the Arabs in Israel. Marxist approaches to the sociology of sports have maintained that this is the role that sports must necessarily play, in that its optimistic ideology creates an illusion of a lack of structural restraints and thus serves the status quo.<sup>48</sup>

However, the inhibition of national consciousness is not necessarily the only role that soccer can play. Even in the particular case of the Palestinian people, there is some evidence to the contrary. As I showed at the beginning of this article, when the

Palestinians were a majority, in the Mandatory period, soccer was used to promote national consciousness. Five decades later, under the autonomous rule of the Palestinian National Authority, the Palestinian national soccer team arouses an extravagant popular enthusiasm in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its international matches attract people from all strata and regions. After winning third place in the Pan-Arab games in June 1999, the Palestinian national soccer team was welcomed in Gaza by thousands of cheering fans who were waving Palestinian flags. By contrast, when the same team visited the Palestinian towns inside Israel, Sakhnin and Nazareth, three months later, its two games did not attract more than few hundreds spectators—far fewer than an ordinary league game in those towns.

The Palestinians under Jordanian rule provide another example of soccer as a forum for Palestinian nationalism. Indeed, the Jordanian policy toward sports also derived from the need to promote cultural unity after the drastic demographic transformation following the 1948 war.<sup>49</sup> However, the Palestinians in Jordan express collective national pride in the soccer sphere through their flagship team, *al-Wihdat*.<sup>50</sup>

In the Israeli–Palestinian case, a number of factors separated sports from the minority’s nationalism, primarily the huge gaps in the power held by the state, on the one hand, and a society that had lost its elites, on the other. When Palestinian society fell apart in 1948, soccer was not rooted in popular culture to any great extent. The collective memory of the Arabs in Israel does not contain any recollections of pre-1948 Palestinian sports, mainly because the elite that used to organize it was exiled from the country.

The construction of an organizational infrastructure during the 1950s and 1960s with the help of governmental and semi-governmental bodies, and the prevention of any independent organizations, created a cognitive association between the game and the political status quo. The Arabs in Israel identify soccer with “Israeliness”; this Israeliness in turn would seem to contradict Palestinian nationalism.<sup>51</sup> Soccer in Israel, then, is seen as an opportunity for integration, while expressions of Palestinian nationalism within the sporting arena are taken as a threat to that opportunity. This argument can explain the relative weak presence of Arab soccer fans in the informal games of the Palestinian national team inside Israel in October 1999. The Palestinian national team’s visit could undermine the integrative role that is ascribed to soccer by these fans.

From a historical and socio-economic perspective on the order of events, Arab success in soccer came too late for it to serve as a locale for nationalism. Just as soccer’s sporting infrastructure in the Arab settlements was starting to bear fruit at the beginning of the 1980s, the rules of the game changed. The laws of the market damaged the ability of ethnically or nationally identified teams, or teams representing small settlements, to achieve notable success. In the 1990s, Arab teams succeeded despite these developments, with *ha-Po’el Taibeh*’s single year in the National League providing the exception that proves the rule. In the absence of a “flagship team,” the best Arab players are snapped up by the big Jewish clubs, and Arab fans join Jewish ones in joint support of those teams. So Arab Palestinian nationalism on the bleachers remains mute.

Palestinian soccer players themselves play a significant role in hiding and blurring Palestinian identity.<sup>52</sup> The most striking example is that of Walid Bdeir, from Kafr Kassem, a player on the Israeli national team since 1998. Bdeir makes every effort to

be treated as a professional soccer player and blur his national identity. However, his familial biography stands as an obstacle to this aim: Bdeir's grandfather was murdered in the Kafr Kasseem massacre in 1956 by Israeli troops.<sup>53</sup> After an excellent performance in an international match against Austria in October 1998, Bdeir was shown on Israeli television wearing the Israeli national soccer uniform, stating that he feels pride when he hears the Israeli national anthem. When asked by the journalist 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 to contribute to the integrative image of the soccer 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 soccer field. Instead, by physically participating in a national symbol such as the national soccer team, the Arab citizens are expected to identify with the national anthem, which actually excludes them from the Israeli collective by its words. By the statements of Arab players, more than by their mere participation in the national team, they contribute to the reproduction of the separation between soccer and Palestinian nationalism.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note that the current Arab sports press in Israel harbors a strong opposition to these tendencies and attempts to develop a sense of Arab national pride around the Arab teams.<sup>55</sup> These attempts, however, do not have much influence on the behavior of the masses on the bleachers and the players' aspirations. Even the violent events of late September and early October 2000, which are considered a watershed in the relations between the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel and the state,<sup>56</sup> have not changed the place of soccer in Arab-Jewish relations. In the first weeks after the events, the Israeli soccer low leagues were almost paralyzed, because the police were afraid to attend the Arab towns and villages (police must attend every soccer match). However, the games have since been renewed, and until the end of the season they were interrupted only on the "Land Day," when the police again prevented playing the games in the Arab towns.

During the first season after these events, expressions of national protest were extremely rare on the soccer bleachers. It seems that the Palestinians in Israel continue to distance their national identity from the soccer sphere and to channel expression of nationalism to other spheres. Most of the Arab fans regard soccer as a channel of integration in Israeli society. In the soccer stadium they can suspend their national identity, which constitutes an obstacle in day-to-day life, especially in interactions with Jews. This image of soccer as an a-national and apolitical sphere is in part a significant legacy of the formative years of the 1950s and 1960s.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143.

<sup>2</sup>John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), 129.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Bradley, "The Irish in Scotland—Football, Politics and Identity," *Innovation* 7 (1994): 423–39.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremy MacClancy, *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* (Oxford: Berg, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Lincoln Allison, "Sport and Politics," in *The Politics of Sports*, ed. Lincoln Allison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 1–25.

<sup>6</sup>Dag Tuastad, "The Political Role of Football for Palestinians in Jordan," in *Entering the Field—New Perspective on World Football*, ed. Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 123–40.

<sup>7</sup>Arjun Appadurai, "Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket," in *Modernity at Large*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 89–112; Stephen Wagg, "Mr. Drains Go Home: Football in the Societies of the Middle East," in *Giving the Game Away—Football, Politics and Culture on Five Continents*, ed. Stephen Wagg (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 163–78; Thomas Stevenson and Abdul-Karim Alaug, "Football in Yemen: Rituals of Resistance, Integration and Identity," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32 (1997): 251–65; Ossie Stuart, "Players, Workers, Protestors: Social Change and Soccer in Colonial Zimbabwe," in *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*, 167–80.

<sup>8</sup>Dan Rabinowitz, "Oriental Nostalgia—How Did the Palestinians Become 'The Arabs of Israel?'" (in Hebrew), *Teoria Uvicoret* 4 (1993): 141–51.

<sup>9</sup>David Tidhar, *Be-Sherut Ha-Moledet* (Tel Aviv: Yedidim, 1961).

<sup>10</sup>See *The IFA Yearbook, 1959*, Wingate Sport Archive, AD 1.21/31, Naetanya, Israel.

<sup>11</sup>Wingate Sport Archive, AD 1.21/15.

<sup>12</sup>*Filastin*, 17 May 1945.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 June 1945.

<sup>14</sup>Unfortunately, this association's documents were lost in the 1948 war. Because of this loss, the main source about the association's activity is the sports section of the newspaper *Filastin*.

<sup>15</sup>Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 74.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>17</sup>On 29–30 May 1945, the French army, in a harsh reaction to anti-French demonstrations in Syria and Lebanon, shelled and bombed Damascus from the air, resulting in some 400 victims.

<sup>18</sup>Protocol of the directorate of the Football Association, Wingate Sport Archive, AD 1.21/1.

<sup>19</sup>See in this context the importance that was attributed to sports by one of the most notable Palestinian intellectuals, Khalil Sakakini, in *Kadha ana ya dunya* (Beirut: al-Ittihad al-‘Amm lil-Kuttub wa-al-Suhufiyin al-Filastiniyin, al-Amanah al-‘Ammah, 1982), 142.

<sup>20</sup>Adnan Abu-Ghazalaeh, "Arab Cultural Nationalism in Palestine during the British Mandate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1 (1972): 37–63.

<sup>21</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishar, 1971).

<sup>22</sup>John Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986); Sugden and Bairner, *Sport*.

<sup>23</sup>Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

<sup>24</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 176.

<sup>25</sup>Allison, "Sport and Politics."

<sup>26</sup>The Alliance of the Workers of the Land of Israel was founded by the Histadrut as a joint Jewish–Arab body. In effect, it formed the organizational infrastructure for what was to become the "Arab Department" of the Histadrut.

<sup>27</sup>Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 75–136; Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel—A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 130–33.

<sup>28</sup>James Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830–1950* (London: Longman, 1978).

<sup>29</sup>Azmi Bishara, "Israeli-Arabs: Reading a Fragmented Political Discourse," *al-Ahram*, 5–11 February 1998.

<sup>30</sup>Lustick, *Arabs*, 211–13.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.; Zeev Rosenhek, "The Origins and Development of a Dualistic Welfare State: The Arab Population in the Israeli Welfare State," in *Sociology and Anthropology* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995).

<sup>33</sup>Many young Arabs from villages that lacked a sports infrastructure wrote to the Histadrut or their own initiative and requested help. In a letter sent by the Histadrut on 30 June 1955, candidates from the settlements of Jaffa, Lod, Shefa-amer, Tira, Taibeh, Jaljulia, 'Ar'ara, Furaydis, Mizra'a, and Kafr Yassif were invited for training as sports coaches.

<sup>34</sup>*Al-Yawm*, 16 May 1960.

<sup>35</sup>"Items Concerning Minorities," State Comptroller's Report to the Prime Minister's Office for the Financial Year 1963–64, "Israeli State Archive ISA, G 6312 220/0400/10/3.

<sup>36</sup>*Al-Yawm*, 25 May 1964.

<sup>37</sup>Hassan Boustouni was the nephew of Rustom Boustouni, a former member of Knesset from the left-wing Zionist party Mapam.

<sup>38</sup>Lustick, *Arabs*. See *ha-'Olam ha-Zeh* 1390, 29 April 1964, and 1407, 26 July 1984.

<sup>39</sup>Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), 138–39.

<sup>40</sup>Nurit Reshef and Jeremy Paltiel, "Partisanship and Sport: The Unique Case of Politics and Sport in Israel," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 6 (1989): 305–18.

<sup>41</sup>This is in paradoxical opposition to the declared ideologies of the parties behind the sports clubs. Ha-Po'el was founded as the sporting organization of the Workers' Party, and Maccabi was set up by the civic-liberal, non-socialist minority of the Zionist movement.

<sup>42</sup>The material on this subject is still classified. This discussion is based on the testimony of Shmu'el Toledano, who was the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs at the time.

<sup>43</sup>Amir Ben-Porat, "The Commodification of Football in Israel," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 33 (1998): 269–76.

<sup>44</sup>This is according to two independent testimonies of Victor Shaharabani, head of the Histadrut's sports division between 1962 and 1987, and Nawaf Musalha, a member of the Histadrut leadership at that time and later Israeli deputy foreign minister. Shaharabani argued that the decision taken by the Israel Lands Authority was a strategic one. I found no proof of this decision in the official publications of the authority.

<sup>45</sup>A detailed description of ha-Po'el Taibeh's year in the National League can be found in Amir Ben-Porat and Biladi Biladi, *All the Way Back—ha-Po'el Taibe's Journey into the National League* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2001).

<sup>46</sup>The calculation includes a settlement only 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).

<sup>47</sup>On 8 April 1998, Israel played Argentina in an informal game. Israel won 2 to 1, with two Arabs playing for Israel. One of them, Najwan Grayeb, scored Israel's first goal.

<sup>48</sup>Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport—A Prison of Measured Time* (London: Pluto Press, 1989 [1975]).

<sup>49</sup>Suha Maher Khalifeh, *The History of Organized Sports in Jordan* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami, 1986).

<sup>50</sup>Tuastad, "Political Role of Football."

<sup>51</sup>Azmi Bishara, "The Arabs in Israel: Reading a Fragmented Political Discourse," in *Between the "Me" and the "Us"* (in Hebrew), ed. Azmi Bishara (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999).

<sup>52</sup>See in this context "Hareshima Hamitkademet," *Yedi'ot Aharonot* (sports section), 9 April 2000, 12–13.

<sup>53</sup>On 29 October 1956, a group of peasants from Kafr Kassem returned to the village from their fields, unaware that their village was under curfew. Forty-seven of them were shot to death by Israeli troops.

<sup>54</sup>See also *Ma'ariv* (sports section), 11 October 2000, on the defiant indifference of Bdeir to the "Intifadat al-Aksa" in October 2000.

<sup>55</sup>Tamir Sorek, *Arab Football (Soccer) in Israel—Playing with Identities* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001); idem, "Arab Soccer in Israel as an 'Integrative Enclave,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26 (2003): 422–50.

<sup>56</sup>As'ad Ghanem and Sarah Osacky-Lazar, "*Intifadta el-aqtsa*"—*bekerev ha-ezrahim ha-falastininim be-Yisrael: sibot ve-totsa'ot* (Giv'at Haviva: Institute for Peace Research, 2001).

