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**CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY:
THE MUSCULAR JEW VS THE PALESTINIAN UNDERDOG**

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**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
SINGAPORE**

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Abstract

Soccer threads itself as a red line through the 20th century history of the Middle East and North Africa as independence populated the region with nation-states. Soccer was important to the leaders struggling for independence as a means to stake claims, develop national identity and fuel anti-colonial sentiment. For its rulers soccer was a tool they could harness to shape their nations in their own mould; for its citizenry it was both a popular form of entertainment and a platform for opposition and resistance.

The sport offers a unique arena for social and political differentiation and the projection of transnational, national, ethnic, sectarian, local, generational and gender identities sparking a long list of literature that dates back more than a century.¹ The sport also constitutes a carnivalesque event that lends itself to provocation of and confrontation with authority — local, national or colonial.²

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¹ Examples include G. T. W. Patrick. 'The psychology of football,' *The American Journal of Psychology*, 14 (1903),. 104-117; Frederick Jakobus Johannes Buytendijk.. *Le football : une étude psychologique*, (Paris : Brouwer, 1952)

² Gary Armstrong and Malcolm Young. . 'Fanatical football chants: Creating and controlling the carnival,' *Culture, Sport, Society* 2:3 (1999), 173-211 / Tom Clark.. 'I'm Scunthorpe 'til I die': Constructing and (Re)negotiating Identity through the Terrace Chant, *Soccer and Society*, 7:4 (2006), . 494-507

Occupation and Conquest

Soccer is about occupation and conquest, the occupation of an opponent's territory and the conquest of his goal.³ The sense of confrontation is heightened with fans often segregated from one another in different sections of the stadium. "The playing field thus becomes a metaphor for the competition between communities, cities and nations: football focuses group identities," said Iranian soccer scholar Houchang E. Chehabi.⁴ French Iranian soccer scholar Christian Bromberger noted that every match between rival towns, regions and countries took the form of a ritualised war, complete with anthems, military fanfares and banners wielded by fans who make up the support divisions and who even call themselves "brigades", "commandos", "legions" and "assault troops".⁵ Social scientist Janet Lever argued that in sports "nationalism is aroused by individual contestants but peaks over team sports... (It) peaks because many consider collective action a truer test of a country's spirit than individual talent."⁶

Little wonder that communities with contested identities and national leaders saw soccer, since its introduction to the Middle East and North Africa by colonial powers, as a key tool to shape their nations and promote modernity in a world in which according to political scientist Benedict Anderson "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."⁷ The sport was initially employed as what sports scholar Mahfoud Amara described as the post-colonial tool par excellence "for party-state regimes in their projects of mobilizing populations around nation-state building and integration into the international bi-polar world system." It has since then helped autocratic leaders maintain power while managing the transition of their economies from state-run to market-oriented. It did so in part by exploiting the fact that nations emerge, in the words of Turkish sociologist Dogu Ergil, out of the tireless global competition that determines dominance, submission and the hierarchy of nations. Success in sports increases the confidence of nations. Failure does the opposite, Ergil argued.⁸

Amara and Ergil's insights are relevant in the context of ethnographer Anthony D. Smith's emphasis on "common myths and memories" and "mass, public culture" as crucial elements of national consciousness and the realisation that the relationship between nationalism and sports is to a large degree determined in the political context.⁹ That context in turn is defined by the multifaceted nature of nationalism. "There is a very real difference between the nationalism of a well-established world

³ Tom Clark, 'Aspects of the Psychology of Games and Sports,' *British Journal of Psychology*, 31-4 (1941), 279-293

⁴ Houchang E. Chehabi. "The Politics of Football in Iran" in ed. *Fringe Nations in World Soccer*, ed. Kausik Bandyopadhyay and Sabyasachi Mallick, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 77

⁵ Christian Bromberger. 'Football as world-view and as ritual, *French Cultural Studies*,' 6 (1995), . 293 - 311

⁶ Janet Lever, *Soccer Madness: Brazil's Passion for the World's Most Popular Sport* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1983) , 29

⁷ Benedict Anderson. "Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (London: Verso, 1983) Kindle edition

⁸ Dogu Ergil. "On Football." *Today's Zaman*, July 19,2014 (accessed July 19, 2014) http://www.todayzaman.com/columnist/dogu-ergil/on-football_353397.html

⁹ Anthony D. Smith, "The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates About Ethnicity and Nationalism," (London: Polity Press, 2000), 3

power and that of a submerged people... Inevitably there will also be a marked variation in the manner in which sport is used in such different contexts to promote the nationalist cause," noted sports scholar Alan Bairner.¹⁰

At the bottom line, sports and particularly soccer enabled post-colonial societies in the Middle East and North Africa to generate meaning and symbolism that gave imagined substance to an identity that differentiated the conceived nation from others and helped neutralise the threat posed by racial, ethnic, social, religious and regional identities they incorporated. At the same time, it allowed such sub-groups to differentiate themselves even though those sub-identities potentially would compete with the larger national identity.

As a result, sports in general and soccer in particular served historically in the Middle East and North Africa as a platform of opposition and resistance against colonial rulers and their local allies, and as a tool to project on the international stage a nation struggling to achieve independence. Given its strength in producing various forms of distinction,¹¹ sports frequently helped post-colonial Middle Eastern and North African societies mould multiple, often rival identities into one that encompassed the nation as a whole. It was simultaneously designed to help construct national myths and advance post-colonial modernisation and foreign policy goals.

Constructing National Identity through Sports

Construction of a deeply rooted national identity was often hampered by the fact that a significant number of nations in the region lacked the perception of a long-standing common history on which countries like Egypt, Turkey and Iran pride themselves or the wrenching, unifying experience of a vicious struggle for independence as in the case of Algeria. This deficit was reinforced by the emergence of neo-patriarchic autocracies across that region that viewed the population as immature subjects rather than full-fledged citizens. As a result, sports — soccer in particular — underperformed as a tool in moulding nations and promoting feelings of national solidarity in line with historian Eric Hobsbawm's definition of nations as imagined or constructed entities with invented traditions.¹²

Nevertheless, Middle Eastern and North African examples of the political employment of sports to create national myths are myriad. Egypt, a regional sports powerhouse, claimed to have fathered soccer long before the British who are largely credited with the emergence of the sport. Ousted President Hosni Mubarak's State Information Service asserted that ancient Egyptians had recorded their knowledge of the game with inscriptions on the walls of temples that were discovered by the 5th century Greek historian Herodotus.¹³ In his memoir of a visit to Egypt titled "An Account of Egypt",¹⁴

¹⁰ Alan Bairner, "Sport, Nationalism and Globalization; European and North American Perspectives," (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 164

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste," (London: Routledge, 1984), 211-212

¹² Eric Hobsbawm. Introduction / Mass-producing traditions: Europe 1870 – 1940 in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-4 / 263-307

¹³ State Information Service. 2009. History of the Egyptian football game, accessed December 31, 2009 <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=1746>

Herodotus made no mention of the inscriptions or of ancient Egyptians playing something akin to soccer. He also failed to refer to assertions that he saw young men kicking around a ball made of goatskin and straw.¹⁵

Zionists like the Shah of Iran and the Ottoman Empire's reformist Young Turks saw sports as a way to mould their citizenry in a nationalist image. For the Zionists, the goal was the new, muscular Jew. Reza Shah Pahlavi, who captained his team at his Swiss boarding school and played for the squad of the Iranian military's Officer School, saw soccer as a way "to create a modern Iranian man who understood the values of hygiene, manly competition, and cooperation."¹⁶

To the Young Turks, soccer was a means of garnering support as they sought to convert the remnants of the Ottoman Empire into a modern state. Both recognised what the French Iranian soccer scholar Christian Bromberger identified as the westernising virtues of the sport: "Football values team work, solidarity, division of labour and collective planning — very much in the image of the industrial world that produced it."¹⁷ German and Swedish athletics was to the Turks like Cooper's Commonwealth competition was to the Zionists. It furthered what social anthropologist Paul Connerton described as the creation of collective memory and shared identity through ritualised physical activity.¹⁸ Soccer was uniquely designed for that purpose — as historian Eric Hobsbawm noted, "the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people."¹⁹

For the Palestinians, in contrast to other national groupings in the Middle East and North Africa, forming a national identity initially constituted nation formation through differentiation of the Palestinian identity from a Syrian dominated pan-Arab identity, as stated by political scientist Paul James. Later nation building constituted the construction and/or structuring of a national identity within the framework of an own state as seen in post-Ottoman Turkey, Iran and Egypt.²⁰ James defined nation formation as occurring "within a social formation constituted in the emerging dominance of relations of disembodied integration" in which there is no face-to-face encounter or agency extension.²¹ The differentiation of Palestinian identity in the absence of agency extension — the existence of a nation-state — was defined by asserting its distinctiveness from a Syrian Arab identity that was prevalent in Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan and Zionist settlements at the time. Moreover, both in nation formation and nation building, imagined national communities need to give

¹⁴ Herodotus, *An Account of Egypt*, Translated by G. C. Macaulay, Project Gutenberg, 2006, accessed July 10, 2011, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2131/2131-h/2131-h.htm>

¹⁵ Alaa al Aswany, *Egypt's Enduring Passion for Soccer*, *The New York Times*, April 16, 2014 (accessed April 16, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/17/opinion/egypts-enduring-passion-for-soccer.html?_r=0

¹⁶ Franklin Foer. "How Soccer Explains the World," (New York: HarperCollins, (2006), 217

¹⁷ Christian Bromberger, "Football as world-view and as ritual," *French Cultural Studies*, 6 (1995), 293-311

¹⁸ Paul Connerton, "How societies remember," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, "Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143

²⁰ Harry Mylonas, "The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities." (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

²¹ Paul James, "Nation Formation: Toward a Theory of Abstract Community," (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 45

substance to their constructs by creating a consciousness of what it meant to be a nation. For Israeli Jews and Palestinians, sports served that purpose.²²

Nonetheless, the effort of multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Middle Eastern and North African societies to employ soccer in the shaping of an overriding national identity was complicated by the communal aspirations of minority communities such as Kurds, Berbers and Israeli Palestinians, as well as conflict that resulted from their assertion. These communities felt discriminated against because the newly established states were preoccupied with creating one imaginary overall national identity that superseded diverse societal fabric rather than one that sought multicultural accommodation of the identities of its various constituent communities.²³ Those communities often saw soccer as much as a way of expressing an identity of their own as they viewed it as tool to shape the new state's national distinctiveness. Bairner and historian John Sugden noted 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."²⁴

Israeli sports historian Tamer Sorek argues that Palestinian citizens of Israel as opposed to Palestinians governed by Israeli occupation constituted at least for a significant period of post-independence Israeli history an exception to Sugden and Bairner's notion. "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," Sorek reasoned.²⁵

In effect, Sorek was highlighting the fact that post-1948 citizenship of the State of Israel did not amount to nationality for non-Jewish citizens i.e. the Palestinians. That dichotomy was reinforced by continued Israeli-Palestinian tensions, including military conflict in Gaza, Israeli-Palestinian frustration with lack of progress in peace talks, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab bigotry on the soccer pitch. Nevertheless, Palestinian players contribute significantly to Israel's national and top echelon teams despite their deep-seated sense of discrimination.²⁶ This has meant that soccer serves Palestinians in Israel both as an integrative tool and a vehicle to assert their identity within the Jewish state.²⁷

Rifaat 'Jimmy' Turk, Israel's first Palestinian national team player, recalls coach Ze'ev Segal telling him when he joined Hapoel Tel Aviv: "There is one important rule. We live in a racist country. They will

²² *Ibid.* James

²³ *Ibid.* Anderson

²⁴ John Sugden and Alan Bairner, "Sport, Sectarianism and Society," (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), 129

²⁵ Tamer Sorek, 'Palestinian nationalism has left the field: A shortened history of Arab soccer in Israel,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35:3 (2003), 417-437

²⁶ James M. Dorsey, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*, (London/New York: Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2015), forthcoming

²⁷ *Ibid.* Dorsey

curse you, they will curse your mother and your sister. They will spit at you. They will try to undercut you, cut your legs from under you. You have to be smart about it and know how to deal with it. You can't allow yourself to be provoked. You have to stay focused. If you are smart, you'll survive. If you're not smart, you can take everything I told you and throw it out the window."²⁸

Moulding Modern Citizens

For pre- Zionist Palestine, Iran and Turkey, sports was key to moulding of the "modern" citizen as well as the forging of relations with a colonial or Western power. This could help them in their endeavour irrespective of the fact that Jews and Palestinians were forming nations while Turkey and Iran were building nations as illustrated in this section. In doing so, they built on the experience of the first modern day international sports encounter — a cricket match in 1860 between the United States, a former British colony, and Canadian colonies that had yet to achieve independence.²⁹ They also relied on the notion, first put forward in 1891 by Reverend J. Astley Cooper, of a British Commonwealth sporting competition that would involve literary and military events as a way of strengthening ties between Britain and its colonies.³⁰

Zionism's view of sports, much like that of the Shah of Iran as well as the Young Turks and their Kemalist successors, was partly anchored in the need to prepare young men for military service and defence of the nation. It was similarly rooted although not acknowledged in 19th century German approaches to athletics articulated by Theodore Herzl, physician and the father of political Zionism, and social critic Max Nordau's concept of muscular Judaism. It also harked back to the principle in Deuteronomy 4:9 of *shimrat ha-guf*, guard the body.

"I must train the boys to become soldiers.... I shall educate one and all to be free, strong men, ready to serve as volunteers in the case of need," Herzl wrote in his diaries.³¹ Speaking to the Second Zionist Congress in Basel, Nordau urged his audience to "let us continue our ancient tradition of being heroes with deep chests, nimble limbs and fearless looks." Russian physician Max (Emmanuel) Mandelstamm made a similar appeal at the congress, where he concluded by repeating a line from Roman poet Juvenal's Satire X:³² "Men sana in corpore sano (A sound mind in a sound body)."³³

²⁸ Interview with the author March 1, 2013

²⁹ The New York Times. International Cricket Match.; United States vs. Canada, September 1, 1860 (accessed July 29, 2010) <http://www.nytimes.com/1860/09/01/news/international-cricket-match-united-states-vs-canada.html>

³⁰ J. Astley Cooper, "1908 Olympic Games, What has been done and what remains to be done The History of Sport in Britain, 1880-1914, ed. Martin Poley (London: Routledge, 2004), 147-157

³¹ Theodore Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Vol. 1 (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 51

³² R. D. Hick (Ed), *Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925)

³³ George Eisen, "Jewish History and the Ideology of Modern Sport: Approaches and Interpretations," *Journal of Sport History*, 25:3 (1998), 531

Nordau argued that Zionism would revitalise Judaism, liberate it from the distress it encountered in the diaspora, and create the new Jew “morally through the rejuvenation of the ideals of the people and bodily through the physical rearing of one’s offspring, in order to create a lost muscular Jewry... We want to restore to the flabby Jewish body its lost tone. Jews have to show to themselves, and to the world, how much vitality they still possess.”³⁴ Literature scholar Marilyn Reizbaum described Nordau’s image of the new Jew as “derived from the image of manliness and restraint which together make the civilised man. This image is ironically modelled on the Aryan ideal...”³⁵ Political scientist Haggai Harif went a step further in describing the emphasis on the “physical ability of the ‘New Jew’ who symbolized the ideal of national revival in the eyes of the fathers of Zionism” as a core element in “a revolution in the existential reality of the Jewish people in the Diaspora, in defining its collective identity and in its ways of life... Gymnastics and sport were among the offshoots of renewed life in the country and were an expression of the glorification of the physical heroism that was perceived as vital in the battle to conquer the Land” of Israel.³⁶

Zionism’s embrace of the importance of sports was also rooted in moves by significant segments of 19th century Jewish diaspora to accommodate societal change, counter anti-Semitism, and by implication reject Orthodox Jewish repudiation of sports as a form of secularism. From the mid-nineteenth century, many Jews viewed joining the main gymnastic movements and, more importantly, sport and country clubs and the Olympic movement as part of their ‘emancipation’ from the old legal and social exclusions and from a “Jewish pathology”. Jews were described as intellectuals, cosmopolitans, and therefore artificially removed from nature. Responding to the charge of physical inadequacy, participating in gymnastic and sports movements was just another facet of claiming equality and, simultaneously, manifesting patriotism.

Movements such as the Deutsche Turnerschaft, the Sokol, English Muscular Christianity, and of course the Olympic Games were as much a product of the 19th century as was the emancipation of Jews. In many societies, Jews considered the two as part and parcel — if Jews could join this fraternity of athletes, it would prove they were being accepted by the larger society. Zionist preoccupation with the body, exercise, and later the Jewish Olympic idea (Maccabiah Games) was a direct consequence of industrialisation, urbanisation and anti-Semitic pressures, wrote Sports historian George Eisen.³⁷ Eisen was referring to the Maccabiah — a sporting event for Jews from across the globe — first organised in Palestine in the early 1930s and which today is recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Historian David Biale argued that “like other nationalist movements of the nineteenth century, Zionism was preoccupied by the physical and emotional degeneration of the nation and by the threat of demographic decline.”³⁸ As a result, Jewish

³⁴ Max Nordau, “Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des II. Zionisten-Congresses (Basel, August 28–31, 1898), (Vienna: Verlag des Vereines Erez Israel), 14-27

³⁵ Marilyn Reizbaum, Max Nordau and the Generation of Jewish Muscle, *Jewish Culture and History*, 6:1 (2003), 130-151

³⁶ Haggai Harif, “Israeli Sport in the Transition from a Mandatory Community to a Sovereign State: Trends of Continuity and Change, *Israel Affairs*, 13:3”(2007), 529-553

³⁷ *Ibid.* Eisen, *Jewish History and the Ideology of Modern Sport*

³⁸ David Biale, “Zionism as an Erotic Revolution” in *People of the Body, Jews and Judaism from an*

immigrants imported soccer to Palestine under Ottoman rule. The game was institutionalised through public schools and clubs in 1917 under British colonial rule.

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, a xenophobic German nationalist, radical egalitarian and father of German gymnastics, inspired Zionist thinking despite his anti-Semitism that eventually prompted clubs associated with his movement to create Aryan sections. Historian Petr Roubal quotes Jahn as saying that “Poles, French, clerics, landlords and Jews are Germany’s misfortune!”³⁹ Jahn’s combination of seemingly contradictory racist and revolutionary views posed a challenge to reactionary rule in Germany. As a result, Jahn was incarcerated in 1819 and his gymnastics movement was banned. Released in 1825, he resurrected his movement in the form of a more militaristic group that favoured unification of the various German states as the 1848 revolutions swept across Europe.

Jahn saw gymnastics and physical education at the time of the Napoleonic conquest of Prussia as a powerful tool to prepare for a liberation struggle. His German Gymnastics Movement (Deutsche Turnerschaft) established in 1811 expressed nationalist goals and emphasised strength, endurance, discipline, and movement in unison.⁴⁰ He also saw his gymnastics, with its egalitarian lack of divisive class or regional characteristics, as a vehicle that would demonstrate what an ideal society would look like. Jahn believed that his gymnasts should be “chaste, pure, capable, fearless, truthful and ready to bear arms.”⁴¹

Jahn’s notion of a utopian society constituted fertile ground for representatives of all political stripes in the Middle East, including various trends within Zionism as well as Jews in Palestine and the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire, who saw militarisation of society as the way forward. In Zionist Palestine, Jahn’s thinking was to have its greatest impact on Beitar, the right-wing youth movement associated with revisionist Zionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s idea that evoked the Jews’ last stand against the Romans. Beitar was the Hebrew acronym for Joseph Trumpeldor Union, named after a one-armed Russian army officer who established the Zion Mule Corps that was defeated alongside the British and other Allied forces in 1916 by the Ottomans in the Battle of Gallipoli.

Beitar’s mission was to create the “New Jew” who would be able to build and defend the Jewish state. Beitar differed from other Zionist factions in its insistence that Jews had to rely on themselves rather than on the British. Its philosophy was rooted in the Biblical story of God advising Joshua on the eve of the Israelite’s return to the Promised Land, which stated “Every place that you have set foot I have given you”⁴² and “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord

Embodied Perspective, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 284

³⁹ Petr Roubal, . ‘Today the Masses Will Speak,’ Mass Gymnastic Displays as Visual Representation of the Communist State in Neue Staaten - neue Bilder?, ed. Arnold Bartetzky (Ed), (Koeln: Boehlau Koeln, 2005), 326

⁴⁰ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn und Ernst Eiselen. Deutsche Turnkunst zur Einrichtung der Turnplaetze, (Leipzig: Reclam, 1816), III-VLVIII

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Jahn and Eiselen, III-XLVIII

⁴² Joshua 1:3

your God will be with you wherever you go.”⁴³ Jabotinsky summarised Beitar’s mission in songs he wrote, one of which said:

“From the pit of decay and dust
Through blood and sweat
A generation will arise to us
Proud, generous, and fierce.”⁴⁴

Russian-born Yosef Yekutieli, an Ottoman conscript who became a physical educator in Palestine and a driving force in realising Herzl and Nordau’s vision, played a key role in the development of soccer and its emergence as a nationalist battle. Yekutieli defined his mission as “the development of Jewish culture — both physical and spiritual, and the presentation of that culture to the Jewish people and to the whole world; the development of Jewish sport in the world and the emphasis of the idea that Jewish sporting athletes were not just part of their home countries but were part of the Jewish diaspora. The emphasising of the fact that Eretz Yisrael is the centre of the Jewish world; and finally, the strengthening of the Maccabi movement.”⁴⁵ A centrist Zionist youth movement whose concept of sports was influenced by Jahn served Yekutieli’s purpose of tightening bonds between the Zionists in Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora and projecting Jews as a nation and Palestine as their homeland.

Maccabi grew out of the Union of Jewish Gymnastic Clubs founded at the Fourth Zionist Congress in 1903. It was named after the Maccabean revolt in the second century CE that was sparked by the creation of gymnasium in Jerusalem by the High Priest Jason. The gymnasium in which Jews competed nude and participated in pagan rituals provoked the Maccabeans’ anger because it amounted to idol worshipping in their view. Ironically, one of the first things the Maccabeans did after recapturing Jerusalem was to destroy the gymnasium.⁴⁶ Yekutieli, the founder of the Palestine Football Association and the Palestine Olympic Committee, first dreamt of the Maccabiah as a 15-year old. His inspiration was the 1912 Olympics. It took him 16 years to prepare a plan for the Jewish National Fund and another four to organise the first tournament.⁴⁷

Following the Zionist Example

Palestinians, notwithstanding their hostility to Herzl, Nordau and Yekutieli effectively adopted their approach. “Obedience is one of the most important qualities a soldier on the battlefield must equip himself with. The war will not be fought without obedience. I urge everyone to obey whoever they are subordinate to, irrespective of whether you are players, spectators or referees, and to heed his every command, decision and restriction,” said the sports column of Filastin, a twice-weekly Christian-

⁴³ Joshua 1:9

⁴⁴ Lawrence Wright, ‘Thirteen Days in September, Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David,’ (New York: Knopf, 2014), Kindle edition

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Jewish Agency for Palestine

⁴⁶ Eizehu Gibor, “Living Jewish Values,” (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2009), 19

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Gibor, 20

owned newspaper published in the first 67 years of the 20th century that pioneered Palestinian sports reporting, supported the Young Turks during Ottoman rule, opposed pre-Israel's traditional Palestinian leadership, and was influential in promoting Palestinian nationalism. In a separate column, Mohammed Tahre Pasha, an Egyptian doctor, who went on to found the Mediterranean Games and head the Egyptian Olympic Committee, argued that sports was crucial for the East and the Arab's regaining of past glory. "The East neglected sports for a long time. It is a main reason, if not the main reason, for its loss of superiority," Pasha argued.⁴⁸

The employment of sports by Zionist leaders also served as a way to mould relations between the Jewish national movement and the British mandate authorities in Palestine who established civilian clubs as well as ones associated with various branches of the government, military and law enforcement. "Here it is, we are given the opportunity now that tens of thousands of British soldiers from various countries and classes happened to come to the country; some of which will play important roles in the British policy and it is up to us to influence them and make them our friends through friendly sport meetings; it is our duty to do so properly and on a full state scale," Maccabi said in a memo at the beginning of the Second World War.⁴⁹

The strategy of forging ties to British colonial personnel proved to be a double-edged sword. It created situations of both bonding and friction. At times, encounters between Jewish and British players would end up in brawls with Jews alleging discrimination by British referees. Moreover, tensions would rise at times of unpopular British measures like the publication of the White Book in 1930 that restricted Jewish immigration to and settlement of Palestine. Sir John Robert Chancellor, the High Commissioner at the time of the publication, suspended matches between Zionist and British soccer teams to evade the risk of violent eruptions.⁵⁰

The Zionist effort nonetheless constituted the flip side of Astley Cooper's vision of Commonwealth sports. Jewish clubs sought to forge alliances with their British counterparts in a bid to build ties to Brits who one day may be influential in formulating British policy and could help cement Palestine's identity as a Jewish entity. Ties to the mandate authority, the Zionists hoped, would also ensure Jews of British protection in times of violent Palestinian resistance to Jewish settlement of the land. As a result, Zionist exploitation of the sport turned soccer into a barometer of British-Jewish relations against the backdrop of the controversial settlement of Palestine in the 1930s.

Relations between British and Jewish players and fans warmed and cooled depending on political circumstances. In good times, they further served, according to Palestinian historians, as cover for illegal Jewish immigration. The historians charged that such incidences occurred in 1932 and 1935

⁴⁸ Mohammed Taher Basha. Filastin, March 11 1945

⁴⁹ Haggai Harif and Yair Galily, "Sport and politics in Palestine, 1918–48: Football as a mirror reflecting the relations between Jews and Britons," Soccer & Society, 4:1 (2003), 41-56 / Aron Nethanel and Zelig Rosetzki, "A Memorandum to the Jewish Agency to the Land of Israel on Having Sport Ties with the British Army in the Country, March"21, 1940., quoted by Issam Khalidi. مائة عام على كرة القدم في فلسطين in manuscript provided by the author

⁵⁰ Harry Schneiderman, The Year in Review, Canadian Jewish Chronicle, September 11, 1931

during the Maccabiah, “This was not merely physical activity for the enjoyment of the individual: it was physical development in the service of the nation,” the Jewish Agency for Israel said.⁵¹ Sports historian Eisen argued that the Olympics had provided “a guiding example for the Maccabiah idea and (the) exerting powerful influences upon the inception and format of the Jewish Games.”⁵² Nonetheless, the Palestinian Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) deprived Maccabiah of the ability to project itself as representative of the region’s diversity by withdrawing participation from the 1932 tournament.⁵³ It also complicated the PFA’s effort to meet FIFA’s requirement that it represent both Jewish and Palestinian clubs.

Defence under Cover of Sports

Palestinian historian Issa al-Sifri warned in a book published in 1937 that “since 1924, the Zionists were trying to find new tricks for admitting more Jewish immigrants to the country; they have used smuggling and manipulation. They have pretended to submit to the restrictions of the immigration laws (while) transferring Jews to illegal resident status in Palestine by hiding them in the settlements. The Maccabiah was one of the ways of achieving these tasks,” Al-Sifri wrote.⁵⁴ Hapoel, the sports association with the Zionist labour movement, pioneered naval operations that supported illegal immigration into Palestine as well as the smuggling of arms to Jewish paramilitary groups. The movement also helped establish Jewish settlements. Its members were often also part of the Haganah, the underground Jewish paramilitary force that after independence formed the core of the Israel Defence Force.⁵⁵

All in all, the involvement of sports movements in what Zionists described as defensive measures traced their roots to the late years of Ottoman rule when sports groups volunteered to protect Jews against Palestinian protesters.“ From the early 1920s, members of the sports organizations participated in activities aimed at restraining Arab manifestations of violence. They also assisted with the absorption of immigrants and in broadening the settlement enterprise, were involved in protests against British policy which sought to limit the development of the national home, and continued its activities in the fields of education, culture, etc. Many of these activists volunteered to serve in the British army during the Second World War, and some were active in saving and rehabilitating Jewish Holocaust refugees from Europe,” Harif noted.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Jewish Agency for Israel. The Story of Sport in Israel, (accessed June 20, 2014), <http://jafi.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Compelling+Content/Eye+on+Israel/Sport+in+Israel/The+Beginnings+of+Modern+Jewish+Sport.htm>

⁵² George Eisen, “Jewish History and the Ideology of Modern Sport: Approaches and Interpretations,” *Journal of Sport History*, 25:3(1998), 482-531

⁵³ Filastin. مقاطعة دورة الالعاب مكابيه في تل أبيب: الانتصارات القومية على مكائد الصهيونية. March 20, 1932

⁵⁴ Issa Al-Sifri. *Filastin bein al-Intidab wa al- Sahyoonia*. (Jaffa, 1937), 184-187 quoted in Issam Khalidi, *Body and Ideology, Early Athletics in Palestine (1900 - 1948)*, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 27 (1937), 44-58

⁵⁵ Yehoshua Alouf and Gilboa Shaked, Hapoel." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 8. (Detroit: Macmillan, Reference USA, 2007). 338

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Harif, *Israeli Sport*

Palestinian media as well as a Jewish scholar asserted that the Maccabi was using its 1935 tournament to obtain as many tourist visas as possible for Jews from abroad to visit the territory. Filastin said it had received a complaint from residents of the town of Tulkarem denouncing the games as a provocative military exercise.⁵⁷ The paper reported the letter in an article headlined "Ten Thousand Jewish Athletes: By What Right are They Permitted to Come?"⁵⁸ Ha'aretz reported that the Palestinian media had questioned whether British authorities were "taking sufficient precaution to ensure that the tourists entering the country would leave at the end of their stay under the visas granted, or whether it knew that many contemplated remaining permanently as residents."⁵⁹ In his 1979 dissertation, "The Maccabiah Games: A History of the Jewish Olympics", Eisen acknowledged the Palestinian concern but asserted that the number of tourists cited by the media was "highly inflated by the hostile Arab news media even though their perception as to the real purpose of the Jewish influx was quite accurate."⁶⁰ The notion of using sports not only to project nationalism but also as a cover for developing military skills for the conquest of Palestine and defence of the rights of the Jewish people was particularly prevalent among those elements within Maccabi that traced their routes to Beitar.

Filastin and other Palestinian media demanded that the games be banned and asserted that their opening march was paramilitary in nature.⁶¹ The assertions prompted the British authorities to cancel the march a day before the opening of the Maccabiah.⁶² Earlier, the British had advised Beitar against wearing its brown-coloured shirts during the opening ceremony as it was reminiscent of fascist dress in Mussolini's Italy. The ban prompted Beitar to pull out of the tournament and break away from Maccabi.⁶³ Beitar, unlike Maccabi and Hapoel which saw itself first and foremost as sporting organisations with affinity to the Socialist International, defined itself primarily as a movement that also engaged in sports.

The Palestinian media nevertheless complained that the British gave the Zionists preferential treatment by imposing far less restrictions on them than on marches by Palestinian youth and sports groups. The complaint reflected British fears that Palestinian youth were adopting more militant nationalist attitudes. The British mandate authority warned in the public security section of its 1936 annual report that Palestinian youth had closely followed the Egyptian student movement that had "instigated disorders there in November, 1935." It said Palestinian youth had "gradually achieved a certain degree of influence with the Arab leaders themselves and used this influence to press for the adoption of a more extreme Arab policy. These activities were voiced in the Press through the

⁵⁷ Issam Khalidi, Coverage of sports news in Filastin, 1911-1948, *Soccer and Society*, 13:5-6 (2012), 764-777 / Filastin January 18, 1933

⁵⁸ Filastin, عشرة آلاف الرياضيين اليهود: بأي حق هل هم المسموح القادمة؟, March 30, 1935

⁵⁹ Haaretz, סי יופיע במכביע בשם ארצ-ישראל, April 4, 1932

⁶⁰ George Eisen, *The Maccabiah Games: A History of the Jewish Olympics*, (unpublished, 1979), 175

⁶¹ Davar, הסתה סביב "תמכביע", April 3, 1935

⁶² Davar, ערב פתיחות המכביע, April 1, 1935,

⁶³ *Ibid.* Jewish Agency for Israel

medium of 'Al Difa`a' newspaper, which was suspended for a month under the Press Ordinance for advocating the adoption in Palestine of the methods employed by the Egyptian students."⁶⁴

Palestinian media hinted at a growing divide between more militant youth and the Palestinian leadership in articles that criticised the lack of solidarity within Palestinian sports organisations,⁶⁵ using the term *Assabiyah* — a phrase coined by Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century historiographer and founding father of modern sociology — that refers to the bonds of cohesion built in the formation of communities.⁶⁶ Divisions among Palestinians were exacerbated by the decision of some Palestinian clubs to join the Zionist-dominated soccer federation during the popular revolt against Jewish settlement and British colonial administration in the late 1930s and the disappearance of a political edge in sports reporting during the Second World War as a result of British censorship.

Al-Sifri was not the first person to suspect Zionist use of sports. Palestine's Ottoman rulers feared that sports was used as a means to further Jewish nationalism and provide paramilitary training. To counter the Zionists, Ottoman authorities pressured schools to bar sports clubs like Rishon Le Zion in Jaffa and Bar Giora in Jerusalem. Schools often barred sports clubs for fear that authorities would confiscate their equipment or close them down. Ottoman and Palestinian fears were fuelled by the participation of Hashomer — a left-wing Jewish self-defence and settlement organisation — in the Rehovot Games, Zionism's first major series of sports tournaments. Hashomer grew out of Bar Giora — a self-defence group established during the second wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine and named after Simon Bar Giora who was a leader of the Jewish Revolt against the Romans in 70 CE. Hashomer not only fielded athletes but had been contracted to guard the Rehovot settlement.⁶⁷

Palestinian nationalists sought to stress the point that youth movements like Maccabi were paramilitary rather than sports groups. "The idea of the Maccabi goes back to first century B.C. when the Roman Empire saw for its own safety that the Jews have to (assimilate) so they could become Romans, but the Jews refused; they decided to maintain their national identity. The idea was in the beginning religiously ethical, so were their ways to achieve their goals. Later the concept was reduced from the realms of religion and ethics to the ground of nationalism and weaponry. The war was ongoing between the parties. The Romans were defeated more than once by the Maccabeans. The Jews remained nationally independent. We have no objection to see the Jews struggling for the sake of their unity and independence. The most we can prove here is that the Maccabi movement was a military struggle, but not an athletic movement as many Jews want to suggest to the world. What has been mentioned was proved by history," said Filastin.

⁶⁴ His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, "Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Palestine and Trans-Jordan for the year 1936," December 31, 1936

⁶⁵ Filastin. *أل-إتحاد أريد وال-عصبية*, July 18, 1935

⁶⁶ Syed Farid Alatas, "A Khaldunian Exemplar for a Historical Sociology for the South," *Current Sociology* 54:3 (2006), 397-411

⁶⁷ Stephen E. C. Wendehorst, "Between Promised Land and Land of Promise: The Radical Socialist Zionism of Hashomer Hatzair," *Jewish Culture and History*, 2:1 (1999), 44-57

A Primary Source

Filastin, with its projection of Palestinian nationalism, has become a primary source of 20th century Palestinian history. Since Israel has captured significant Palestinian archives and Palestine's sports history, historical sources has almost exclusively been written by non-Palestinian scholars and writers, with the exception of the work of Palestinian sports historian Issam Khalidi. Palestinian sports, despite its current political relevance, hardly ever emerges in Zionist or Palestinian collective memory.

The Jewish effort to solidify ties with the British as well as with other nations through soccer was boosted by Palestine's admission in 1928 to world soccer body — FIFA. Within a decade of its founding, the PFA sought FIFA's permission to play regional teams that were not members of the world body in a bid to strengthen Zionist ties with its non-Palestinian Arab neighbours as well as with British colonial teams in the Arab Middle East. In Khalidi's words, "to obstruct Arab Palestinian teams, which it had alienated or excluded from the PFA, from competing with teams from other Arab counties."⁶⁸ To this end, the PFA in the mid-1930s used its authority as the national association to prevent Palestinian teams from playing neighbouring Arab squads on the grounds that they were not members of the PFA.

Josef Yekutieli, the founder of the PFA and initiator of the Maccabean games, described the PFA's membership "as a direct result of the Maccabiah Games."⁶⁹ The PFA, despite having been established as an organisation that grouped teams regardless of religion and race, projected itself as one of the driving forces of Jewish sports in British-controlled Palestine. Palestine in its view was Jewish and British; Palestinians did not figure in its nationalist calculations. Its mother organisation, the Palestine Sports Federation, adopted Zionism's blue and white colours while the PFA dropped Arabic as one of its languages within three years of its founding. The Zionist anthem "Ha-Tikva" was played alongside Britain's "God Save the King" at the start of official matches. The Palestine Olympic Committee followed a similar pattern with its nine members, seven of which were Jewish. "By 1934, the dominance of Zionist officials meant that Arab clubs had no say in the running of the association, despite Arabs comprising over three-quarters of Palestine's population," Khalidi wrote.⁷⁰ The quest for Zionist dominance was rooted in the effort to create under British rule the building blocks of a modern state based on the principle of "authority without sovereignty".⁷¹

The PFA was established in 1924 after the Jewish Maccabi Athletic Organization was refused admission to the International Amateur Athletic Federation because its membership was predominantly Jewish and not representative of Palestine's British and Arab population.⁷² Its Zionist

⁶⁸ Issam Khalidi, "Sports and Aspirations: Football in Palestine 1900 – 1948," *Jerusalem Quarterly*. 58, (2014), 74-89

⁶⁹ Josef Yekutieli, "השתתפות ארצ-ישראל במשחקי האול'מפ"מ," *Haaretz*, March 29, 1935

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Khalidi, *Sports and Aspirations*

⁷¹ Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, "Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel," (Albany: State University of New York Press 1989), 232

⁷² Haim Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics," *Israel Studies*, 10:2 (2005), 147-167

domination sparked the initial creation of the Arab Palestinian Sports Federation (APSF) in 1931 with Palestinians unwilling to legitimise Zionist colonisation or serve as a fig leaf for a Zionist dominated institution. The APSF was founded at a time when the Palestinian national movement had to grapple with the fact that its traditional leadership was ineffective in the face of a refusal by the British mandatory administration to accord Palestinians the same degree of self-governance that it had granted other Arabs such as the Egyptians and the Iraqis. This reality was brought into sharp relief in 1930 with the death sentence for three Palestinian youths accused of organising the 1929 uprising against Jewish settlements and the British colonial administration. It persuaded younger nationalist leaders that they had to be more hard-line if Palestinians were to achieve their national ambitions.⁷³

Divorce of Palestinians and Zionists was a key element of a more hard-line approach. As a result, the APSF vowed to boycott Zionist teams, athletes and referees. Its opting for segregation paralleled efforts in other regions struggling with competing identities like South Africa and Ireland to assert identity through sports associations based on ethnicity or nationalism rather than the sport itself. The APSF's policy however proved controversial. The Arab Sport Club in Jerusalem battled, for example, for months against a decision by the Orthodox Club in Jaffa to bar Jewish referees.⁷⁴

The PFA's intent was evident when it dubbed the squad it sent to Egypt for a friendly match, the Land of Israel. The team was made up of six Jewish and nine British players. No Palestinians were included.⁷⁵ Neither were Palestinians part of the team which fielded in qualifiers for the 1934 and 1938 World Cup. When Palestinians revolted in 1936 against Jewish immigration, sports served to further bind Jews and Brits. "Efforts to dominate athletics, marginalize the Arabs, and cultivate cooperation with the British at any price were the main traits that characterized Zionist involvement in sports," Khalidi wrote.⁷⁶

A Well-oiled Machine

The Zionist effort to forge close relations with the British stumbled when ties with the colonial power frayed in the wake of the Second World War as Jews geared up for independence and extreme nationalist groups attacked British forces. Beitar, the right-wing nationalist group that encompassed Beitar Jerusalem, a storied club notorious until today for its anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim attitude, played an important role in the push for independence. Beitar, which was the product of the 1935 split between the revisionists and the main Zionist movement, was particularly pronounced in the post-World War Two run up to independence. The various Zionist youth movements intensified their focus on the concept of sports in the service of the nation and as a projection of nationhood. *HaMashkif*, the Beitar newspaper, argued in 1945 "that nations take part in international tournaments not only to

⁷³ Mustafa Kabha, "The Palestinian press and the general strike, April–October 1936: Filastin as a case study," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:3 (2003), 169-189

⁷⁴ *Filastin*. January 21, 1933

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Harif and Galily

⁷⁶ Issam Khalidi, "The Zionist movement and sports in Palestine, The Electronic Intifada, April 27, 2009 (accessed April 27, 2009) <http://electronicintifada.net/content/zionist-movement-and-sports-palestine/8198>

display their sporting skills, but also to demonstrate their national traits and their national flag.” *HaMashkif* went on to note that sports teams serve “to glorify the name of their people in public.”⁷⁷

Beitar adopted obedience as one its core principles so that it would operate as a well-oiled machine. Its members were obliged to become skilled in the use of weapons. Its philosophy was in line with the militaristic principles of legionism, the notion of collective revival based on an inherited defensive tradition; strict discipline; *hadar* or dignity; and mobilisation.⁷⁸ The duty of a Beitar member was to be ready to defend the Jewish settlement of Palestine. In Beitar’s vision, its members were destined to join a military unit that would emerge from five volunteer battalions known as the Jewish Legion of the British military that fought the Ottomans in the First World War. Almost two decades later, Jabotinsky, to who sports was a utility rather than a passion negotiated through intermediaries the training of 134 Beitar members in Mussolini Italy’s Maritime School in Civitavecchia in the province of Rome. The Beitar members were trained by Il Duce’s Black Shirts — paramilitary squads established after the First World War — and were visited by Mussolini himself. In a letter to Leone Carpi, one of his intermediaries, Jabotinsky, aware of the rise of fascism under Mussolini, wrote that his movement preferred to have the training in Italy.⁷⁹

Sociologist Shlomo Reznik noted that “in Jabotinsky’s words, Beitar was militaristic in the sense of knowing how and being ready to take up arms in the name of defending our rights. As an educational movement, the goal was to create a ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ citizen of the Jewish nation instead of the stereotypical ‘Diaspora Jew.’ The concept that captures the new Beitar type is *Hadar* (a Hebrew word that was used by Jabotinsky to denote outer beauty, pride, good manners, dignity, loyalty, and the like). Like its mother party, Beitar vowed to work for the establishment of a Hebrew state with a Hebrew-speaking Jewish majority, on both sides of the Jordan River, by means of mass settlement funded by national loans.”⁸⁰

The Jerusalem branch of Beitar founded the Beitar Jerusalem sports club in 1936, the year of the second Palestinian uprising. The club has been supported throughout its history by right-wing Israeli leaders, including current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It initially drew many of its players and fans from Irgun, an extreme nationalist, para-military Jewish underground. Its players and fans were active in various right-wing Jewish underground groups that waged a violent campaign against the pre-state British mandate authorities. As a result, many of them were exiled to Eritrea in the 1940s. Beitar’s initial anthem reflected the club’s politics, glorifying a “guerrilla army racist and tough, an army that calls itself the supporters of Beitar.” The movement’s links to the underground ultimately prompted the British to ban it on the grounds that it was “recruitment source for (a) terrorist group.”⁸¹ Said an Israeli journalist: “This was a team with an ideal. Everybody was a member of (the Jewish

⁷⁷ Ben Eliehu, 'המשקיף הספורטיבי', *HaMashkif*, January 14, 1945

⁷⁸ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *State Zionism*, Hadassah Newsletter, October 1945, 9

⁷⁹ Daniel Carpi, Attilio Milano and Alexander Rofé (eds, “Scritti in memoria di Leone Carpi: Saggi sull’ebraismo italiano a cura,” (Jerusalem/Milano: Mosad Shelomoh Meir, Makhon Le-Made Ha-Yahadut, 1967). 42

⁸⁰ Shlomo Reznik, “Betar: Sports and Politics in a Segmented Society, *Israel Affairs*, 13:3 (2007), 617-641

⁸¹ David Niv, 'הסיארוח מארגון הצבא' הלאום, (Tel Aviv: Klausner Institute, 1965), 277

underground movement Ha'Etzel) with the Menorah (Jewish candelabrum) emblem, which was something of a sacred symbol. The public was aware of the connection between Beitar and Ha'Etzel."⁸²

So were the Palestinians. Filastin translated an article by Jabotinsky originally published in Hebrew in *HaMashkif* newspaper under the title "Jabotinsky's Program: Shooting".⁸³ Jabotinsky argued in the *HaMashkif* article that Beitar could serve as a venue for military training given British opposition to the creation of Jewish military units.⁸⁴ The article constituted in Filastin's view evidence that Beitar was a cover for Jewish paramilitary activity.

Despite the willingness of teams of neighbouring Arab countries to play Zionist squads prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, resistance to the Jewish national project spilled onto the soccer pitch, long before Israel's expulsion from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in 1974. Filastin reported in 1929 at the time of the Palestinian uprising that Arab fans, provoked by Zionist flags and the singing of Jewish nationalist songs during a match in Damascus played by a Hapoel club, clashed with their Jewish counterparts.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, fans fought over alleged bias of referees.⁸⁶ The Muslim and Christian Association asked the British mandate authorities in 1925 whether the flying of Zionist flag alongside the British flag during soccer matches violated regulations governing public display of flags. The British governor of Jerusalem and Jaffa ruled that club flags did not violate the ordinance which was designed to curtail "any partisan demonstration."⁸⁷ The query followed a visit to Palestine by Hakoah Vienna, a team that was inspired by Nordau and widely viewed at the time as the best Jewish squad ever.

Ironically, Palestinians were not the only ones threatened by Zionist sports endeavours. Orthodox Jewry was vehemently opposed to defining Judaism as a national entity. To them Jewry was solely a religious community and would remain so until the Jews were redeemed from exile. The Orthodox leadership failed however to counter the attraction of youth movements with their emphasis on sports. Religious youth either joined Bnei Akiva, the largest religious Zionist movement, or often became members of Maccabi. The Orthodox Jewry nevertheless fought the fact that sports activities, particularly soccer, took place on Saturdays — the Jewish day of rest. Police repeatedly clashed in the 1930s with Orthodox protesters who sought to prevent games from being played.⁸⁸ It was a struggle that continued to be waged throughout the 20th century, with the Orthodox Jewry battling

⁸² Amir Ben-Porat, Oh Beitar Jerusalem: The Burning Bush Protest, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 18:4 (2001), 123-139

⁸³ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, , *Hamashkif*, April 3, 1939

⁸⁴ Filastin.. برنامج جابوتنسكي: اطلاق النار, April 6, 1939

⁸⁵ Filastin April 16, 1929

⁸⁶ Filastin, . اشتباك التي انتهت تقريبا مع الثورة ., April 6, 1926

⁸⁷ The Palestine Bulletin. March 24, 1925

⁸⁸ Israeli Daily Picture. "The Tensions between Jerusalem's Religious and Secular Jews Go Way Back, January 26, 2012 (accessed January 26, 2012), http://www.israeldailypicture.com/2012/01/tensions-between-jerusalem-religious.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+IsraelsHistory-APictureADaybeta+%28Israel%27s+History+-+a+Picture+a+Day+%28Beta%29%29

plans for the construction of a stadium in Jerusalem. Much like militant Islamic clerics, ultra-Orthodox rabbis feared that sports would distract students at yeshivas, Jewish religious schools, from their study of traditional texts. Similarly, they also opposed sports because it was performed in clothes that allowed athletes to exhibit parts of their body.⁸⁹

Fuelling Nationalist Friction

The Zionist employment of sports in their struggle for Jewish statehood nonetheless sparked a Palestinian national response that sought to counter the challenge in the realm of sports. Palestinian national sentiment expressed itself post-World War I through the emergence of charitable societies, women's groups, youth organisations and sports clubs, even though Palestinian media lamented that they lacked the resources, particularly in sports, available to their Zionist counterparts. British mandate officials recognised early on that the development of separate Jewish and Palestinian sports clubs was likely to fuel nationalist friction. At the inauguration of the Jerusalem Sports Club in 1921, Jerusalem Military Governor Ronald Stores called for clubs to be inclusive and admit members irrespective of their religion or beliefs.⁹⁰

Khalidi documented the battle over rival Jewish and Palestinian claims to land and identity waged on the soccer pitch in the decades leading up to the founding of Israel. Muslim, Christian Orthodox and secular Palestinian sports clubs reinforced national identity and constituted a vehicle to strengthen ties among different Palestinian communities. Orthodox Christians, opposed to foreign domination of their parishes, took a lead in promoting sports with the first conference of Orthodox Christian clubs in 1923 that called for the establishment of clubs across Palestine. Its call was heeded with the emergence of Orthodox clubs established in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Lod, and Akko.⁹¹

The clubs, similar to the role of the Algerian national team as a promoter of the Algerian liberation struggle during the country's war of independence, allowed Palestinians to forge relations with other Middle Eastern and North African nations. Filastin praised in nationalistic terms the performance of the Orthodox Club of Jaffa in its 1931 encounter with a visiting Egyptian team. "The team of the Egyptian University came to Palestine and played with the Jewish teams, no Arab team applied to compete with them, except the Orthodox Club. The result was better than the game with "Maccabi". So it made us proud and made everyone understand that there are Arabic teams in Palestine who are skilful in this game and have the same level as the British and Jewish teams," Filastin wrote.⁹²

Sports clubs further created an institutional base for political organisation and served to prepare predominantly young men for social and political engagement. In an effort to forge useful relationships through soccer, Palestinians first created their own informal national team in 1910 that played

⁸⁹ For a detailed description of the history of the Teddy Kollek Stadium in Jerusalem see Gedalia Auerbach and Ira Sharkansky, "Politics and Planning in the Holy City, (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 87-96

⁹⁰ The Palestine Weekly, Jerusalem Sporting Club, April 12, 1921

⁹¹ Issam Khalidi, The Coverage of Sports News in "Filastin" 1911-1948, Jerusalem Quarterly. 44 (2010), 45-69

⁹² *Ibid.* Khalidi, The Coverage

primarily against missionary clubs. Encouraged by local media, the Arab Palestinian Sports Federation and a national team that played its first match against a squad from the American University of Beirut were born 21 years later as Palestinian counterparts of the PSA and the PFA. The team “will refute Jewish claims and Zionist propaganda that Palestinians are ignorant and have nothing to do with sports,” Filastin quipped.⁹³

The Islamic movement, riding a wave of increasing popularity on the back of mounting public disillusion with the inability of Palestinian and Arab leaders to counter Zionist advances, convened a meeting of the Islamic Physical Training Club in 1928. The gathering attended by lawyers, journalists and politicians, including Ragheb Effendi Al-Imam, Hasan Sidqui al-Dajani, Mohammed Izzat Darwazeh and Sheikh Hassan Abu Saud, a close associate of Haj Mohammed Effendi Amin el-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, called for the establishment of Young Men’s Muslim Associations (YMMA) across Palestine.⁹⁴ A prominent newspaper editor described the activities of the YMMA’s Nablus branch as evidence that “native sons now have the knowledge that their public welfare, and consequently their private welfare, requires bonds of unity, virtuous discord, and love to exist.”⁹⁵

Four years later, sports became a central tenant of the Arab Youth Congress headed by newspaper proprietor and politician Issa Basil Bandak. Convened in 1932, the congress was a reflection of the growing gap between Palestine’s traditional leadership and its youth.⁹⁶ The divide was evident within clubs. In 1934, members of the long-standing Salesian Club in Haifa that was associated with the charitable Catholic Society of St. Francis de Sales, split off to form Shabab al-Arab because they felt that it was not nationalist enough. Shabab al-Arab was founded under the auspices of the congress which had its own annual tournament.⁹⁷ “Athletic clubs were important in evoking the Palestinian national consciousness, sustaining connections between villages and cities, and developing ties with groups across the Middle East and parts of Africa. As such, this trend was contested by Zionist forces in Palestine in a struggle played out on the international stage after the re-establishment of the defunct APSF in 1944,” Khalidi wrote.⁹⁸ To strengthen links with Arab neighbours, players and spectators held two minutes of silence in 1945 at the beginning of the final of the Palestinians’ first territory-wide soccer championship to commemorate the 400 protesters killed in the French bombardment of Damascus.⁹⁹

⁹³ Filastin, March 28, 1931

⁹⁴ Abdelaziz A. Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians 1850-1939*, Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (1989), 120

⁹⁵ *Bracey/Filastin*. 1932. May 4

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Ayyad. p. 136

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Ayyad. p. 136

⁹⁸ Issam Khalidi, “Body and Ideology Early Athletics in Palestine (1900 - 1948),” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 27 (1983), 44-58 / Tamer Sorek, “Sports Column as a Site of Palestinian Nationalism in the 1940s,” *Israel Affairs*, 13:3 (2007), 605-616

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Sorek, Palestinian nationalism

The nationalist Palestinian uprising that erupted in 1936 nevertheless allowed the PFA to briefly revalidate its claim to represent both Jews and Arabs in Palestine. With the APSF in disarray and no institutional framework, several Palestinian clubs including Jerusalem's Arab Sports Club and Al Rawda Club and Haifa's Shabab al-Arab re-joined the PFA to ensure that they could continue playing.¹⁰⁰ It was further strengthened by the creation of a short-lived league in 1942 that included Palestinian, Jewish, British and Greek teams.¹⁰¹ Shabab al-Arab, the nationalist club, was among the Palestinian clubs that participated.¹⁰² The APSF's demise ironically ushered in a period of greater engagement between Zionist and Palestinian teams that in part was encouraged by perceptions in some segments of Palestinian society of sports being apolitical. It was a perception Zionists were eager to encourage. "Perhaps at first a small group of Arab sportsmen would be found, a group that would listen to our voice and claims that sport and politics should not be mixed and that the good and mutual relationship between sportsmen of both nations could bring about the improvement in the friendship in general," wrote journalist Shimon Samet in 1937.¹⁰³

A refusal seven years later by an Egyptian military soccer team to visit Palestine to play a predominantly Jewish squad prompted the Palestinians to again organise themselves on a regional and national basis. The newly reconstituted APSF insisted in its 1944 regulation that its membership "consists exclusively of Arab, non- Jewish institutions and clubs in Palestine... All clubs must include no Jewish members, not employ Jewish referees and not be funded by Jewish sources."¹⁰⁴ "The association is uncharted road in the confrontation with the Jewish Football Association," a prominent Palestinian sports editor said.¹⁰⁵

The regulation was more than an effort to challenge the Zionist claim of representation of Palestine, it was an attempt to project Arab Palestine as an organised sports entity in its own right, able to compete internationally and to engage the British in the waning years of their mandate. Opting for segregation in sports was in line with Filastin's advocacy more than a decade earlier of parallel Jewish and Palestinian labour markets to counter British and Zionist policies that forced Palestinians into an increasingly untenable situation of insecure land tenure, heavy debt, and lack of investment.¹⁰⁶ Filastin conveniently refrained from reporting that Palestinians and Jews played in an APSF team in violation of the group's 1946 regulations to play against other squads in Palestine.¹⁰⁷

The segregation strategy nevertheless persuaded Palestine's Arab neighbours to play in Palestinian rather than Zionist clubs. However, Palestinian efforts to persuade FIFA to recognise the APSF alongside the PFA fell on deaf years. It took the Palestinians half a century to achieve FIFA

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Khalidi, *Body and Ideology*

¹⁰¹ Filastin.. تشكيل رابطة الرياضة للموسم المقبل, January 27, 1942

¹⁰² *Ibid.* Khalidi, *Sports and Aspirations / al-Difa'*, 12 April 1942

¹⁰³ Shimon Samet, למסלול תפקוד חשוב, Ha'aretz, April 17, 1936

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Khalidi, *Body and Ideology*

¹⁰⁵ Hussein Husnu, Filastin, January 31, 1947

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Bracy, p. 101

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* Al-Jibin, p. 442

acceptance when the Palestine Football Association, the APSF's successor, won membership as FIFA's only entity that was not a state.

Ironically, APSF had already warned two years before the establishment of the State of Israel that FIFA's efforts to play peacemaker in the Middle East by having Jews and Palestinians represented by one organisation would fail. "Simply we could say that the members of your federation will not succeed in achieving what the British administration could not do," the APSF said in a memo to FIFA.¹⁰⁸ It would take the Palestinians 52 years to defeat Zionist insistence that the Palestinians did not constitute a people or a state. In achieving their goal, the Palestinians made history by becoming the first territory without a state to have a seat at the soccer world table.

The fact that it took the Palestinians half a century to become a FIFA member raises questions about soccer's effectiveness as a tool to project nationhood. In the case of the Jewish national movement, Harif argued that the "political implications of the sports contacts with foreign countries must not give the impression that these sports meetings resulted in a substantial change in the international standing of the Yishuv," the Jewish settlement of Palestine. Athletes, in the political scientist's view, "first and foremost fulfilled a symbolic role as representatives of a political entity which lacked sovereignty and real power and strove to achieve independence."¹⁰⁹ While Haggai looked at the role of sports primarily in terms of Zionist Jewish identity, he unwittingly anticipated later concepts of the utility of sports as a soft power tool to project identity to a target audience beyond a nation's immediate confines.

Projecting Nationhood

The Palestinian struggle to gain the right to represent themselves in soccer nonetheless gave birth to a strategy Palestinian soccer upholds until today: the projection of Palestinian nationhood through football. Palestinians "cannot avoid devising a way to publicise their ideas...and propagate their principles and views without being afraid of opposition or oppression. They can achieve their goal through sports as did Sweden, Czechoslovakia ... and Hungary," Filastin commented a day before the 1947 United Nations vote in favour of partitioning Palestine.¹¹⁰ APSF had rejected an invitation to Palestinian clubs issued by the PSA a year earlier in a bid to fend off a request by Arab soccer associations to grant the Palestinian group FIFA membership.¹¹¹

The Palestinian efforts to join FIFA were thwarted not only by Zionist opposition but also by British concern about identity politics in sports given their experience in Egypt where Cairo's storied Al Ahli club was a driver of the 1919 revolution and represented an anti-colonial bulwark. A 1935 official British report on youth movements in Palestine warned that Palestinian Scouts, sports and youth

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Khalidi, Sports and Aspirations

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* Harif, Israeli Sport

¹¹⁰ Filastin November 28, 1947

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* Sorek, Palestinian nationalism

groups could challenge the region's national leadership.¹¹² A year later, in a forerunner of the role of soccer fans in the 21st century's popular Arab revolts, members of sports clubs and the Scouts were in the forefront of anti-British demonstrations during the revolt in 1936. They patrolled beaches to prevent illegal Jewish immigration and arms smuggling, organised the distribution of food, and helped moving those wounded or killed in the uprising. They saw themselves as filling a void left by a failing Palestinian leadership.

Palestinian media stressed throughout this period the nationalist utility of sports in general and soccer in particular. *Filastin*, a twice-weekly Christian-owned newspaper published in the first 67 years of the 20th century that pioneered Palestinian sports reporting, supported the Young Turks during Ottoman rule and was influential in promoting Palestinian nationalism, "maintained a consistent critique: challenging the authorities' neglect of Arab sport and its support of Jewish sport activities. About 80 per cent of the news in *Filastin's* sport section was about soccer, the most popular game in Palestine," wrote Khalidi.¹¹³

At the Jaffa Literary Club in 1922, the newspaper's co-founder, poet and journalist Issa Daoud El-Issa, signalled public distrust of political leadership that came to haunt the Middle East and North Africa almost a century later. Addressing Arab rulers, El-Issa, a pioneer of criticism of 20th century Arab regimes, said: "Oh little kings of the Arabs, by the grace of God, enough feebleness and infighting. Once upon a time, our hopes were on you, but all our hopes were dashed." El-Issa's comments primarily targeted the inability of the Hashemites, Jordan's current rulers who at the time ruled Hejaz — a province of contemporary Saudi Arabia, to unite the Arabs in confronting British, French and Zionist advances in the region.¹¹⁴ They also targeted large landlords who sold Arab land to the Jewish National Fund which was a key element of Zionist colonisation effort; Palestinian merchants opposed to general strikes in protest against pro-Jewish British policies, and against Palestinian leaders who collaborated with the mandate authorities. The comments were all the more significant given that El-Issa had joined Hashemite Prince Faisal in his 1918 march on Damascus and served as the head of his court during his brief two-year reign in Syria. Similarly, El-Issa parted ways with El-Husseini, the grand mufti, whose supporters called for a boycott of *Filastin*, accused El-Issa of being a traitor, burnt his house to the ground and forced him into exile in Beirut from where he continued to publish the newspaper.¹¹⁵

Filastin, founded in 1911 in the booming port city of Jaffa, helped in the emergence of a Palestinian civil society and built an audience across all social and economic segments. El-Issa's cousin and co-founder, Yousef El-Issa, defined the newspaper's mission in *Filastin's* first edition as advocating

¹¹² *Ibid.* Khalidi, *The Coverage*

¹¹³ *Ibid.* Khalidi, *The Coverage*

¹¹⁴ Yaqub Awdat. "Min 'alam al-fikr wa al-adab fi Filastin," (Jerusalem: Dar al-Isra, 1992), 478 quoted in. 'Isa al-'Isa, *Filastin, and the Textual Construction of National Identity 1911-1931*, R. Michael Bracey. (Lanham: University of America Press, 2011), 1

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* Bracey, p. 36

“every development that serves the constructive rather than the destructive building of a nation.”¹¹⁶ Six months later, he stressed the need to create a public opinion that would enable Palestinians to modernise tradition and custom within the framework of Islamic law.¹¹⁷ The notion of a need for public opinion and mobilisation was expanded three years later in the pages of *Filastin* and other media in a bid to galvanise opposition to Jewish immigration and land purchases. Within three weeks of writing an editorial asserting that “a very important movement is afoot among young men,”¹¹⁸ *Filastin* was closed down by the Ottomans for a period of six years that included the length of World War One, and Isa El-Issa was exiled to Anatolia. The paper’s fate was shared by other Palestinian publications.

Filastin, which unlike most Palestinian publications was not formally associated with a political party, was widely viewed as the most influential Palestinian newspaper in the first half of the 20th century. Once it started publishing again after the six-year closure, *Filastin* expanded its coverage to include sports. It used its football coverage to deepen national sentiments and helped, according to Khalidi, to “maintain the Palestinian national identity... Sports began to be viewed in the Palestinian community as an important element for raising social consciousness and as an essential component of national culture.”¹¹⁹ The paper did so in the context of a drive promoted by Isa El-Issa to carve out a Palestinian national identity that was separate from that of Syria, which traditionally was seen to incorporate Palestine. It was based on Isa’s notion that Palestinians needed to shape their identity before seeking independence — a proposition that positioned *Filastin*’s brand of Arab nationalism against Islam-based concepts of *ummah*, the community of the faithful.¹²⁰ *Filastin*’s coverage tackled Zionist domination of sports and refuted assertions that the Palestinians lacked the cultural, social and athletic attributes needed for sports. The paper’s influence increased despite British censorship. Its sports coverage went in tandem with the revival of Palestinian sports federations in the 1940s.

Sports, a term in Arabic derived from a word that denotes domestication of animals, amounted in *Filastin*’s view to a national duty, according to Israeli sports historian Sorek who analysed *Filastin*’s sports reporting in the 1940s. *Filastin* propagated soccer’s emphasis on discipline and obedience. “Soccer teaches us to obey the team’s manager, and the referee teaches us to adhere to law and justice... Obedience is one of the most important qualities that the soldier in the battlefield must equip himself with. The war will not be fought without obedience,” the newspaper said.¹²¹ To bolster its campaign, *Filastin* enlisted medical personnel to propagate the individual and national health benefits of sports and provide guidance for taking care of one’s body — similar to concepts pushed by its Zionist counterparts.

In an appeal to the Supreme Muslim Council in 1946 to encourage sports, *Filastin* said it was “calling upon you as a soldier active on the sport field for many years ... I would ask you to direct the attention

¹¹⁶ Youssef El-Issa, وجد ام لا وجد, *Filastin*, January 14, 1911

¹¹⁷ Youssef El. Issa, نفس السنة, *Filastin*, July 15, 1911

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* Bracey, p. 59 / Issa El-Issa. 1914. *Filastin* August 8

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Khalidi, *The Coverage*

¹²⁰ Bracy/*Filastin*. 1921. July 9

¹²¹ *Ibid.* Sorek, *The Sports Column*

of the preachers in the mosques, and the speech-givers in the houses of God, so that through their speeches they may point the nation to sport, to urge them to care for their bodies, to ensure its cleanliness and activeness, to strengthen its limbs and to behave according to the rules of health, and its health will advance with us...in the struggle....”¹²² In a similar appeal to school principals, it said: “Remember that history urges you to raise an army of well-educated and healthy people, which will defend this country against the demon of colonialism.”¹²³ The newspaper’s campaign reflected the views of nationalist leaders at the time. “The youth is to the nation as the heart is to the body ... I see sport as the best means of equipping the nation with the youth it longs for,” Gaza mayor Rushdi al-Shawa told the paper in 1945.¹²⁴

Fast forward to 1998 when Palestine became the first non-state entity to become a member of FIFA and soccer re-emerged as a building block in the Palestinians attempt to create a state regardless of peace talks with Israel. Soccer, despite lack of funds and disruptive Israeli travel restrictions, flourished in Israeli-occupied Palestinian areas. Stadiums were built or refurbished across the West Bank and the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) hosted international tournaments. The Palestinian national team in 2014 qualified for the Asian Cup finals for the first time.

“Ours is more than just a game,” said PFA secretary general Abdel Majid Hijeh. “It breaks the siege on Palestinian sports and the Palestinian people.”¹²⁵ “When teams come to play on our land, it’s a way of recognizing the Palestinian state. That benefits the Palestinian cause, not just Palestinian sports,” added player Murad Ismael in an interview with the Associated Press.¹²⁶ Palestine’s soccer effort fits into a Palestine Authority campaign spearheaded by President Mahmoud Abbas to ensure popular support at a time of popular revolt, upheaval and sectarian violence in the Arab world and to reduce Palestinian dependence on failed U.S. efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Leading Palestine’s charge on the soccer pitch was PFA President Jibril Rajoub, a 62-year old tough anti-Israeli activist, former security chief and member of the central committee of Abbas’ Al Fatah guerrilla group-turned political party. Rajoub, who served 17 years in Israeli jails for throwing a grenade at Israeli soldiers when he was 17 years old, worked hard to get Israeli consent to upgrade a soccer stadium in Al-Ram, a Jerusalem suburb a stone’s throw from the barrier that separates the West Bank from Israel, and to get FIFA funding for its refurbishment. He also convinced FIFA to allow Palestine to play its first ever match on home ground in 2008 rather than in a neighbouring Arab capital. The crowds in the Faisal al Hussein Stadium shouted “Football is nobler than war” as

¹²² *Ibid.* Sorek / Filastin. 1946. June 1

¹²³ *Ibid.* Sorek / Filastin. 1945. October 25

¹²⁴ Filastin. October 12, 1945

¹²⁵ Interview with the author

¹²⁶ Quoted in Palestine: Playing soccer for statehood, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*, James M. Dorsey, June 18, 2011 (accessed June 18, 2011) <http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.sg/2011/06/palestine-playing-soccer-for-statehood.html>

Palestine took the lead in its first international match in the stadium, a friendly match against Jordan.¹²⁷

“We can achieve a lot for our cause through sports. The world is changing and we have to push the legitimacy of our national aspirations through sports. I hope sports will help Israel reach the right conclusion. We are 4.2 million people living under Israeli occupation; I hope that I can convince the Israelis that we should open a new page that recognizes the existence of Palestinian people,” Rajoub said.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Filastin’s emphasis on national duty and its concept of sports as a tool for cultivation of traits needed on a battlefield was reflected in its reporting of the 1948 war that led to Israeli independence. Sportsmen who died in Zionist attacks or on the battlefield resisting Zionist advances were termed martyrs. One obituary was entitled, “The Martyrdom of a Youth on the Battle Field.”¹²⁹

Nationalist fervour and the impending partition of Palestine in the late 1940s produced a galvanising figure, Hussein Husnu, in many ways the equivalent of early modern Turkey’s legendary author and athlete Selim Sirri Tarcan and Zionism’s Yosef Yekutieli. An Egyptian physical education teacher who became Filastin’s sports editor, Husnu was, in Khalidi’s words, a rarity who had a keen understanding of the importance of sports and education for the “health, ethical, national, cognitive, pedagogic and aesthetic benefits of sport at a time when many thought that sport was merely an amusement or recreational activity.”¹³⁰ The emphasis of Filastin and Husnu on sports as a driver of modernity paralleled trends elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, including Zionist parts of Palestine as well as Iran, Ottoman and modern Turkey, and Egypt.¹³¹ Husnu emerged as a nationalist critic of Palestinian and British official neglect of Palestinian sports and physical education, and a major voice in countering conservative opposition. “The more the Palestinians will sacrifice for the sake of athletic progress, the faster they will reach a level of development and civilization. Every Palestinian must know that for every cent he pays for the growth of sport, he will achieve glory and honour for his country,” Husnu argued in his Filastin column.¹³²

In doing so, Husnu and Filastin were aligned with more modernised segments of the Palestinian elite as opposed to conservatives like al-Husseini with whom Filastin editor Isa el-Issa had parted ways. Filastin found common ground with Ahmed Hilmi Pasha, an Ottoman general and finance minister in Faisal’s short-lived government in Damascus, director of Hussein’s religious endowment, and founder

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* Dorsey

¹²⁸ Interview with the author

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* Khalidi, Sports and Aspirations

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Khalidi

¹³¹ Wilson C. Jacob, ‘Working out Egypt: Masculinity and Subject Formation between Colonial Modernity and Nationalism, 1870 – 1940’, (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2005)

¹³² *Ibid.* Khalidi

of a bank. Hilmi Pasha parted ways with Husseini with the establishment of the secularist Istiqlal Party in 1932 to which El-Issa was close. By the mid-1940s, Hilmi Pasha had emerged as a major patron of soccer which he hoped would help garner support for his bid for political office and mobilise a grassroots base. Hilmi Pasha was not alone in recognising the political value of soccer in Palestine at a time of increasing disunity and factionalism. Founders of the People's Party, a breakaway group of younger members of the Husseini clan's Palestine Arab Party (PAP), operated secretly through a network of sports clubs in Nablus and other cities.¹³³ The moves by Hilmi Pasha and the PAP dissidents underscored the role soccer had already played in nationalist struggle and nation-formation in the Middle East and North Africa and was destined to play in the years to come.

So did the graduation of Jewish Israelis from nation formation to nation building with the 1947 United Nations partition resolution that established the State of Israel and could have established an Arab/Palestinian state had Arab states not rejected the notion of a territorial compromise. As a result, Palestinians post-1948 remained preoccupied with nation formation in the absence of an identity that was fully delineated from that of the broader Arab world and particularly concepts of Greater Syria.

That delineation took final shape with the takeover of the Palestine Liberation Organization, founded five years earlier by the Arab League, by Palestinian guerrilla groups in 1969. The creation of the Palestine National Authority in 1994 as a product of the Oslo Israeli-Palestinian peace process launched the Palestinians on their ongoing convoluted and messy nation building process. The Ottomans and Turkey as well as Iran were spared the convulsions of nation formation. Nevertheless like in Palestine, sports influenced by the notions of the German *Turnbewegung* played a key role in their nation building efforts.

¹³³ Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948*, (Albany: State University of New York Press 1991), 95

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