- • • *Football and Society in Israel—a Story of Interdependence*

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The English poet T. S. Eliot referred to football as a major cultural phenomenon of early twentieth-century Britain. This has held true since then in Britain and in many other countries. The game crosses continental and national borders when, during the football seasons, thousands of professional footballers and millions of amateur ones congregate weekly to play the game worldwide (Goldblatt 2006). An exceedingly large number of male and female amateurs play the game on all kinds of fields, while hundreds of millions of fans of all ages, genders, classes, and ethnicities watch from the benches at local stadiums or through mass media. The same holds true every four years when the FIFA World Cup tournament (the Mundial) takes place, and every year during the European and other regional championships. Indeed, there is no other cultural event that exceeds football's popularity, consumption, and enthusiasm: football is more than just a game.

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levels. It has been associated with a host of subjects related, among other things, to violence and racism; gender and ethnicity; identity, identification, and loyalty; body and emotions; space and time; history and nationalism; types of ownership and organizational, individual, and collective relations; communication and discourse; globalization, neoliberalism, and consumption; socialization, immigration, and social change (e.g., Giulianotti 1999; Hargreaves 1995; Kuper 1994; Mangan 1998; Sugden and Thomlinson 2002). Studies of these subjects employ multiple quantitative and qualitative theories and methodologies to uncover social structures and hierarchies, relationships, and group norms and values; bodily and emotional practices, perceptions, and experiences (Giulianotti 2004, 2005; Smith 2010).

Ipso facto, the modest anthology we have compiled makes no pretense to cover all or even the most important subjects in football, as we have focused on topics concerning the interrelations between “football and society” that are investigated by Israeli football researchers. Our survey of the existing studies revealed that their numbers are small but growing. Subsequently, we decided to include both veteran and new Israeli researchers in the anthology and offer readers a taste of the current research on football and society “made in Israel.” The main aim of the anthology is to present new knowledge and insights concerning football in Israel, and to invite other researchers to delve into many oft-neglected subjects.

The sustainable seeds of football were planted in England in the nineteenth century. The modern formula of the game was created and shaped in the backyards of British public schools, the boarding schools attended by upper-class boys. Later on, the game was appropriated by the English lower classes and attracted the locals, then it spread all over the United Kingdom and worldwide. At first, it was a game played mainly by amateurs, watched by the proletariat, and managed by local businessmen. Fans at the time often gathered in muddy local grounds where they enthusiastically watched a somewhat aggressive, non-colorful game. In 1885, a few of the English clubs had turned professional: players were paid, bought, and sold; playgrounds turned into more or less fancy stadiums; and fans had to pay for their pleasure. After that, not much changed until globalization, commodification, and technology penetrated the football field and changed the ways clubs in the western hemisphere are managed and fandom is performed (Ben Porat 2002). Yet, despite these changes and the development of new modes of fandom (such as long-distance spectatorship and touristic fandom), traditional fandom has not lost its authenticity and attraction: football is literally “the people’s game.”

From early on, the growing spread of the game, the increased public interest, and fandoms’ visibility has attracted cultural attention far beyond the stadium: writers have published books (Hornby 1992), poets their

poems (Seddon 1999), and composers have written popular songs (e.g., Arik Einstein in Israel). People travel far to watch games; exhibits on football can be seen in the best museums. All these cultural products celebrate the “beautiful game,” honoring the players and the enthusiastic fans at the same time. Millions of photographs and videos are taken by professionals and amateurs and distributed on social media, documentaries and feature movies are produced, special sports articles and columns are written in newspapers and magazines on clubs, owners, players, and fans, beyond the reports on winners and losers. All these cultural products reflect the passionate consumption and production of football-related information and products that enrich and propagate this unprecedented cultural and economic phenomenon (Seddon 1999).

Indeed, global economic and neo-liberal agendas play a major role in shaping the football field. Evidently, the game’s transformation from an amateur sport to a professional-commercial corporation is tightly related to the expansion of capitalism and consumerism. To date, it looks like the sky is the limit with regard to the already enormous sums players receive and the financial investments in clubs, often by billionaires from countries where football is a secondary cultural phenomenon. Contrary to these developments, we are witnessing the emergence of fans and clubs that swim against the current and, mainly in European countries and also in Israel, establish “fan-owned clubs” that resist and challenge the process of commodification (Ben Porat 2016; Rapoport 2016). These clubs promote the idea that football belongs to the fans. Although they are far from being mainstream, they are important in establishing an alternative organization and offering another set of values.

Alongside the strong link between economics and football, the tight association between football and politics is almost inevitable. Local politicians and state authorities realized long ago the instrumentality of football in mobilizing political power and, most importantly, the game’s potential to enhance local and national (state) identification. Authoritative and democratic governmental systems alike take advantage of football’s popularity (albeit in different ways) in attempts to strengthen their position and power by elevating the “national selection” as a symbol of genuine nationalism: “the entire people stand behind the football team” wearing the national uniform (Ben Porat 2003; Hobsbawm 1990).

Academic research was slow to study football, so for a long time the meaning, significance, and characteristics of the game, fans, and fandom, and particularly its close relationship with culture, economy, and politics remained relatively unexamined. Research that started mainly in Britain after World War II was primarily conducted in the disciplines of history, sociology, economics, and psychology (e.g., Giulianotti 1999). Coupled

with the awareness and recognition of football's importance and the fascinating phenomenon that it is, a small stream of academic books and articles were published, which grew over time until it became a wide river. For many decades, academic institutions that marginalized the subject looked down on scholars that engaged in the topic and contemptuously rejected suggestions to study it; however, this attitude has changed over the last three decades. Now, university students are engaged in football research, articles and books are written in various languages covering different dimensions of the game and fandom, conferences take place all over the globe, special journals (e.g., *Soccer & Society*) and established publishing houses publish new ideas and perspectives about the game. Football has become a legitimate subject to be taught, studied, and researched.

In general, research into the sociology of football, which most interests us here, has generated vast information and an abundance of important ideas in various domains, yet it lags behind in developing its own analytical models. Many football scholars draw on existing sociological, economic, and psychological (Giulianotti 2004, 2005; Maguire and Young 2002) theoretical frameworks and models and apply them to study football as a social and cultural phenomenon. Football research in Israel borrows concepts and models from sociology, history, and more.

Football in Israel

Football was played in Palestine before the State of Israel was established, after which it became part of the state's cultural institutions. Similar to certain societies in Europe, football clubs in Israel were founded as public associations supported by political parties and were in line with the party's ideological and political agenda. At first they were considered amateurish, but later on developed their professional qualities. In the late 1980s, the first division became genuinely professional and, within a few years, the second division followed suit, while clubs in the lower divisions remain amateurish. Now, Israeli players travel to play abroad and non-Jewish and non-Israeli players play in the Israeli league. The Israeli national football team currently plays in the preliminaries of the World Cup and the European Cup and Israeli clubs play in the European season's tournaments. Thus, Israeli football has gone global; as in other countries, money has become the name of the game.

As already mentioned, the academic study of football in Israel began late. Very few studies were published until the late 1970s, and there has not been an abundance of them since. This situation began to change in the early 2000s when university students studying the social sciences explored

football from various perspectives and published articles in local and international journals. Some of the topics they dealt with were the nature of fandom, the conflict between Israeli Jewish and Arab fans, the commodification of the game, socialization and practices of fandom and its gendered qualities, emotions and the body, and the alternative model of fan-owned clubs as well as the economy and history of the game. The analytical frameworks and methods used in the different chapters of this anthology aim to contribute to the growing academic interest in Israel.

Embarking from a neo-Marxist approach to examine the ongoing association between the football field and the engulfing society, Amir Ben Porat coined two concepts: *relative autonomy* and *permission zone*, which serve as guidelines in studying the history of Israeli football since 1948. Permission zone refers to the autonomy of the game and fandom behavior within the boundaries of the stadium; it addresses behavioral norms that are tolerable and even encouraged in the stands but are rejected, condemned, and even punished outside the stadium. Ben Porat argues that alongside the FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) rules that bind each of the organization's member states (211 in 2019), what happens in the stands during games depends on the relative autonomy granted to football in a certain society. Thus, the transformation of Israeli football from a game to a commodity reflects the process of Israeli society becoming capitalist.

Yair Galily and Alex Nirenburg use the concept of *institutional development* to explain the relationship between media and sport in four consecutive periods since the establishment of the State of Israel. They claim that many of the specific developments in this relationship can be understood by looking at the continual dynamic based on mutual recognition between them. The conclusion is that sport, particularly football, emerges as an institution that is especially well-suited culturally and ideologically through which to understand how Israeli society is becoming capitalist.

Tamir Sorek focuses his analysis on Arab football clubs in Israel, showing how their particular position as an ethno-national marginal group plays an active and significant role in shaping the attitudes and emotions of the club and the fans, on and off the football field. Because football is ostensibly apolitical, Arab fans hope that demanding equality from inside the football field outward might be less threatening and more acceptable to the Jewish majority than demanding it in other contexts. However, their attempt to utilize their success in football as a tool to fulfill their wishes and demands for social equality has failed.

Tamar Rapoport and Efrat Noy advocate the use auto-ethnography—a feminist-phenomenological conceptual and methodological approach based on personal testimonies to investigate women's (and men's) position,

experience, perception, and performance. The careful analysis of personal stories narrated by three women fans who are also researchers shows that this method is particularly useful in revealing how women (and fans in general) express fandom and charting their different paths to becoming fans in the gendered fandom field. The main suggestion is that the absence of a model for women's fandom shapes their fandom practices and orientations in particular ways since they have not learned and cannot properly speak (perform) the dominant language of fandom and therefore must find their own language to do it.

Using the analytical framework of "suspending suspicion," Guy Abutbul-Selinger examines the case study of Mizrachi fans of Beitar Jerusalem FC who recreate the meaning and intent of the fandom behavior in their club, which has an infamous reputation because of the fans' racist-nationalistic orientation and expressions of hatred toward Arabs. Considering the clubs as reflecting the ongoing conflict between Jews and Arabs in Israel, he dwells on the concept of "nationality *cum* ethnicity" to analyze the relationships between Mizrachi-Jewish and Arab-Palestinian fans. The analysis proposes an additional explanation to the one promoted by the media and public discourse for the "racist behavior" of Beitar fans. According to the author, Beitar fans' opposition to Arabs is not the result of their "false consciousness" but the effect of their communitarian-traditional Jewish worldview.

Shlomit Guy discusses how different authorities in Israel endeavor to integrate Israeli football into European football by importing and making efforts to implement and institute "civilized behavior" (Elias 1978)—that is, European behavioral standards—on the football field. The aspiration is that the adoption of civilized emotional and behavioral patterns, particularly those related to feelings and expressions of shame and refinement, will reshape the conduct of the fans, players, and officials. They believe that this change will not only make the stadium a better place to watch football but will transform the image of Israeli football in Europe.

The six articles in this anthology deal with major subjects that are at the heart of football in Israel and beyond. Together, the articles demonstrate the multi-faceted nature and utility of studying football as a universal yet local phenomenon. Football research reveals a great deal about Israeli society and facilitates an open discussion of the relationships between football and social issues. The anthology draws an incomplete picture of the state of the football research field in Israel; nevertheless, we hope that the readers of the *Israel Studies Review*, whether or not they are familiar with this fascinating cultural, economic, and social phenomenon, will find this collection instructive and interesting.

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