Arab football success is not true reflection of Israel integration

BY SIMON YAFFE

ISRAEL'S media uses the fact that 30 Arab players represent the national team to suggest there is full equality.

― But sociologist Tamir Sorek claims that Israel's Arabs — sometimes dubbed a fifth column — are still not well integrated into Israeli society.

The author of Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave told Sportsworld: "Arabs playing for Israel is a way for Israeli Jews to flatten themselves about the Arabs being part of an equal democracy."

"However, the Arabs are discriminated against in many areas in Israel."

"The Israeli media view the fact that Arabs are in the national team as if there is now full equality."

True, football does have the potential to blur the ethnic boundaries and to form a bridge for people from different backgrounds, but there is a danger that it could be used for the wrong purposes."

Brought up on a kibbutz in the western Galilee, Florida-based Tamir grew up a fan of Maccabi Haifa and his book started out as a PhD about Arab football in Israel.

A graduate in sociology and philosophy from Jerusalem's Hebrew University, he decided to stick with sociology as "Israel is a complicated society." He moved with his America-born wife Michelle to Ithaca, New York, in 2003 and three years later took up a post as assistant professor of sociology and Israel studies at the University of Florida.

Tamir's PhD coincided with the rise of the Arab-Israeli football club Bnei Sakhnin.

In the 2004/05 UEF A Cup, it gave me a sense of satisfaction."

"When they stood alongside their Jewish teammates, they did not sing the Hatikvah."

"The words mean nothing to them, because it talks about 2,000 years of yearning for the Jews to return to Zion."

"They know that this is a conflict for them, but they respect it."

"Tamir also said that the Arab citizens of Israel are not looked upon favourably by their brothers in the Arab world."

"The Palestinian media ignore the fact that Arabs play for Israel."

"It is not unthinkable for them — it does not exist and it cannot exist." He continued: "The Palestinian media ignore the fact that Arabs play for Israel."

"But these types of actions now belong to a minority of fans in Israel."