



## **Between football and martyrdom: the bi-focal localism of an Arab-Palestinian town in Israel**

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### **Abstract**

Studies of the relationship between nationalism and localism have brought evidence that these orientations might maintain either relations of opposition or congruence. By conceiving of localism mainly as a strategy, this paper argues that localism can be used alternately as an anchor of nationalist narrative *or* as an alternative to nationalism by the exact same community. This argument is illustrated by the case of Sakhnin, an Arab-Palestinian town in Israel. Local pride in Sakhnin has developed around two separate foci: a nationalist heroic narrative of martyrdom and the success of the local football team. These two foci developed in complete isolation, since the first is embedded in a Palestinian nationalist narrative while the latter is oriented toward the Israeli Jewish public. An ethnographic study follows the construction of these separate spheres and a survey conducted among 174 men in the town confirms that involvement in the football sphere correlates with both local pride and integrative orientations.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, localism, minorities, Israel, Palestinians, sport

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### **Introduction**

On the evening of 18 May 2004, while Israeli troops stormed Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip in another attempt to crush the Palestinian uprising against the occupation, both Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat found time for phone calls concerning seemingly trivial issues. Sharon phoned the manager of an Israeli football team to congratulate him on winning the Israeli State Cup, which made it eligible to represent Israel in the UEFA (Union European Football Association) cup. Prime Minister Sharon emphasized his confidence that the team would represent Israel in an honourable manner in Europe. That same evening,

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President Arafat called the director of an Arab football team to congratulate him on his team's victory, telling him that the team brought pride to the Arab nation.

What makes the co-occurrence of these two events remarkable is the fact that Sharon and Arafat had called the same director, Mazen Ghenayem, and referred to the same team – Ittihad Abna' Sakhnin (translated from Arabic as 'United Sons of Sakhnin'), after the team became the first Arab team to win the Israeli State Cup. This dual congratulation, while apparently paradoxical, was possible due to the peculiar and multifaceted image of Sakhnin among both Jewish Israeli and Arab Palestinian publics.

Since 1976 Sakhnin has gradually emerged as a visible juncture of two separate significant processes with far reaching implications on the collective identity of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel and on collective local pride in Sakhnin. These two processes are the emergence of a local national narrative of heroism and sacrifice, and the centrality of football in the negotiation of political belonging and allegiances. My main argument relates to the finding that these two foci of collective identity rarely intersect: The heroic narrative leans toward Palestinian nationalism, underlining the historical continuity of Sakhnin as a bastion of struggle and the common fate of Sakhnin and the rest of the Palestinian people; in the football sphere, Sakhninians are managing a dialogue with the Jewish-Israeli public in an attempt to achieve acceptance by the Jewish majority and create an 'integrative enclave' (Sorek 2003a).

Sakhnin's residents, local politicians and sport functionaries consistently manoeuvre the meaning of these spheres, alternately highlighting one and hiding the other, in order to navigate between different expectations stemming from their subtle position as both Arab-Palestinians *and* Israeli citizens. Holding a shaky and marginal status in both Israeli and Palestinian spheres, these social agents play with the meaning of football, martyrdom, and their local identity in order to employ a differential 'impression management' toward distinct audiences in diverse contexts.

Irving Goffman noted that individuals perform different roles depending upon their audiences and situations (Goffman 1959). A 'role conflict' might emerge when there is a potential contradiction between the expectations stemming from different roles. A crucial pre-condition for a successful performance and impression management in such circumstances is a strict segregation between various spheres of life that keep the different audiences separate. The case of Sakhnin illustrates that Goffman's insight, while originally referring to individuals, is relevant on the collective level as well. Sakhnin demonstrates how in conditions of high tension between different components of collective identity, social communities might compartmentalize their public space, dedicating separate social realms to distinct orientations of collective identity.

### Localism as a strategy

The relationship between local and national identities is elusive. Historically, they frequently have been treated as maintaining a conflictual and competitive relationship, since modern national movements subverted local identities and loyalties, reconstructing and replacing them. Therefore, classical ‘modernist’ theories of nationalism tend to assume that local identities based on kinship, clan, or the village are gradually replaced by macro-territorial national identities, based on the borders of the nation-state (Rokkan 1975; Gellner 1983). This perception of localism as traditionalism is reverberated as well in the sociology of football, as some scholars identify local loyalties as traditional remnants in a modern world (Giulianotti 1999: 15).

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that since the late twentieth century we are witnessing the global re-emergence of local loyalties due to the decoupling of the nation and space (Delanty 1999) and as an expression of an emerging transnational consciousness (King 2000). This postmodern and transnational perspective does not set the ‘localism–nationalism’ dualism as parallel to the ‘traditional–modern’ dualism as modernist scholars do. However, by describing the decline in nationalist ideologies and in the authority of the nation-state as a convenient background for the emergence of localism, they reproduce the same argument about the competitive relationship between nationalism and localism. Studies that illustrate how localism might be a strategy of people who face difficulties in adapting themselves to a nationalist discourse (Kiely, McCrone and Bechhofer 2000), or those that analyse tensions between local historical narratives and the official narrative of the nation-state (Stacul 2003: 134–44), follow the exact same logic.

On the other hand, studies in several contexts illustrated that local identities might play a mediating role in the ways an emerging nation is imagined (Purnell 2002; Robertson 2001). This mediating role has even greater importance in two contexts: first, in the nationalism of settler societies, the creation of local communities is interwoven into the process of nation building. For example, the establishment of local border villages by the Zionist movement was a top-down engineered process that established strong local loyalties in the service of a national project. The other context is in cases of stateless nationalism such as Palestinian nationalism, when the national narrative is reproduced by local narratives (Tamari 1999), partly due to the lack of control over non-local space.

The above mentioned ethnographic and historical studies focus on case studies where the ‘local’ and the ‘national’ maintain either competitive or complementary relations. The case of an Arab Palestinian town in Israel presented in this article illustrates that these tendencies can maintain a co-habitation: since localism is not an *orientation* but an instrumental *strategy* (Kiely, McCrone and Bechhofer 2000), its relationship with nationalism is context

dependent. Therefore, the same local community can promote local pride in different and sometimes even contradictory paths. In this case two central and separate channels for local patriotism are simultaneously produced – one of them is embedded within a nationalist narrative while the other aims at blurring the exact same narrative. Therefore, I refer to this phenomenon as *bi-focal localism*.

Before demonstrating the production of bi-focal localism, I will provide a necessary brief outline of the studies that examined the collective identity of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel.

### **The Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel**

About 16 per cent of Israeli citizens are Arab-Palestinians. This population of 1.1 million people consists of those Palestinians who remained in the boundaries of what became Israel after the 1948 war. They have been classified by Rabinowitz (2001) as 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 state borders.

Since the military rule that was imposed on Arab regions inside Israel was removed in 1966, social scientists have developed a growing interest in the complicated identity of this population, focusing on the tension between Arab-Palestinian national identity and Israeli civic identity. This combination is a source of persistent predicaments for several interrelated reasons.

First, the Arabs in Israel face contradictory expectations by Israeli Jews and by Palestinians outside Israel. Their Arab-Palestinian identity places them in the position of ‘an enemy within’ for the Jewish majority, at the same time that they are considered suspiciously ‘Israelified’ Arabs by Palestinians outside Israel. Second, their point of reference for assessing their quality of life is confusing. As Arab citizens in a state that defines itself as Jewish, they suffer from diverse forms of discrimination (Dichter and Ghanem 2003). At the same time they enjoy more political freedom and economic opportunities than Arab citizens in neighbouring countries. Finally, their status as Israeli-Palestinians contradicts the standardized symbolic structure of national identity (Anderson 1991), which is intolerant of ambiguities and incongruity between ethno-national affiliation and political boundaries.

Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, it does not seem that Arabs in Israel collectively abandoned either of these two orientations. Smooha (1999) has shown that the percentage of Arab citizens who identify themselves as both Palestinians and Israelis rose significantly from 1976 to 1995. According to Smooha, the politicization of the Arab minority in Israel since 1967 signifies a gradual integration into the Israeli public sphere, and hence, the

demonstration of Palestinian identity in itself is part of an 'Israelification process'. The recognition of this phenomenon has brought scholars to identify and investigate the diverse strategies that enable the Arabs in Israel to cope with the tension created by their sensitive location in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These strategies could be divided into two crude categories: *separation* and *substitution*.

*Separation*: the separation thesis has different versions but it generally asserts that different dimensions of identity co-exist in total separation, and each one of them gains prominence in different spheres. This separation is attained by means of psychological mechanisms such as compartmentalization and by becoming politically indifferent (Peres and Yuval-Davis 1969). The separation thesis reverberates in later studies such as Rouhana's (1988), which suggested distinguishing between emotional (Arab-Palestinian) and formal-instrumental (Israeli) elements of identity. Other versions of the separation thesis reject the distinction between a 'shallow' civic component compared to a deeply-rooted but suppressed national component (Bishara 1999; Suleiman 2002). As Bishara argues – 'in a long term social process the tool becomes a part of the person who uses it' (Bishara 1999: 176), and therefore Israeli identity is more than instrumental, even though it is perceived as contradicting Palestinian identity.

*Substitution*: according to this explanation, Arabs in Israel tend to distance themselves from clear national or civic identities and to emphasize non-national identities – communal, religious, clannish or local (Bishara 1999; Ghanem 1998). This distancing is facilitated by their peripheral status vis-à-vis Jewish-Israeli society, as well as Palestinians living outside Israel. This double marginality enables the Arabs in Israel to define their identity without the need to commit themselves to either one of the two referent groups (Al-Haj 1993).

According to this perspective, the blossoming of the Islamic Movement since the mid-1980s is partly a result of the difficulties in reconciling Israeli and Palestinian identities. Similarly, the mushrooming of Arab football teams during the 1990s is a reflection of this tension and a practice that enhances local identities.<sup>2</sup> This growing localization of collective identity in other contexts is frequently attributed in sociological literature to the globalization process and the decline in the status of the nation-state. However, as has been argued, for the Arab citizens of Israel there are much more powerful forces that count.

My argument in this article aims to take the separation thesis from the field of social psychology that focuses on internal psychological mechanisms toward a combination of dramaturgic, macro-constructive and conflictual sociological approaches. Within this perspective, I will emphasize how the production of localism is a crucial element in the separation process. Namely, localism is a strategy of coping with the predicament of identity, and it is performed

differentially in various contexts in order to maintain the necessary separation. As I will argue, substitution is used as well as a sub-strategy within the broader separation strategy, since it is only during the interaction with Israeli Jews that the Arabs in Israel feel the need to dull their Palestinian identity.

## **Methodology**

The existing literature on the production of localism and football fans' identity is based mainly on ethnographies and interpretative media research, while quantitative scholars have neglected the field. Obviously, ethnography is crucial for learning about meanings, interpretation, and especially to follow the process through which these meanings are produced. At the same time, the post modernist anti-positivist instinct and the reluctance to quantify variables and control them have left the academic debate on identity and the political power of sport to the subjective interpretation of each scholar.

Obviously, every sociological inquiry might benefit from integrating diverse methods; however, this is especially relevant to the study of the political power of sport, which is effective partly because of its a-political disguise (Allison 1986), and therefore is frequently latent. Therefore, some aspects of the relationship between sport, identity and politics might not be seen by observation or found in texts. From a certain aspect, it is only the aggregation of data from many individuals that might be able to draw the line between the sphere of sport, formation of collective identities, and political mobilization.

This article, therefore, incorporates findings from both ethnographic study in Sakhnin and a survey conducted among 174 men in the same town. In addition, I analyse press coverage of Sakhnin as well as local publications. The ethnographic study took place in two stages: June 1998 to May 2000, and March to July 2003. During both periods, I visited Sakhnin several times each month, and during the second period I spent a month as a resident in Sakhnin. I conducted formal interviews and informal talks with Sakhnin residents, attended fifteen local football matches, and three annual commemorative demonstrations.

## **Research design of the survey**

*Sample:* 174 male residents of Sakhnin aged 16 to 40 years were sampled by proportional geographical sampling (geographic borders in Sakhnin highly overlap with familial, class and political divisions in the town (Rosenfeld and Al-Haj 1990)).<sup>3</sup>

*Data collection:* The survey was conducted in April 1999. A structured face to face questionnaire-based interview<sup>4</sup> was held with each one of the

interviewees at their home. The two interviewers were male students from Sakhnin and the neighbouring village of Deir Hana.

*Dependent variables:*

*1) Voting intentions in the elections for Prime Minister planned for 29 May 1999:* In this regard, two indicators of integrative tendencies were measured: a) whether or not the interviewee intended to vote in the upcoming election. This is a conventional measure for probing political integration, although in this particular case a note of caution must be included. For Arabs in Israel, not voting has at least two possible different meanings – lack of interest in politics, or, on the other hand, a conscious act of protest. These contradictory meanings require the use of a second indicator. b) Whether or not the interviewee intended to vote for a Jewish-Zionist candidate. This indicator **does not** measure acceptance of Zionist ideology, as one would assume. Rather, since only Zionist candidates had a realistic chance of winning, it represents an active attempt to influence the Israeli political sphere, and therefore I consider it a valid indicator for the interviewee's orientation toward the Jewish majority.

At the time the survey was conducted, there were four candidates in the race: three Jewish-Zionists candidates from the Labour, Likud, and the Centre Party (Barak, Netanyahu, and Mordechai) and one Arab candidate from the Democratic National Assembly Party (Azmi Bishara). It is noteworthy that in the direct election for Prime Minister (employed in Israel only between 1996 and 2001) the turnout among Arab voters was considered crucial for the chances of the Labour Party candidate to win the election. In essence, the voters had several options: (i) Not voting: this strategy, as has been said, can be interpreted either as a form of protest (this was widely used later in 2001) or as reflecting a lack of political involvement; (ii) Voting for Bishara, whose political agenda emphasized Arab nationalism and the establishment of separate Arab institutions; since he had no realistic chance of winning, voting for Bishara could have been considered a form of protest. Putting a blank ballot had the exact same political effect and I, therefore, consider them in the same category for statistical purposes; (iii) Voting for one of the Zionist candidates: this kind of behaviour had the greater potential for concrete influence on the Israeli political map, and therefore it represented the highest integrative tendencies.

*2) Pride in belonging to an identity (identifiable group):* Interviewers presented the interviewees with eight cards labelled with one of the following identities to belong to: Sakhnin, the hamula (clan/extended family), the Palestinian people, the Arab people, the State of Israel, membership of a religious group (Muslim or Christian), the Galilee region, and being male. The interviewees were then asked to choose the three cards representing the identities of which they were most proud to be a part. These choices were used

to create dichotomous variables for each respondent ('chose / did not choose' a certain identity).

*Independent variables:* Involvement in the local and the Israeli football culture. The questionnaire requested respondents to state the frequency of their involvement in football both via the media and by attending Sakhnin's football games. The interviewees were also asked to list the television and radio sport programs they watched or listened to.

*Controlled variables:* 1) *age*; 2) *education*: The interviewees were asked to state how many years of school they had completed; the variable was used later as a dichotomous variable: academic education (more than 12 years) vs. non-academic education. 3) *Occupational status*: the interviewees' occupation was coded according to the status index created by Kraus and Hodge (1990). 4) *Level of religiosity* was measured by self ranking on a scale of 1 to 5.

*Statistical procedures:* In order to measure the correlation between voting intentions and involvement in the football sphere independent of demographic variables, I used a series of logistic regressions. Due to restrictions related to the sample size I did not include more than three independent variables in each equation.

### **Bi-focal local pride in Sakhnin**

Although local communities played an overriding role in defining Palestinian identity even before 1948 (Tamari 1999: 3–4), the new political circumstances in which the Palestinian minority in Israel was trapped has strengthened the status of local identity. Under the watchful eyes of military governors (in place from 1949 to 1966), Arabs in Israel faced difficulties in travelling from one town to another as well as in organizing country-wide supra-local frameworks. The state actively contributed to the fragmentation of the Arab minority along local lines, together with emphasizing ethnic, religious, and familial boundaries, as a means of control (Lustick 1980).

Even after military rule was removed, because of their limited access to the state's political centre, local politics became, by default, the main sphere in which Arab public leaders could exert power (Rosenfeld and Al-Haj 1990). Most important, however, is the fact that unlike the Jewish majority in Israel, which controls the common space and landscape, the Palestinian minority has no Arab common space outside of the Arab settlements, and they also lack a strong urban centre that is collectively recognized as a symbolic centre or

capital. Therefore, almost every cultural production necessarily acquires a clear local character that overshadows national connotations.

Beyond these structural constraints, localism is strategically used by Arabs in Israel in two different ways. In those towns that can demonstrate a history of struggle, resistance, and sacrifice, these themes enable a self-presentation of possessing a higher rank in the imagined hierarchy of Palestinian national mythology. Therefore, against the collapse of the urban centres and a large number of Palestinian villages in 1948, heroic local narratives have developed among the remaining villages that give meaning to their survival. People in these places have formulated local myths of heroism that ascribe their non-expulsion to their unique steadfastness (see for example Robinson 2003). This form of local pride is congruent with the hegemonic narrative of Palestinian nationalism, and is projected toward an Arab-Palestinian audience.

Localism is also oriented toward a Jewish-Israeli audience. Here, the emphasis of local identity aims to dull Palestinian national identity, which is frequently perceived as potentially dangerous to their status as Israeli citizens. Hence, interactions with Jews tend to be accompanied by an emphasis on institutions with a clear local identity. The tremendous popularity of local Arab football teams and the local-patriotic rites which evolved around them stem in part from their potential to provide a warlike masculine and competitive pride that is non-nationalist and therefore does not contradict 'Israeliness' (Sorek 2003a).

What makes Sakhnin an especially interesting case is the dramatic and spectacular co-appearance of both kinds of local pride. Sakhnin is a mainly Muslim town, with a small Christian minority of 6–10 per cent,<sup>5</sup> situated in the heart of the Galilee. Although it gained formal recognition as a city by the Israeli government in 1995, in terms of its urban texture, level of municipal services, and self-image of its citizens, Sakhnin remains a large and very dense village. Also important is the fact that Sakhnin is flanked on three sides by Jewish settlements and military installations. Its efforts to expand its municipal boundaries have consistently failed due to the demographic anxieties of Israeli authorities which have employed a consistent policy of 'Judaization of the Galilee' and considered any Arab expansion as contradicting this goal (Bashir 2004).

In 2004 Sakhnin was ranked by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics 33<sup>rd</sup> of 210 localities in Israel in an inverse ranking of socio-economic level.<sup>6</sup> It suffers from a lack of sources of income and a high unemployment rate,<sup>7</sup> shaky infrastructure and lack of public services necessary for a city of its size.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Sakhnin's collective self-image as well as its external reputation emphasizes a high level of local pride.

This image is supported by the interviewees' reactions in the survey when they were asked to choose three identities of which they were most proud. As Table I demonstrates, 77 per cent of them chose the Sakhninian identity, more

TABLE I: *Percentage of interviewees who chose each identity as one of three identities of which they are proud to be part*

Identity chosen	% (absolute numbers between parenthesis)
Sakhnin	77% (132)
Palestinian People	58% (99)
Arab Nation	40% (69)
Muslims/Christians	38% (65)
Hamula (clan)	33% (57)
Male	32% (54)
The State of Israel	13% (22)
Galilee inhabitants	11% (18)

than any other identity. This finding stands in sharp contrast to a similar survey conducted among a nationwide representative sample of Arab young men aged 18–50. On the nationwide level, local identity ranked only third after religious identity and the hamula (Sorek 2006), while these two identities were ranked fourth and fifth in Sakhnin, respectively.

The relative weakness of religion in Sakhnin, as reflected in the survey, supports the interpretation that the strong local identity of the town is a peculiar reaction to the crisis of national identity (the *substitution* strategy). The nationwide success of the Islamic Movement at the municipal level in the late 1980s and 1990s almost skipped Sakhnin, and although the status of religion in Sakhnin is much stronger than it was two decades ago, its secular character still distinguishes it from most of the Arab towns in Israel. Its inter-religious tolerance is relatively firm and stable and also distinguishes it as well from other mixed towns. Localism in Sakhnin, therefore, seems to be functionally equivalent to religious piety in similar other towns.

Returning to the survey, the most common combinations of two identities were the two local-national combinations: 43 per cent choose both Sakhninian identity and Palestinian identity as a source of pride, and 26 per cent choose Sakhninian and Arab identities. These findings suggest that local pride might be produced in conjunction with national pride.

Two spheres are highly likely to serve as social sites for the production of this local–national patriotism. The first of those is the annual commemoration of Land Day, referring to the events of 30 March 1976 when Israeli police killed six Arabs (five of them Israeli citizens) during nationwide demonstrations following a governmental plan to confiscate Arab land. Three of the victims were residents of Sakhnin, and they are remembered as local and national martyrs symbolizing the centrality of Sakhnin in the struggle of Palestinians in Israel to defend their land. The second focus of local pride is the local football team, the most successful Arab team in Israel at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, whose high level of achievement, including the winning of the State Cup in 2004, were completely disproportionate in comparison to the town's size.

It is noteworthy that both spheres are not monolithic. Various social agents are involved in struggles over the level of integrative tendencies or nationalist orientations that both Land Day (Rabinowitz 2001; Sorek 2002; Yiftachel 2000) and football (Sorek 2003a) might represent. However, the dominant voice in each sphere is easy to identify. The result is the creation of a 'bi-focal' local pride based on a fragmented public space.

### **'The martyrs' village': a narrative of struggle**

Sakhnin is a town that has existed thousands of years and is proud of the nationalism of its people. You know, we gave many martyrs, whether it was in October 2000, in 1976 or in 1948. Our entire history is a history of people who love their land, who always identify with the Palestinian people. (Interview with a political activist in Sakhnin, 29 March 2003)

After 1948 Sakhnin's population increased dramatically, from 3,000 in 1948 to 6,100 in 1961, reaching 24,000 in 2004. At the same time, Sakhnin suffered from a continuous shrinking of its land due to a series of land confiscations. The last attempt by the government to confiscate land from Sakhnin was halted due to an organized and determined reaction. In February 1976 the Israeli government announced its intention to confiscate lands from owners in Sakhnin and neighbouring Arab villages A'rabeh and Deir Hana. The general strike and the large-scale demonstrations against the confiscation plan evolved into violent clashes between demonstrators and the Border Police troops, who opened fire using live ammunition on people in the villages, killing six Palestinians.

The Land Day martyrs dramatically changed the public image of Sakhnin among both Arabs and Jews in Israel. Overnight, Sakhnin turned from another medium-sized peripheral village in the Galilee into a symbol of national struggle. Following the fortieth day after Land Day (the end of the traditional Muslim mourning period), *al-Ittihad*, the Communist Party's mouthpiece and the only daily newspaper in Arabic that time, wrote:

As early as before the setting of the sun on 30 March 1976, the name of Sakhnin and her sisters was known by all. Her fame spread across the horizon not as a victim of a natural catastrophe [. . .] but as weaponless villagers who defended their people's future and its destiny, relying on their right. The slogan that was heard from thousands of throats became real: 'By blood, by spirit, we will redeem you, O Galilee'.<sup>9</sup>

The centrality of Sakhnin in the emerging Land Day myth was acknowledged by the Committee for Protecting Arab Land,<sup>10</sup> which decided to build the central commemorative monument for all six victims in the main cemetery

in Sakhnin. This monument reflects a transitional phase and a historical juncture. It is the first attempt by Arabs in Israel to carve out a symbol of national heroism and sacrifice in the public arena, linking it to a major Palestinian national theme: the land. The monument became an iconic symbol of Land Day and it serves as the final gathering point in annual Land Day ceremonies.

Since 1976, Land Day has been commemorated annually in the Arab settlements in Israel by massive rallies and parades; in most years, the main rally has taken place in Sakhnin, signifying the centrality of the town in the event. For the generations who grew up after Land Day, the annual commemorations have become a natural anchor in the local and national calendar. Although the dilemmas and tensions characterizing the identity of Arabs in Israel have been repeatedly reflected in Land Day ceremonies, no other day in their collective calendar has been more intensively loaded with Palestinian national symbolism. This aspect became more visible after the Oslo accords in 1993, when the waving of Palestinian national flags was legalized. Since then Palestinian flags have dominated the rallies, together with slogans imported from Palestinian demonstrations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the singing of the Palestinian national anthem.

An example of the centrality of Land Day events in the local sense of patriotism can be found in a book published by the local public school in 1996, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school. The book describes the history and geography of Sakhnin and includes a sub-section entitled 'The sites in Sakhnin and the reasons behind their names'. The editors divided the Sakhnin region into five sub-areas and chose to begin with the 'al-Mal Area – known as area number 9 in the Galilee,' which is the area that included the 10,000 acres confiscated from Sakhnin in 1976 which had sparked Land Day. In the spatial perception of the editor, this part of Sakhnin (unpopulated and containing no monuments) stands at the top of the local geographical hierarchy – because of its relevance for Land Day.

In October 2000 the wounds were reopened when Israeli police killed thirteen Arab demonstrators inside Israel during the first days of the second Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Again, Sakhnin suffered as two of its residents were killed. These events further reinforced the linkage between national martyrdom and local pride, another annual day of commemoration was born, and another monument was built – this time with a greater local orientation since, although on both monuments all the victims of the events are mentioned, the new monument emphasized the names of the two local victims.

The sacrifices made by Sakhnin on Land Day and later, in October 2000, serve as an anchor for the construction of a glorified past for Sakhnin. Since 1999, during the month of March, the local branch of the Islamic Movement has presented a photo exhibition of all Sakhninian national martyrs since the

rebellion of 1936–39. In a book published by the movement following October 2000, the author emphasized the heroic role of Sakhnin in 1948 in defending the other Arab villages in the area (Ghenayem 2000: 17–24). Based on the memories of town elders, the author portrays an heroic narrative that posits Sakhnin at the top of the Palestinian national hierarchy among Arab villages:

... after the fall of 'Akka and the neighbouring villages, the people of Sakhnin took upon their shoulders the mission of protecting the villages located on its western side, such as Mi'ar, Kawkab, Sha'eb, and al-Birwa, and attempted with their humble means to protect these villages.<sup>11</sup>

It is noteworthy that this kind of publication is available only in Arabic. The success of Sakhnin's football team has given the people of Sakhnin frequent access to major Hebrew media and an abundance of opportunities to present themselves before a broader Israeli-Jewish audience. Yet in these presentations, the heroic narrative is totally absent.

This absence is a part of a broader pattern of relationships with Jewish audiences but it also has a specific economic incentive. Since the late 1990s, the municipality in Sakhnin has invested great efforts in cultivating a successful tourism industry. These efforts could be hampered (and Jewish visitors repulsed) not only by violent riots but also by an emphasis of Sakhnin's nationalist and wary image. It is also in this context that we should understand the statement made by a woman from Sakhnin, while speaking with a reporter of the Hebrew daily 'Ha-aretz' immediately after the State Cup was won:

Now they will no longer speak of us only in the negative – of Land Day and demonstrations. I believe this will change perceptions. We are part of the State, we want to be part of the State, to live together, but we are not always understood. Perhaps through football they will see our true face.<sup>12</sup>

### **The integrative face: football**

As a small and peripheral village, relatively detached from the cultural transformations that occurred in the large Palestinian cities during the first half of the twentieth century, Sakhnin did not have a football team before 1948. However, some of the men who served in the British police were exposed to the game and brought it home. The Palestinian defeat in 1948 undermined many traditional institutions that were blamed for the destruction of Arab Palestine in the war. According to the same logic, some new cultural forms were intensively adopted, partly stemming from an urge to be 'promoted' on an imagined scale of modernity. The universality of football and the sporting ideology that celebrates achieved status and disdains attributive status (Bromberger 1995; Guttman 1978) has made it a vivid representation of

'progress'. According to the memories of the town elders, in the early 1950s children were already playing football with a rag ball in the village's alleys. At the same time, in many of the Jewish settlements in the Galilee, the game was played with a 'real ball', established goals, and formal leagues. Therefore, in the subjective perception of many young male villagers, football was one of several badges of modernity; in the absence of the modern Palestinian cities that were destroyed in 1948, including their football infrastructure, Jewish settlements were considered the ultimate agents of this modernity.

The production of this cognitive association between football and Jews was intensified by the active involvement of the Israeli authorities in promoting football in Arab towns. From the 1950s onward officials invested efforts in order to channel the energies of young Arabs into a sphere that was considered both a-political and under surveillance (Sorek 2003b). In Sakhnin two football clubs were created in the 1960s. The first one, Ha-po'el Sakhnin, was founded in 1961 with the financial support of the 'Histadrut', (the General Organization of Workers in Israel).<sup>13</sup> Five years later, a second club was founded in the village, this time by the rival Zionist sports organization 'Maccabi'.<sup>14</sup>

The two teams attracted fans based mainly on overlapping familial, geographic, religious, class, and political lines. 'Ha-po'el' was traditionally considered as the established team, representing larger, stronger, and wealthier families who were politically closer to Mapai, the ruling Zionist party. Maccabi, established later, served as a default option for smaller families with less political influence in the internal politics of the village and fewer material resources; its supporters traditionally tended to vote more for the Communist party and considered themselves to be more 'nationalist'.<sup>15</sup>

These distinctions, however, gradually lost their significance as the demographic-political overlap unravelled. A significant turn occurred in 1992 when the two clubs united in order to form a strong representative team: 'Ittihad Abna' Sakhnin'. Some of the most loyal fans of Maccabi are nostalgic about the days when they had their own team and are still somewhat bitter, especially because in the official documents of the IFA the team is named Ha-Poel. It seems, however, that for the vast majority of football fans in Sakhnin the transition was relatively smooth.

For fans of Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow or United and City in Manchester this unification might sound fantastic. As Brown (2004) and Hand (2004) showed, although both United and City fans hold strong local pride, they both reject solidarity with the other club based on their shared locality. In fact, this merger was an exceptional and unprecedented step among Arab teams in Israel as well, since familial alliances within localities are strong enough to usually prevent this kind of unification. It is very likely that Sakhnin's uniqueness is related to the power of earlier local patriotism, which is in great part a result of Land Day mythology and the annual commemoration of shared sacrifice.

This merger turned out to be a very successful one. First, in terms of popularity – 91 per cent of the interviewees in the survey defined themselves as fans of the united team – even before it rose to the first division. Second, in terms of achievement – in no less than four seasons the united club moved from the fourth division up to the second division of the IFA. Within ten years of the merger, Sakhnin reached to the first division, and the following year it won the State Cup.

This success was achieved in large part due to the generous support of the local municipality. In 1998, Arab municipalities in Israel spent 0.8 per cent of their budget on average to support local football teams – 2.4 times more than Jewish municipalities of similar size (Sorek 2006). In Sakhnin, whose football team still played in the second division in 1998, 1 per cent of the total municipal budget was spent on financial support for the team. This over-investment in a football club might have two sorts of explanations. First, although there is not enough evidence to support this assumption, both social theory and popular belief assume that sport might reduce social exclusion and urban crime, and this belief motivates municipal authorities to invest in sport (Long and Sanderson 2001). This assumption is a major motivation for the Arab municipal leaders to invest in sport as well (Sorek 2006).

Second, and more relevant to the main argument of this article, football is used as a means of collective ‘impression management’ (Goffman 1959: 208–212) aimed at the Jewish public. As Smith writes, ‘Sporting initiatives may therefore provide a credible, realistic, popular and penetrative means of influencing the way in which destination images are formed’ (Smith 2001: 136). The irony is that the strategy of using sport events as a means of image reorientation has primarily been implemented by ‘industrial’ cities whose gritty industrial character and image is a barrier for the evolution of tourism (Smith 2001: 129). Sakhnin is far from suffering from over-industrialization. Rather, sport is used in Sakhnin to distance Sakhnin from its nationalist separatist image among the Jewish public. Encouraging tourism is only one component in a wider set of integrative channels that football might promote.<sup>16</sup>

### **The local and the national**

In early 1999, a few months after a heated municipal election, Khalil, a devoted fan of Sakhnin, told me:

This is what’s good about football. The city has two separate parts, but in football everything is together. You know, before the merger, we had many troubles, but since the merger in football, the Christians, the Muslims, the Communists, the Labour party – everyone is together in football . . . it is not like in the past when we had a coffee shop for ha-Po’el and a coffee shop for Maccabi.

TABLE II: *The relation between attendance in the local football stadium and the choice of various identities as source of pride*

Frequency of attendance in Sakhnin's football matches	Sakhnin (as 1 <sup>st</sup> choice)	Sakhnin (as one of three choices)	The Palestinian people	The Arab nation	The State of Israel	Religion	Hamula (clan)	The Galilee	The men
0 to 2 games	26%	70%	54%	49%	10%	45%	34%	11%	27%
3 games or more	42%	80%	59%	35%	14%	31%	32%	10%	34%
$\chi^2$	p < 0.05	p < 0.1		p < 0.05		p < 0.1			

Khalil ascribes to football the role of uniting the people of Sakhnin, and assumes that the unification of Ha-Po'el and Maccabi made a great contribution to this unity. Whether he is right or whether local patriotism predated the merger (as the Land Day narrative might suggest), statistical evidence supports Khalil's implicit argument that local pride and football fandom are closely related. Table II illustrates that local pride is not only statistically correlated with attendance in the local football stadium but is the only identity examined that has a significant, positive correlation with game attendance.

It is noteworthy that Arab identity had a negative correlation with game attendance. This finding might seem surprising: many examples of ethno-national 'flagship teams' like the Basque team Athletic Bilbao or the Palestinian team 'al-Wihdat' in Jordan are evidence that successful minority football teams often turn the sports arena into a central location for the expression of nationalist feelings. As I explained (Sorek 2003b), although Arab sport journalists do ascribe nationalist meanings to Arab success in football, most Arab fans on the terraces are reluctant to adopt these meanings. They see football as a rare opportunity for seeking acceptance by the Jewish majority and therefore they exclude potential conflictual messages from the sphere. This finding is also probably related as well to the historic role of the state in promoting both local identities and football among the Arabs in Israel with the intentional aim of inhibiting national consciousness (Lustick 1980; Sorek 2003b).

However one would expect that Sakhnin, as a central location of Arab resistance within Israel, would be an exception and its game nevertheless would be immersed with national feelings. In reality, however, Palestinian national symbols are excluded from the football sphere, even in Sakhnin. In the unwritten code of Arab–Jewish relationships in Israel, expressions of Palestinian nationalism in the public sphere are considered a form of protest and defiance. Therefore, in order to avoid confrontation, these expressions have been pushed into the private sphere; within the public sphere they are used only in

demonstrations and on commemorative days like Land Day, the annual anniversary for October 2000, and Nakbah Day.<sup>17</sup>

The shared understanding between Arabs and Jews of the meaning of Palestinian symbols as signs of protest makes it extremely difficult to create social spaces that simultaneously contain both these symbols and integrative tendencies. The changing face of Mazen Ghenayem's salon illustrates this point. On my first visit to the home of Sakhnin's football teams' Chairman in 1999, the team was in the second division and Mazen's exposure to the Hebrew media was relatively rare. The decoration on the walls of his salon included diverse forms of Palestinian national symbols, including trophies with the colours of the Palestinian flag and photos of Yasser Arafat. Following the team's success and the intensive visits of Jewish public figures and journalists, his salon became a semi-public sphere. On my visit to his house in August 2004, I noticed that all Palestinian national symbols had disappeared or were covered with a curtain.

The assumed 'a-political' nature of football and its integrative potential has created a sphere in which the people of Sakhnin tend to emphasize their commonalities with the Jewish citizens of Israel more than with their Palestinian compatriots. Hence, the audience on the stands, as well as local players, managers, and local politicians, make noticeable efforts to abate national tension and to mark the football stands as an integrative territory.

For this purpose, the demographic diversity of Sakhnin's football team cadre is very useful. With the growing professionalization of the club, the relative number of Arab players has declined. Only half of the players who won the State Cup were Arabs. The non-Arab players are Israeli Jews and foreign players from various countries. However, these changes did not impair the status of the club as a focus of local pride (partly due to the fact that most of the Arab players are local), nor did it prevent Arab fans from outside Sakhnin from considering it as representing all Arabs in Israel. For the club's Managers and local politicians, however, the multi-ethnic character of Abna' Sakhnin was an important asset. It is a fact that they mention very frequently in their public declarations to the Hebrew media as proof of the tolerant nature and integrative tendencies of Sakhnin.

The perception of football as a stage for performing a tolerant and integrative role is common among fans as well. Jamal (a pseudonym) is a very devoted fan of Sakhnin. He owns a small private business on the main road of Sakhnin, which until October 2000 served many Jewish customers. In an interview with him he explained the importance of football, as he sees it:

What I want is that when a football team comes to Sakhnin, people will know that we are not violent. This is the image of Sakhnin in particular, and the image of the entire Arab sector. I want them to know that people here are not racist and want to live in dignity and peace.

Football is seen as an opportunity to perform the role of 'good citizens'. But how is this image actually constructed in the football sphere? Observation of football matches and public expressions of the various agents involved reveals several concrete practices. Beyond the exclusion of national symbols one can find extensive use of Hebrew, an ungrudging attitude towards the Jewish players, selective and cautious reactions to provocations launched by opposing Jewish fans, and extra enthusiasm in demonstrating hospitality to visiting Jewish teams (Sorek 2003a). In the following paragraphs I will describe a specific incident that illustrates how the fans of Sakhnin struggle to imbue the football encounter with integrative meanings and to deflate national tension.

On 2 February 1999, Ittihad Abna' Sakhnin played in the final of the second division's Toto Trophy. The game took place in the national stadium in Ramat Gan, the most central site of Israeli football. Sakhnin played against Ha-Koah Ramat Gan, but the attention and alertness of the fans was directed toward the encounters with fans of another team that was scheduled to play in the subsequent game.

This team was Beitar Yerushalaim (Jerusalem), a team whose fans have been traditionally identified as right-wingers, and racist anti-Arab slogans constitute an integral part of their repertoire. Past encounters of Beitar fans with another Arab team, Ha-Poel Taybeh, ended up in a nationalist verbal confrontation (Ben-Porat 2001).

Sakhnin and Beitar fans were located on opposing stands in the stadium. Beitar fans did not wait long before starting the provocations, shouting 'Death to the Arabs! Death to the Arabs!' At first Sakhnin fans, determined to shape the encounter as 'purely sportive' rather than as a national confrontation, simply ignored them. When the game started, Sakhnin's fans began cheering their team with the regular repertoire, mainly Hebrew slogans such as 'Sakhnin, the first (goal) is on its way' and 'The cup is ours!' Beitar fans tried again: 'Death to the Arabs', 'Haide Bibi' ('Way to go, Bibi,' referring to the nickname of the right-wing Prime Minister at the time, Binyamin Netanyahu). Sakhnin's fans reacted again in Hebrew: 'Zewel, Zewel' ('Garbage, Garbage!') and 'Yerushalaim 'al ha-Zayin' (literally translated – 'Jerusalem on our dick'). One lone fan dared to violate the consistent attempt of his colleagues to avoid any expression that might produce an Arab–Jewish confrontation and cried 'Death to the Jews' – but he was immediately silenced by other fans.

Beitar fans continued: 'Haide Bibi!' At this point something happened that best illustrated the urge of Sakhnin's fans to paint the event as an internal Israeli dispute rather than an Arab–Jewish struggle. They shouted 'Bibi son of a bitch' and 'Haide Barak', referring to the opposition candidate for the Prime Minister position at that time, Ehud Barak. Ignoring the 'Death for the Arabs' cries and praising the opposition candidate was a strategic choice: 'Haide Barak' was a slogan that, at that time, half of the Jewish public in Israel could identify with.

This incident illustrates the successful efforts made by Sakhnin's fans to maintain the definition of the situation as 'purely sportive'. It is noteworthy, however, that this definition is fragile and sensitive. Although it is successfully constructed in most games, under extreme circumstances, like when Sakhnin's fans feel they have been blatantly discriminated against by the referee, it might collapse. This kind of scenario constitutes a metaphor too close to the socio-political reality in which the Arabs in Israel live. As has been stated, the collapse of the 'integrative enclave' is relatively rare, but when it happens, it crashes loudly (Ben-Porat 2001).

### **Football as an integrative sphere – a statistical examination**

Arguing that football is dedicated mainly to the integrative tendencies of Sakhnin means that individuals perform their integrative role in this sphere and save expressions of national protest for other occasions. This is indeed what is happening, according to fans' own explanations concerning their behaviour in the stadium and outside of it (Sorek 2006). At the same time, however, another prediction stems from this argument. If the football sphere indeed has 'integrative qualities', individuals who are involved in it would be expected to display a higher level of integrative tendencies than individuals who are not involved in it.

The cross-tabulation of sport involvement and voting are presented in Tables III and IV. The results in Table III testify for strong association between the tendency to vote for a Zionist candidate and diverse indicators of involvement in the football sphere: attending games in the stadium, listening to live broadcasts of the game on the radio, opening the sports section in the newspaper first,<sup>18</sup> and watching the weekly television programme that covers Israeli football. Moreover, the association is strongest for the most direct form of involvement – attendance in the football games of Sakhnin. Among those who intended to vote for a Zionist candidate, 85 per cent had attended a Sakhnin match at least once during the season in which the survey took place, compared to 70 per cent among those who did not intend to vote, and only half of the fourteen Bishara voters.

The results in Table IV demonstrate a small, positive, and statistically insignificant association between attendance in the stadium and the tendency to vote in the 1999 election. At the same time, they testify to a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between attendance in the stadium and the tendency to vote for a Zionist candidate. The frequency of attendance in the stadium was found to be less crucial than the question whether or not the interviewee attended games in the stadium at all. Among those who did not attend the local football stadium at all, 27 per cent intended to vote for a

TABLE III: *Involvement in football and voting intentions*

	Among voters for a Zionist candidate	Among those who do not intend to vote	Among those who intend to vote, but did not say/know for whom	Among voters for the Arab candidate
Attended at least one game of Sakhnin***	85%	70%	52%	50%
Listened to football live radio broadcasts in Arabic***	76%	44%	55%	50%
Open the sports section in the newspaper first****	59%	32%	22%	17%
Watching the weekly TV program which covers Israeli football****	67%	36%	35%	50%
N =	79	30	25	14

*Notes:*

Chi-Square significance.

\*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*  $p < 0.1$ .TABLE IV: *Attendance in the local football stadium and voting intentions*

Stadium attendance frequency	No attendance	Low attendance (1–4 games)	High attendance (5 games or more)
Voting in 1999 election	79%	86%	85%
Voting for a Zionist candidate***	27%	70%	60%
N =	45	43	63

*Notes:*

Chi-Square significance.

\*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*  $p < 0.1$ .

Zionist candidate, while among those who attended the stadium at least once, 64 per cent intended to vote for a Zionist candidate.

Furthermore, this correlation survives even if we control potential variables that might predict political behaviour. Tables V and VI show two sets of logistical regression models where the dependent variable is intention to vote in the 1999 election (Table V) and the intention to vote for a Zionist candidate for Prime Minister (Table VI).

While tendency to vote in the election is predicted mainly by academic education, involvement in football is found to be the **only** variable that significantly predicts voting for a Zionist candidate.

TABLE V: *Logistic regression models predicting participation in the 1999 election (coefficients  $\beta$  are standardized)*

	I	II	III
Attendance in local games	0.27	0.13	0.13
Education (academic = 1)	0.60**		0.64*
Level of religiosity	-0.10		
Occupational status		0.30	-15
Age		0.06	
N =	156	142	145
Constant	1.72	1.66	1.71

*Notes:*\*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*  $p < 0.1$ .TABLE VI: *Logistic regression model predicting voting for a Zionist candidate in the 1999 election (coefficients  $\beta$  are standardized)*

	I	II	III
Attendance in local games	0.64***	0.58***	0.64***
Education (academic = 1)	0.03		0.31
Level of religiosity	-0.21		
Occupational status		-19	-0.39
Age		0.14	
N =	156	142	145
Constant	0.00	-0.09	-0.09

*Notes:*\*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*  $p < 0.1$ .

In 1999, Prime Minister Netanyahu of the Likud party was widely considered by the Arab public as responsible for halting the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, economic stagnation, and reversing the gains made by Arab local authorities against discrimination under Rabin’s government in 1993–5. Voting for a Zionist candidate in 1999 represented a calculated and tangible political step to influence Israeli politics. Although painfully regretful about their choice later, at the time electing Barak (the Labour party candidate) was viewed by most of the Arab voters as their collective goal. This perception was shared even by Azmi Bishara who withdrew from the race to ensure Barak’s victory! And indeed after Bishara withdrew, combined with the earlier withdrawal of Mordechai, Barak remain the only ‘anti Netanyahu’ candidate and subsequently received 95 per cent of the Arab vote.

It can be said, therefore, that football involvement is not correlated with general involvement in the Israeli political sphere but it is strongly correlated with practically-oriented political behaviour. This correlation and the lack of mediation by other potential predictors of political behaviour further confirms and validates the argument that football in Sakhnin is a sphere in which strong integrative discourses are produced.<sup>19</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

The case of football and martyrological memory in Sakhnin illustrates that the possible relations between localism and nationalism are not only limited to opposition or congruence. By conceiving localism mainly as a strategy and following the practices that construct meanings in different contexts, I argue that localism can be used alternately as an anchor of nationalist narrative *and* as an alternative to nationalism. The people of Sakhnin navigate between local-national heroism in the Palestinian sphere, being ‘just Sakhninian’ (like the people from Berwick-upon-Tweed that use localism to avoid national identification (Kiely, McCrone and Bechhofer 2000)), and embracing localism as a safety net for their participation in the Jewish-dominated Israeli sphere. Obviously, the bi-focal localism of Sakhnin should be seen as a private case of multiple strategies: it should be assumed that, under certain circumstances, more than two foci could emerge.

The case of Sakhnin largely differs from most of the literature written about football, localism and nationalism. Sport teams are very frequently an important stage for displaying both local identities and national identities. These two sets of identity, as already mentioned, might complement or contradict each other. For example, scholars of Spanish football emphasize the historic identification of local teams such as FC Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao with the nationalist aspirations of their regions, Catalonia and the Basque Country, as well as with tendencies of de-centralization in the Spanish nation-state (Crolley 1997; MacClancy 1996). In these examples, especially under the Franco regime, local pride was co-produced with the ethno-nationalist sentiments of the minority and has competed with Spanish nationalism. A different sort of relationship is presented by King (2000), who interprets of the localism of local ‘Mancunian’ Manchester United fans and the animosity of some of them to the English National Team as an expression of an emerging transnational consciousness.

Although Sakhnin’s residents belong to an ethno-national minority, and express a high level of local pride, the success of the local football team is not accompanied by accentuation of the localism–nationalism nexus. One reason for this is that since the 1950s football has been identified by Arabs in Israel with both the state and modernity (Sorek 2003b). A powerful

'football-modernity-state' associative triangle has been created, which promoted in parallel lines several processes: The hegemony of the state (as 'provider of modernity'), the popularity of football, and the canalization of local loyalties in the football sphere to integrative orientations. This stands up in a sharp contrast to the assumed 'authentic' status of football in Manchester and its early identification with independent 'Basque Modernity' in Vizcaya.

Therefore, for Barcelona and Bilbao fans under the Franco regime, football was a relatively risk-free opportunity to demonstrate a distinct national identity (Crolley 1999). Namely, it was a 'nationalist enclave'. For Sakhninians, the football sphere is an 'integrative enclave', where their local identity is oriented toward a non-nationalist direction, similar to some Mancunian fans in King's study. However, there are two additional important differences between Manchester and Sakhnin. First, Sakhnin fans never express hostility toward Palestinian national symbols; they only exclude them from the football sphere, where they might interfere with the desired integrative tendencies. Second, due to the severity and the intensity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for Arab-Palestinians in Israel the nationalist discourse constitutes a daily challenge, and therefore their need to dismantle it in certain spheres is much more urgent than for any European fan communities.

In this context, this study gives statistical support to an old argument of the Gramsci-inspired studies in the sociology of sports that recognized the potential of sport to promote hegemonic structures (Hargreaves 1986; Sage 1998; Sugden and Bairner 1993). Namely, if involvement in football is the only variable that predicts voting for a Zionist candidate, football plays a conservative role and inhibits forces which might radically challenge the political status quo. In this regard, the 'a-political' nature of sport is an illusion as the 'a-political' image of sport is exactly what empowers it as a political force.

Future developments might change the picture described in this article. Currently, Sakhnin is in the process of becoming a flagship team of the Arabs in Israel. With the growing success of the team, the relative weight of local Sakhninians among the team's fans is declining, and this will certainly affect the character of the football sphere. For example, the spontaneous celebrations held in Sakhnin on the night following the winning of the National Cup attracted Arabs from all over the country. It was also the first time that a Palestinian flag was tolerated within the crowd at a football related event. At the exact same time, people danced on the memorial monument, built to commemorate the martyrs of October 2000, ignoring the painful memories that this monument might evoke. These mixed tendencies might characterize the atmosphere of Sakhnin's matches in the future.

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## Notes

1. This article is based on research that was enabled by generous support from the Shaine Center for Research in Social Sciences and Eshkol Institute. I would also like to thank two anonymous readers for their illuminating comments on a previous draft of this article.

2. While the Arabs in Israel make up only 16% of the population, in the 1997–1998 season 42% of the senior clubs in the IFA represented Arab villages or cities, or Arab neighbourhoods in the mixed cities. Except one case, every Arab locality with at least 5,000 people had at least one official football club.

3. Sakhnin was divided into six sub-districts according to the division of statistical districts designated by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics based on the 1995 census. A proportional number of households were sampled in each district according to the absolute number of households within its boundaries. Interviewers were instructed to walk lengthways through the sub-district in pre-defined routes and to enter every 22nd house (Sakhnin had no street names or numbers in 1999). In each household they randomly selected one man in the appropriate age range (16–40). If there were two men within the appropriate age range in one household, interviewers were instructed to interview the elder the first time, the younger the second time, the elder the third time, and so on. In the case of three potential interviewees at a residence, interviewers were instructed likewise to select each time a different person in cyclical order of their age.

4. The survey was part of a wider project and included additional questions which will not be analysed in this article.

5. The minimal 6% is taken from: *Demographic Characteristics of Population in Locations and Statistical Districts*, Jerusalem: Israel Bureau of Statistics, 1995. However most local inhabitants of Sakhnin are convinced that this is an undercounting,

and that a 10% Christian minority is closer to reality.

6. 'Local Councils and Municipalities, by Socio-Economic Index, Ranking and Cluster Membership' [http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2004/13\\_04\\_22t1.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2004/13_04_22t1.pdf)

7. In 2002 Sakhnin was ranked by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics 209 out of 264 local and regional authorities in Israel in an inverse ranking of unemployment allowance recipients. ([http://gis.cbs.gov.il/Website/Localities2002/Rashuyot\\_htm/tables/tab\\_2.htm](http://gis.cbs.gov.il/Website/Localities2002/Rashuyot_htm/tables/tab_2.htm))

8. For example, lack of public education buildings: average number of students in class is 30, ranked 226 out of 264 localities in inverse order: [http://gis.cbs.gov.il/Website/Localities2002/Rashuyot\\_htm/tables/tab\\_2.htm](http://gis.cbs.gov.il/Website/Localities2002/Rashuyot_htm/tables/tab_2.htm).

9. Al-Ittihad, 14 May 1976, p. 5

10. A committee founded in 1975 to coordinate actions against land confiscation, it became one of the most important leadership institutions of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel.

11. Sakhnin's role in the 1948 war is controversial. Wasfi a-Tal, one of the commanders of the Arab Salvation Army, wrote in his memoirs that Sakhnins' people helped the Zionist forces in the battle.

12. Eli Ashkenzi, 'Be-Sakhnin hagegu im ha-gavi'a', Haaretz, 19.5.2004.

13. In 1959 the 'Histadrut', the General Organization of Workers in Israel, had decided to open its gates for Arabs to join. The 'Arab Department' of the Histadrut was *de-facto* an apparatus of the ruling party, 'Mapai', who used it as a vehicle for accommodating political power in the Arab sector. Within this context the AD initiated the establishment of a large number of sports clubs in different Arab villages from the early 1960s onward.

14. The rivalry between these two Zionist sport organizations motivated both of them to establish sport clubs in the Arab villages since the political power in various sport

associations was determined by the number of active athletes.

15. This is in paradoxical opposition to the declared ideologies of the Zionist 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. However, since the Communist party was the only legal framework through which Arabs in Israel could promote their collective political claim, and since Ha-Po'el teams were identified with the ruling party, in Sakhnin, and several other villages, Maccabi teams attracted people with higher nationalist awareness and political affiliation with the Communist party.

16. An anecdote that illustrates this point was a football match between Sakhnin's high school team and the Israeli National Team for youth, organized by Hamid Ghenayem, chairman of the sport department in the Sakhnin municipality. The game took place on 29 March 1999, one day before 'Land Day' (30 March). In a conversation in

his office Ghenayem explained to me: 'I intentionally scheduled it for the day before Land Day. I have to change the image of Sakhnin. The media presents Sakhnin as a hostile town, and this is not true.'

17. The Nakba is the Arabic term for the war of 1948, in which 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted and became refugees, and Israel was established on 78% of mandatory Palestine. The Palestinians commemorate these events on 15 May.

18. Interviewees were asked 'Which section in the newspaper do you open first?'

19. The small and statistically insignificant negative correlation between religiosity and voting for a Zionist party is compatible with Tessler and Corstange's study (2002), which demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, in the Arab world religious attachments per se do not necessarily foster confrontational stances, but rather it is the tendency to claim a political role for religion, a variable that was not measured in this study.

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