

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Arab soccer in a Jewish state: the integrative enclave**, Tamir Sorek, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, xiv + 225 pp., bibliography, index, ISBN 978-0-521-87048-1 (hardback), 978-0-521-13135-3 (paperback)

Tamir Sorek's work contends that soccer has assumed the role of an 'integrative enclave' for the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. At the same time, he observes, the construction of the 'integrative enclave' has not been a harmonious and coordinated process. Sorek asserts that soccer in Israel has two dimensions: (1) the game as it is played in the field, which requires professional excellence; and (2) the game as it is played out in the broader framework of public sphere, where power equations between various agents are expressed in the battle over collective consciousness. At this level, soccer provides an opportunity to the Palestinian minority for integration into Jewish-Israeli society and acceptance by the Jewish majority as against a stage for promoting political protest and national pride.

Sorek is of the opinion that soccer is not the arena for political resistance or overt national identification, and the Arab soccer stars themselves tend to downplay their national identity; instead, they highlight their professional identity. Sorek stresses that it is the integrative orientation (of soccer) that takes precedence in present day Israeli soccer (p. 7). However, this integrative discourse is not translated into a tangible change in the discriminatory character of the state, and as a result, soccer might play a conservative political role that legitimizes the political, social and economic inferiority of the Arabs in Israel (p. 9). For Sorek, soccer in Israel is an integrative enclave – a space which permits integration and equal exchange between the Jews and Arabs, even though the society which surrounds them does not. The word 'enclave' is emphasized to imply subtly, but emphatically, that these possibilities will not materially affect wider Arab-Jewish relations in the near future.

The book begins with an historical introduction. The second chapter deals with the emergence of modern sports in Palestine, the perception amongst a section of the Arab-Palestinian elite of sports as a symbol of modernity, its apparent role in forging a Palestinian national identity, and the subsequent conversion of the modernizing mission into an anti-colonial struggle against the British and the Zionists. Sorek's analysis is distinctive in the manner in which it traces the history of Israeli Arab soccer, which he uses as a preface to his analysis of sports as an indication of modernity and the diverse ways in which Jews and Arabs reacted to it.

The third chapter traces the emergence of Arab soccer as a sphere of limited integration after the establishment of the State of Israel. Highlighting the significance of sports, in general, and soccer, in particular, in the Arab-Israeli context, Sorek argues that, in its formative years, it was used as a nation-building tool, and after 1948, it became a tool for limited and selective integration, downplaying the national identity of the Arabs in Israel (p. 54). Chapter four explores the recent prosperity of Arab

soccer teams, which has been achieved as a result of the generous financial assistance provided to them by Arab municipalities.

Chapter five delves into the realm of the Arab sports press which consciously and intentionally attempts to champion Arab and Palestinian national pride in its soccer commentaries. The Arab press tends to look at Arab–Jewish matches as an opportunity to demonstrate the possibilities of peaceful and equal coexistence, whereas the Jewish press uses the same to highlight what they believe to be Israel’s essentially tolerant nature. Chapter six, however, tells a different tale, wherein the assumed linkage between sports and national pride is seen to have no significant impact on the fans. The chapter elaborates upon the attempt by Arab soccer fans to shape the soccer arena as an apolitical arena. It also analyses the potential of the soccer fans to serve as ‘surrogate nationalists’. The chapter also discusses the ambivalent attitude of Arab fans towards the Israeli national team. In other words, the Arabs find ways to identify with Israeli symbols, provided these symbols themselves do not align themselves with exclusively Jewish notions.

Chapter seven contends with an interesting aspect in the Israeli soccer scenario, that of the separate and autonomous Islamic Soccer League in Israel, which can be viewed as an isolationist reaction to the integrative aspect of soccer. The chapter explores the linkage between the ideology of Islam and its requirement to establish a separate soccer league. The Islamic League is a minor enclave within the bigger integrative enclave (p. 149). In other words, the message conveyed is that not all Arabs believe football should act as an integrative activity and that far from being an integrative initiative, the Islamist League is consciously divisive in character and purpose.

Chapter eight cites the example of the town of Sakhnin where soccer plays an important role in the formation of collective identities among its residents. Sakhnin is a town recognized as both a defender of Palestinian national protest and a centre of Arab soccer excellence. Sorek argues that since 1976, Sakhnin has gradually emerged as a visible juncture of two separate and significant processes with far-reaching implications on the collective identity of the Arab–Palestinian minority in Israel and on the local identity in Sakhnin. Sorek describes these two processes as the emergence of local–national narrative of heroism and sacrifice and the centrality of soccer in the negotiation of political belonging and allegiances (in other words, the attempt to create an integrative enclave) (p. 150–151).

In the concluding chapter, Sorek assesses the role soccer performs in the context of Arab–Jewish relations. Regarding the integrative orientation of soccer, Sorek contends that the lack of national protest and the dominance of an integrative discourse in the soccer sphere in Israel are the result of specific historical, dynamic and contemporary structural circumstances (p. 184). Moreover, Sorek describes soccer as an agent of depoliticization of the Arab minority in Israel and links it with the exclusion of Palestinian identity from the field. For Sorek, the depoliticization of soccer itself is part of the political game. The book concludes on a speculative note about the future trend as Arab prominence in Israeli soccer continues to grow.

*Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave* by Tamir Sorek is a perceptive, fascinating and thought-provoking text. As a converted PhD thesis, the book often makes contextual and relevant references to Gramsci, Durkheim and others, and the bibliography is exhaustive. It is both incisive and scholarly in its

approach and character. More importantly, it furnishes the reader with an analysis of how politics and sports interact in a region that is grappling for peace.

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**European football in black and white: tackling racism in football**, by Christos Kassimeris, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2008, viii + 265 pp., bibliography, index, ISBN 978-0-7391-1960-0.

Christos Kassimeris addresses a serious contemporary issue in the book under review, namely, racism in Europe. He chooses to examine it in the arena of sport, and particularly football. The problem is serious, more so because it is rooted in the history of the western world. In seeking to define racism, the author looks at the evolution of an attitude of superiority based on supposedly biological characteristics (disproved by scientific investigation) and its continuation by other means, even today. In his words, 'novel expressions of racial discrimination pertaining to cultural, economic, political and social divisions' have now emerged.

Kassimeris suggests that contemporary racism is exacerbated by the politics of the right-wing, more specifically fascist and neo-fascist political formations in several European countries. The author feels that the emergence of these fascist formations 'constitutes a grave concern to long-established democratic practices in Europe'. The escalating violence, especially against ethnic and religious minorities, constitutes probably an even greater threat to the emerging multicultural nature of European society. It is possible, of course, to raise questions about so-called entrenched democratic practices in Europe. The author misses the larger context somehow. European democracy, one fears, historically ignored 'the other', i.e. the colonized. The long history of anti-Semitism apart, Saidian 'orientalism' did play a role. Indeed, as Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison has recently argued, there were exceptions to the laws meant for the Europeans. The exceptions were in the colonies. Even 'democrats' in France declared that the 'Revolution is our revolution, the Code (the law codes) is our code'. When former colonized people come to live and work in Europe in ever larger numbers, these racial attitudes become more visible. Football only makes it come into focus.

It is the increasing incidence of 'delinquency' at football matches across Europe that Kassimeris discusses at some length. He brings in a wealth of detail and varieties of racist expressions from the football fields. He coins an interesting term 'footballisation of politics', whereby he suggests that football acts as the surrogate for playing out the political battle among European nations. In other words, 'while the European Union strives to overcome national differences, football offers a civilised approach for European nations to settle their differences.' Is this approach civilised enough? In trying to find the roots of racist behaviour in Europe, the author provides a fairly detailed overview of racism and ethnic tensions as well as discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and race.

Kassimeris begins by tracing the origin of football and notes the emergence of various governing bodies of the game at the international level, like FIFA and UEFA.