

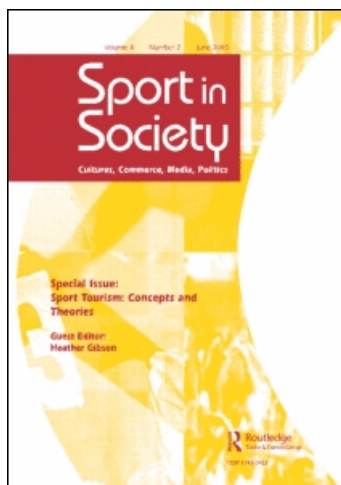
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Sport, Zionist ideology and the State of Israel

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Sport has been a central element of the Zionist ideal to create a new Jew, even though the meaning of the term did not necessarily include physical activity and was perceived differently in the Diaspora and in *Eretz Israel*. As this essay explains, within the establishment of the State of Israel sport turned into an instrument for recruiting diverse streams of Zionist ideology, both on a political and on a national level and as a means of internal and external Zionist propaganda, as well as collective identification in the society taking shape in *Eretz Israel*. The social, economic and political changes the State of Israel has undergone since the 1980s have led sport to lose its function as a political tool and a tool for spreading propaganda. Instead, sport has become one of the few forms of collective identification that can unify the Israeli public. Still, this identification is not necessarily related to Zionist ideology, but rather to civilian identification with the State of Israel.

The Enlightenment and Jewish sports

The Enlightenment, which began at the start of the seventeenth century, brought about dramatic changes for the Jewish people and was one of the leading causes of the growth of Jewish nationalism, expressed by Zionism. The Enlightenment replaced the theocentric Judeo-Christian concept in the anthropocentric moral system, and placed human beings and their needs at the centre. The human became a rational creature who must examine phenomena by means of the brain, free of the chains of a system whose beliefs and opinions were dictated by political and religious institutions. The Jewish Enlightenment, which followed in the footsteps of its European counterpart, intended to give the exiled Jew a normative lifestyle once again. It attempted to tear down barriers between Jews and the surrounding world, and to change Christian society's negative attitude towards Jews by emphasizing the common ground they shared. Barriers were removed through changes in three main areas: general education in addition to traditional Jewish education, the study of the nation's language, and the aim for 'productivization' – instilling values of manual work and production in order to turn the Jew into a 'productive' citizen worthy of equal rights.

The Enlightenment, together with resulting social, economic and national benefits in Europe, ruptured the traditional framework of the Jewish community. The world surrounding the Jews was no longer a Christian world, alongside which lived the Jewish community, but rather a world of nation-states where Jews gradually became citizens with equal rights and in whose frameworks they could work and succeed. Consequently, the traditional community lost its power to enforce Jewish law and no longer served as the Jews' sole existential structure. The community was no longer the dominant educating

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authority of the Jews, who were now free to search additional self-definitions of their Jewish identity. As a result, at the start of the eighteenth century, various Jewish identities began to take form, at times conflicting with one another, and each claimed to be the one that would lead the Jewish people to an optimal future.¹ The diverse Jewish identities that took shape at that time led to varied attitudes towards bodily culture in general and to sports in particular.

The concepts developed by the Enlightenment and liberalism, the growth of modern states, and above all, the emancipation granted to Jews in Central and Western Europe led to the integration of Jews in Europe in all spheres of life. Jews integrated in such disciplines as economics (for example, the Rothschild and Hirsch families), the independent professions, culture (Mendelssohn, Mahler, Kafka, Stefan Zweig) and science (Einstein and Freud). This integration led Jews to question their Jewish identity in a new reality. The new definitions that emerged were not uniform and several integration patterns can be identified: complete assimilation, national assimilation with preservation of Jewish religious association, or preservation of a national identity within a 'civilian' national framework.

However Jews chose to define themselves, they saw themselves as part of general society and therefore their integration in gymnastics and sports was part of the process of Jewish mobility in society at large, especially as part of their integration within the urban middle class, to which a large part belonged in Central and Western Europe. For example, many Jews in Germany became members of the 'German Gymnast Movement' and others excelled in countries where competitive sports began to develop. The Platov brothers, the Jewish gymnasts who represented Germany in the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, Alfred Gutman from Hungary, who won two gold medals in those games and dozens of outstanding Jewish athletes who represented their states did so as patriots of their countries – though undoubtedly their achievements stood in opposition to anti-Semitic bodies who were against Jewish integration, claiming Jews' physical racial inferiority.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, socialist philosophy developed throughout Europe, especially as a result of the Industrial Revolution and widening social gaps. The concepts of a new egalitarian society free of oppressors and oppressed resonated loudly in Tsarist Russia, where lack of democratization, social gaps and economic inequality were especially salient in relation to Central and Western Europe. These concepts captivated many Jews, especially in Russia. A revolution which would overthrow the Tsarist regime and create a social revolution in Russia could also solve civilian discrimination and the social and economic distress of Russian Jews.

Jews chose to join socialist movements in two main forms. The first was a complete merge with general movements and a joint effort to change society. The second was activity within a unique Jewish framework in light of the increasingly growing working-class status of the Jews in Eastern Europe. The most prominent labour union in Eastern Europe was the 'Bund' organization, established in 1897, which adopted the definition of Judaism as a culture. It set a goal that within a future socialist state, cultural autonomy would be established which would oppose territorial nationalism and the Hebrew language, but preserve Jewish culture and the Yiddish language created in exile.²

At first, these socialist concepts had no expression in sports. Autocratic rule by the Tsars did not permit free organization and rejected the founding of gymnast unions that were perceived, justifiably, as a means for national awakening. In any case, it was not customary for Jews to engage in physical activity. Practical expression of that was found only after the Bolshevik Revolution and the First World War. Neither did the Bolsheviks

permit the establishment of unions with a national basis, although sports were cultivated by the regime with the purpose of creating the new Soviet Union. Jewish integration in the new Soviet Union system led individual Jews to take part in this phenomenon as well, for as individuals they were now full-fledged citizens of the Soviet Union.

Jewish socialist sports unions, whose aim was to introduce Jewish youth to physical activities ideas, were established mainly in Poland between the two world wars. Poland at the time was the state with the largest number of Jews, and therefore became the main arena for the various Jewish streams. The 'Bund' movement established the biggest sports union for workers, called *Hamergenstern* in Poland, which competed in the Jewish community against the Zionist 'Maccabi' and in a certain period against the socialist Zionist 'Hapoel'. In addition, the leftist Zion Activists (Poalei Zion) established the 'Goyzda-Stern' Union.³

Jewish Nationalism, Zionism and the New Jew

The awakening of national movements in Europe, the growth of modern anti-Semitism in Central and Western Europe, and the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe led many Jews to adopt national ideals for the self-definition of the Jewish people. They recognized that anti-Semitism would prevent them from complete assimilation and since Judaism was a nationality in and of itself, it had to fight for self-determination, like any other nationality. However, the character of such self-determination was under heated debate. Some claimed that each state should strive for national Jewish autonomy. Others claimed that appropriate territories should be found where a Jewish state could be established. The national solution accepted by the majority was the Zionist solution, which meant establishing a Jewish homeland in *Eretz Israel*, the historic homeland of the Jewish people. The Enlightenment freed Jews from religious beliefs insisting on future Messianic Jewish redemption in *Eretz Israel* and made the concretization of the Jewish return to *Eretz Israel* possible. The Messianic prophecy was given a contemporary, earthly dimension in the establishment of a Jewish state. At first the Zionist solution appeared unrealistic considering the difficulty in gaining territory under the Ottoman rule with an Arab majority. Nevertheless, political circumstances which took shape at the end of the nineteenth century and the exchanges that ensued after the First World War turned the solution into a viable one once *Eretz Israel* became part of the British Mandate.

In comparison to other national unions that arose in Europe in the nineteenth century, the Zionist Movement was unique in three respects. First, the majority of the national group that was supposed to be represented by Zionism did not identify with the movement's goals. Furthermore, other movements popular among the Jewish people at that time were intensely opposed to Zionism. Secondly, Zionism was the only national movement with the majority of its followers living outside of what they perceived as their national homeland. Some were even willing to compromise and consider other territories. These included the founders of the Zionist Movement, Jehuda Pinsker and Theodor Herzl, who in their initial platform books, *Auto Emancipation* (Pinsker) and *The Land of the Jews* (Herzl) actually did not focus on *Eretz Israel*. Third, Zionism was a national movement that defied a clear definition.

Religious affiliation aside, almost none of its supporters could claim to share a common culture at the time of its establishment. This final point was cause for disagreement among supporters regarding the movement's aims and the means to achieve them. (Was the aim a state? If a state, then was it to be defined as a Jewish state, or a bi-national state? Was it to be established in *Eretz Israel*? Was the means to establish

it by physical settlement or political activity, or was the establishment of a cultural spiritual centre enough? Would a socialist society be established there, or a capitalistic one? Or should it be a Jewish state that would function according to the *Halacha* (Jewish law)? Should all Jews immigrate or should there be selective immigration? And so forth.)

As a result, a clear definition of 'Zionism' was (and still is) a highly controversial issue. Nevertheless, three general 'key aims' were agreed upon by all factions of the movement, especially after the death of Herzl in 1904. First, exile should come to an end and the Jewish people should establish a homeland in *Eretz Israel*. Debate continued regarding its size, features and the type of government that should be developed. Second, there was a need to create a national culture and a common identity for the settlers who came from such culturally diverse backgrounds. The new culture must be centred on the Hebrew language, that is, the Hebrew issue was non-negotiable. Thus, the revival of the Hebrew language became one of the Zionist Movement's greatest goals. Third, the physical image of the Jew had to be transformed into a 'New Jew'. The expression 'New Jew' referred to a 'positive' physical type that was the antithesis of the Diaspora Jew's negative stereotype.

Herzl and Nordau wrote about the awkward, slim, gaunt Jew who grunts and coughs, and Sokolov claimed that the more bitter and wrinkled the Jew the more he resemble the Diaspora stereotype. The new physical image that would refute the stereotype of the Diaspora Jew (which demonstrates that the anti-Semitic claims of the Jews' physical inferiority were ingrained in the Jewish psyche as well) was for a large part a legacy of the Enlightenment. As a result, a new 'original' or 'real' Jew was developed in complete opposition to the anti-Semitic image. With that, it cannot be ignored that these images were not completely unjustified, and they expressed to a great extent the Eastern European Jew's physical inactivity which influenced how the Diaspora Jew was perceived by anti-Semites as well as by Central and Western European Jews.

Max Nordau coined the phrase 'Muscular Judaism' in the Second Zionist Congress (1898). The new term expressed the will to free the 'exiled' Jew, to change Jewish character and the neurotic anxiety that allegedly characterized it. Moreover, it comprised many other ideas regarding the new Jewish ethos. The term expressed the Jewish power to fight against anti-Semitism in the Diaspora and to develop military skills as a means of building a Hebrew force, and thus an attempt to contend with racial assumptions regarding the Jew's congenital physical inferiority. The term also expressed a model of romantic philosophy by calling for a return to the ancient heroic past of the Jewish people. Since the Jewish heroes of the past became objects of emulation, it was natural for Jewish sports unions to adopt names of legendary heroes such as Bar-Kochva, Samson and Judea the Maccabi.⁴

The image of the new muscular Jew exemplified a primeval, strong, productive type of person who worked the land and was totally familiar with his natural surroundings. In this light, athletics and sports were seen as means for developing group spirit, controlled movement and discipline, and for serving the goal of nationalism by cultivating unity and cohesion. The notion of the new Jew turned into a central component in Zionist terminology and dialogue, and modern Hebrew literature gave it wide expression. The Zionist physical body, which meant a flawless male Jewish body, was expressed in the writings of Tchernichovski, Bialik, Brener, Moshe Shamir and others.⁵ The image of the *tzabar*, native-born in *Eretz Israel*, which took shape at the start of the settlement in *Eretz Israel*, further represented this new image.⁶

The New Jew and sports activity: the Diaspora vs. *Eretz Israel*

The concept of the 'New Jew' was closely tied to the cultivation of body culture. That is how Max Nordau, who wrote extensively on the issue, understood the concept, and how it was understood in Germany and Central Europe as well. The Zionist Movement and the discussion over the Jew's physical image catalyzed the establishment of Jewish gymnasts' unions. The first was 'Bar Kochba' Berlin in 1898 followed by additional unions in dominant areas of German culture. In the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel in 1903, the 'Jewish Gymnasts Movement' was established, and served as an umbrella organization for all unions in Central Europe. The intention was to establish national gymnasts unions similar to other national unions in Central Europe, namely the 'German Gymnasts Union' and the Czechoslovakian 'Sokol'. Interestingly, when Jewish sports unions were first established, they were targeted at all Jews with national consciousness, not only Zionists, including those Jews who maintained their Jewish nationality within their civilian national framework. 'Bar-Kochba' Berlin members (1898) and later 'Jewish Gymnasts Movement' members were for the most part Zionists, but they did not define themselves as such, and thus any Jew with a national identity was granted the opportunity to join. Only after the First World War did national mapping become clearer. The changes that occurred within the Zionist Movement and in *Eretz Israel* enabled Zionist national sports unions to be more clearly defined. The Zionist Movement gained momentum following the Balfour Declaration and the beginning of the British Mandate in *Eretz Israel*. As a result, the 'Maccabi' Labor Federation which was founded shortly after the First World War (1921) defined itself as Zionist, and became a means to attract Jewish youth to the Zionist Movement. At the same time, Jewish national unions which did not define themselves in Zionist terms were established as well, such as the 'Shield' (which represented released Jewish soldiers) and the 'Vintus'.⁷

While in Western and Central Europe the link between the New Jew and sports was apparent, in *Eretz Israel* it conjured up different connotations. Although the concept of the 'New Jew' was vital to the Zionist ethos, it should be pointed out that exercise and sports in *Eretz Israel* suffered from a stand-offish and indifferent attitude from bodies making up the Zionist establishment, such as the Zionist Movement, the National Council (Vaad Leumi), and the General Federation of Labor (Histadrut). National institutions provided little assistance to sports unions, physical education was ranked low priority in schools, and frequent complaints about an indifferent and distant stance from the establishment were found in sports union sources.⁸ If this was indeed the case, the question that arises is why did such a gap exist between an agreed-upon ethos of the 'New Jew' and the attitude towards exercise and sport in *Eretz Israel* where the ethos was to be realized in practice?

There are two explanations. First, the foundation of Jewish sports and gymnast unions had reverse relations with the Zionist Movement's main source of power. The process of establishing Jewish sports unions occurred mainly in Western and Central Europe, while in Eastern Europe it took place more gradually: Russia was less exposed to the Enlightenment and to industrial and modernization processes. Therefore, Russian Jews were unaware of the ideational and external signs of the Enlightenment and the resultant changes regarding the value of body culture. The traditional communal framework was more dominant in Eastern Europe, and therefore greater resistance was met to sports activity, an expression of modernization which the community opposed. The image of the 'Exiled Jew', a key element in the idea of the 'New Jew', relies upon this image of the Eastern European Jew.

In addition, the autocratic rule of the Tsars did not permit open gathering and organizing, and forbade the establishment of gymnasts unions which were regarded, with some justice, as a national awakening. Most immigrants to *Eretz Israel*, as the majority of the settlement leadership there, came from Eastern Europe and had no sports background. Jewish sports developed in Eastern Europe later than in Central Europe and were not amply rooted to allow internalization of their values by the Jewish masses in the East, as was also the case of the Jewish leadership that came from there.⁹ Hence, a reverse relationship emerged between the practical expression of Zionist awakening (Eastern Europe) and the establishment of Zionist sports unions (Central and Western Europe).

The second reason is an outcome of the first, and can be found in the perception of the 'New Jew' in *Eretz Israel* by the first ideological waves of immigration that arrived from Eastern Europe at the start of the twentieth century. These people supported the concept of taking over labour and security from Arab hands as a means of creating a Hebrew working class and defence force. In 1920, A.D. Gordon, one of the leaders who conceived of the idea of 'Labor Religion' and one of the most prominent spiritual leaders of *Eretz Israel* activists during the second immigration wave, wrote a letter to the 'Maccabi' Center in *Eretz Israel*. In it, he objected to 'Maccabi' sending teachers to learn gymnastics abroad. He claimed that Jewish muscles would develop only through labour. Gymnastics and sports were at most 'complementary to labour', though hardly within the bounds of a national movement, for they alone 'will not turn us into workers'. In 'Hashomer [The Guardian] Book', there is a story written by union activist Zvi Nadav about a 'Maccabi' member who joined the Guardian Union, and despite his well-developed muscles he could not carry the burden of guarding. This story bears witness to the demeaning attitude towards gymnastics and body development, and the emphasis that was placed on the worker's and the guard's courage and determination over the athlete's.¹⁰

That is, the idea of the 'New Jew' in the reality of *Eretz Israel* remained a central shaping concept, yet its practical implementation received a wider interpretation. It was not perceived as body development by means of gymnastics and sports (as it was perceived by Nordau), but as an ideal to be realized through Hebrew labour, pioneer work and the building of a military force. Gymnastics and sports, on their own, were considered bourgeois entertainment, or at most a form of leisure.

Thus, the concept of the 'New Jew' never ceased being a shaping and agreed-upon ethos in the Zionist consciousness, although the approaches to implement it were wide and varied. In Western Europe, body culture was developed and gymnasts and sports unions were established for that purpose. In *Eretz Israel*, where the proportion of immigrants from Western and Central Europe was smaller, the practical expression fostered by the ruling establishment was the production of strong, muscular Hebrew work by means of developing manual labour and a military force, while sports and gymnastics were considered bourgeois entertainment for recreational purposes. The German immigration which arrived in *Eretz Israel* in the 1930s was the first mass immigration from Central Europe, and the situation should have changed as a result. It contributed many gymnast teachers, outstanding athletes, and coaches, yet it did not fundamentally change the perceptions described above, as they were already deeply rooted in the Settlement. Moreover, this immigration wave had a minimal role in the Jewish leadership which was the shaping agent of the national ethos in *Eretz Israel*. The image of the 'New Jew' did provide a new physical image of the Jew in *Eretz Israel*, though not in the 'athletic' sense of the term.

Politics, Zionism and sports in *Eretz Israel* and the Diaspora

As mentioned above, one of the unique characteristics of the Zionist Movement was the lack of consensus among its supporters regarding its aims and objectives. Those who carried them out in practice often disagreed on the significant issues which would form the society taking shape in *Eretz Israel*, and led to a division of the Settlement into conflicting political camps.

The first was the labour camp, which was formed prior to the First World War, and significantly grew after the war. This camp was the most organized and consolidated of the groups, and its various parties were unionized under the Histadrut (General Federation). The 'Histadrut', apart from being a professional union, assumed positional responsibilities and national tasks. According to their beliefs, the Hebrew worker was a pioneer at the head of the camp who would achieve the aims of the society-in-making in *Eretz Israel*. The functions of the 'Histadrut' included immigrant absorption, settlement, defence and caring for a range of personal, cultural and spiritual needs of the worker.

Another was the 'civilian' camp, which was formed by the urban 'bourgeois' class. This camp was more divided and less consolidated in terms of ideology, and each party in the camp actually represented private professional sectors (farmers, merchants, craftsmen, etc.). It was mainly characterized by its opposition to socialist ideology and the 'Histadrut's' hegemony in the Jewish Settlement, and its support of private enterprise and capitalistic economy. The Revisionist party which was developed within this camp by its founder Zeev Jabotinski, offered financial as well as national solutions to meet the range of problems at hand. In the 1930s this party was under the threat of the labour camp hegemony. Additional camps included the religious camp of religious Zionists and ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionists, and the ethnic camp which was comprised of parties whose aim was to promote the interests of their various ethnic groups (Georgians, Yemenites, etc.).

The political camps not only fought against one another ideologically, but also established their own institutions which would serve as instruments in the ideological struggle. Health organizations, educational factions, labour unions, youth movements and clandestine military organizations were associated with a clearly defined political identity. Sports unions which were established in *Eretz Israel* at the time shared the same orientation.¹¹

The first gymnastics and sports union established in *Eretz Israel* was 'Maccabi', whose national federation was founded in 1912. 'Maccabi' was founded as a national gymnastics and sports federation. It was intended to represent national Zionist values accepted by all and to stay neutral regarding controversial issues. However, since the Zionist Movement was unable to clearly define what those values were, conflict surrounding how to implement them, and what image and direction should the state to be established adopt, began at the start of Settlement in *Eretz Israel*. One controversial national issue during the foundation of 'Maccabi' was Hebrew labour. Farmers regarded Arab labour as an economic means which enabled colonies to subsist, as well as a way of forming good relations with the Arab population. Workers, on the other hand, viewed the taking of labour into Hebrew hands as a central national objective for the purpose of creating a healthy and natural society based on Hebrew workers. Serious (some even violent) disputes regarding this issue within 'Maccabi' indicated that already at an early stage, common values that could be agreed upon by all would not be easily found.¹²

Divided political camps were clearly defined in the 1920s at the start of the British Mandate and the beginning of the establishment of a 'homeland'. The political divide was reflected in sports as well. The 'Hapoel' Association was established as a sports union

strictly for workers and corresponded with the aims of the General Federation, which met its goals by means of establishing various bodies within it (a health organization, the 'Davar' newspaper, factories, etc.). 'Maccabi', which was established earlier and considered itself from the start as an apolitical sports organization which was not targeted by any particular sector, was cornered into the 'civilian' camp (since anyone who belonged to the labour camp joined 'Hapoel').¹³

Over the years two additional sports organizations with political sectarian identity were established: Beitar, which was in essence a youth movement of the Revisionist Party (founded in 1923 in Riga), which began to foster sports activity and began to be identified as a sport union; and 'Elizur' (founded in 1939), which was founded as a religious Zionist sports union.¹⁴

The politicization of Hebrew sports was not only an outcome of the circumstances that developed in *Eretz Israel*, but also of political developments in international sport. In the early 1920s the international labour union (Sozialistische Arbeiter Sport Internationale, SASI) was established as an answer to the Olympic sports which were regarded as bourgeois, and the foundation of 'Hapoel' in *Eretz Israel* was in fact part of the process of establishing similar sports unions. Shortly after its foundation, in 1927, 'Hapoel' joined SASI. Paradoxically, the 'Hapoel' union, which gradually became the largest sports union in the country, represented both the leading national camp in the national Settlement enterprise in *Eretz Israel*, as well as international sports for workers. One of the aims of 'Maccabi' was to incorporate sports in *Eretz Israel* within international sports unions and to enhance ties with Jewish sports in the Diaspora. It established the 'Amateur Sports Union in *Eretz Israel*' and the 'Olympic Committee in *Eretz Israel*'. 'Hapoel', out of loyalty to SASI, avoided contact with these organizations. For this reason, despite its classification as a 'pioneer' camp, 'Hapoel' was accused by other sports unions as preferring foreign class interests over loyalty to national interests.¹⁵

Sports in *Eretz Israel* moved from this point on two different planes: on an external plane, national Zionist interests of the Settlement were promoted. Sports served to forge ties with the Diaspora and for Zionist publicity in the Jewish world for the purpose of the Settlement. Journeys by different teams from *Eretz Israel* abroad strengthened ties with the Diaspora and culminated in the organization of two Maccabia Games in *Eretz Israel* (in 1932 and 1935), and led the *Eretz Israel* national team to participate in the World Pre-Cup Football Games. On the internal plane, political segmentation and hostility reflected the sectarianism of the Jewish Settlement in general. Such hostility, sometimes expressed by violence, hindered the institutionalization of sports in the country.¹⁶

Political sectarianism in Jewish sports was pronounced only in *Eretz Israel*, and not in the Diaspora. 'Maccabi' in the Diaspora appealed to a large numbers of Jewish youth who wanted to engage in sports activities. Within the 'Maccabi' framework they were indoctrinated in the ideational-cultural framework of the Zionist Movement as well. 'Maccabi' in the Diaspora did not mull over the Jewish Settlement's sectarian problems, and its struggle was focused externally rather than internally – as opposed to Jewish unions which represented Jewish factions. The identification of 'Maccabi' in *Eretz Israel* with a particular camp could have only harmed the World Maccabi Federation's apolitical stance and brought about division in the Diaspora. Therefore, the majority of labour unions in the Diaspora joined 'Maccabi' and even made it difficult in the early 1930s for *Eretz Israel* 'Hapoel' to establish 'Hapoel' in the Diaspora, which would have turned Jewish Zionist sports in the Diaspora political-sectarian as well.¹⁷

Zionism and sports following the establishment of the State

The establishment of the State of Israel was a turning point from all aspects of the Zionist idea. The Zionist Movement, which was up to this point a national movement competing for the hearts of Jews in terms of a suitable Jewish identity and the appropriate solution to the Jewish problem, in fact won the right to realize its vision – a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*. Zionism had won the ideological struggle for the solution to the Jewish problem. The Holocaust allegedly proved that Jewish existence in the Diaspora was hopeless, and placed the Jewish people in existential danger. The murder of millions in the Holocaust put an end to the vivacious and diverse Jewish life that had existed in Eastern Europe, burying other Jewish factions which competed with Zionism.

A new dimension was added to the Zionist idea from this point on. Zionism, which until then focused on the struggle against other Jewish factions and political struggles within it for the purpose of establishing a state, became the official ideology of the new state. It now had to contend with new challenges, both internally in terms of the process of building a nation, as well as externally in terms of legitimizing the status of the nation in the world and among Jews abroad. One of the means employed by the new state was sports. Despite the fact that the founding ideology of the state was established on the basis of Jews who worked and fought for realizing the Zionist ideal – it was in fact a state of immigrants who came as a result of distress in their countries. The Settlement, which on the eve of the War of Independence accounted for 600,000 Jews (most of whom also came due to distress but had internalized the founding ideology in the meantime), absorbed some 1,200,000 Jews in its first 15 years of existence. Some of the Jews were Holocaust survivors who were concentrated in displaced persons camps after the Second World War, or Jews who abandoned their countries due to political strife which arose there (Poland, Hungary). *Eretz Israel* was a last resort for most of these people who could not return to their countries or emigrate to others. Most immigrants came from Islamic countries, where Zionist activity was minor; very few Jews emigrated from those areas prior to the establishment of the state. The Jewish-Arab conflict brought hundreds of thousands of refugee immigrants from Islamic countries, most of whom (apart from religious tradition) had a weak connection to modern Zionist ideology.¹⁸

The aim of the state's institutions was therefore to shape a common collective ideational identity for the population's wide range of diverse segments (native and immigrant, Ashkenazi and Sefardi, religious and secular) in order to bond them together within a melting pot which would produce a new Jewish-Israeli identity. For this reason, the initial years of the state were spent creating a common culture (i.e. literature, all forms of art, school curricula) which would all serve this public ideological objective.

Sport, which prior to the establishment of the state was not a primary priority, did not change its status in terms of immigrant absorption, foreign affairs, defence and so on. However, similar to other forms of culture, it became a tool for national design by becoming the focus of a national identity. Israeli athletes carrying the flag of the country, singing its national anthem, and competing alongside the nations of the world inspired national pride and formed an integrative collective identity crossing all social classes and political sectors. One peak moment illustrating this phenomenon were the two football games played by Israel against the USSR in 1956, which aroused sweeping national enthusiasm, especially following direct contact with representatives of the Soviet superpower. Although Israel was defeated in both encounters, the goal made by Nachum Stalmach into the Russian net produced a wave of pride and joy which was felt across the

country and is remembered to this day as the moment which best expressed the new national spirit.¹⁹

Another aspect of sports in the early years of the state was its functional use for the new state's foreign needs: forging friendly ties, cooperation with other nations, spreading propaganda, and gaining respect and prestige, as well as expressing protest.

In terms of propaganda, the new state set two main objectives. The first was propaganda to justify its very existence. Arab propaganda generated delegitimization of the new Jewish state. Israel's propaganda, in counter-response, was determined to spread information around the world that would justify the Zionist idea as a basis for its existence. The second was propaganda aimed at the Jewish world to engender support of Zionism and immigration to Israel. This agenda was already carried out in Israel's national football team's first journey to the United States in 1948, shortly after the establishment of the state. Although the team lost all three matches, it achieved its publicity objectives: a large Jewish audience came to watch the game including many American celebrities from politics and entertainment, and the visit received a great deal of public exposure.

In those days representative athletes from Israel became publicity ambassadors. They carried with them mementos, pamphlets and brochures about Israel and regularly stayed with the local Jewish communities. In those early years Israel repeatedly failed in the Olympic Games, although its participation and the opportunity to carry the national flag as an equal to all other nations was perceived as more important. With that, there was a growing demand to close the gap between Israel and the rest of the athletic world in terms of level and abilities. The prestigious value of achievement and its impact on national pride was better understood, and sensitivity grew to the impact of failure on the sports field on the image portrayed externally to the world and internally to the nation.

The defeat of the national football team against Poland in Warslav (2-7) in June 1959 became a humiliating national trauma, while the relatively few achievements in the European Championship (fifth place in 1953) and a number of victories in football and athletics (for example, the victory of the football team against Yugoslavia in Belgrade in April 1960 and Israel's achievements in various Asian Championships) received a great deal of press coverage at the time and served as a source of pride far beyond their actual athletic value.

Another dimension of Zionist ideology in the early years of the nation was associated with the political nature of sports. The establishment of the state did not significantly change the sectarian character of Israeli sports. In its early years, there were clearly defined ideological political camps, and sports continued to serve, as in the former days of the Settlement, as a form of rivalry between the different political camps and unions. The agreement known as 'Fifty-Fifty' which was signed in 1951 brought political stability to sports institutions and in effect to athletes' representation in the national teams. This was clearly a political agreement with a pragmatic approach which enabled the 'sound' existence of sports institutions and the establishment of leagues in the various branches.²⁰

The political nature of Israeli sports in the early years of the state affected all the organizations involved in it. Sports centres had deep rooted ties to political centres of power; 'Hapoel' continued its ties with the General Federation, which at that time of the Mapai Party rule was at its strongest. 'Maccabi' institutionalized its ties with 'General Zionists' (Zionim Claliim), 'Beitar' joined the Freedom Movement (Herut), and like the Parliament of those days it regarded 'Maccabi' as its ally, and 'Elizur' continued being identified with religious Zionism ('Hamizrachi' and 'Hapoel Hamizrachi').

The public in those days tended to identify with the new nationalism by means of political parties whose common ground was their commitment to the Zionist ideal

(apart from the Communists, Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox who were at the margins of the political spectrum), while differences remained mainly in regard to the defence, social and economic means for achieving the Zionist aims of the nation.

Political sports served as a tool for the benefit of the national ideal, and the division of fans into camps reflected their political tendencies. Sports clubs were established as an instrument for recruiting supporters for political purposes, especially for recruiting immigrants from the periphery, the extent of whose cultural identity with the founding Zionist ideology was small. Their joining a sports club was perceived as the first link in the connecting chain from the local club centre to the central sports centre, and from there to state-national identity.²¹

The political divide in sports concerning the function of sports to unify society led to tension between its role as an integrative tool for shaping identity and collective consciousness and as an instrument in the political struggle for the benefit of particularistic Zionist ideas.

Sports and Zionism: from erosion to identification

Social political developments, especially since the Yom Kippur War in 1973, brought about many changes on an ideological level. Although Zionism is still considered the ideological foundation of the State of Israel (although Post-Zionist concepts are developing which claim that Zionism has completed its role), the ideological identity of traditional political blocs has undergone a great deal of change.

During the years of the settlement and in the early years of the state, political camps were clearly defined and delineated. The ideological conception of each party was clearly associated with social, economic and defence issues, and each party could be clearly identified politically and socially. After the Six Day War in 1967, ideological identity began to be blurred, and the distinctive features that delineated each political body began to fade. The central debate regarding the future of captured territories overshadowed and practically obliterated the debate regarding the character of the society taking shape in Israel. The debate regarding the economic future was won by capitalism, and ever since it has been quite difficult to clearly define the significant differences between the different parties and bodies. The main difference between what is considered today extreme 'left' and extreme 'right' lies in their radically different attitudes regarding the purpose of the 'territories', rather than essential differences in their social-economic perceptions. Israeli society is still sectarian, although in effect political-ideological sectarianism has been converted to sectarianism of the social character: ethnic, religious, ethnic minorities and economic status.

The ideological blur that occurred began to reflect upon the relations between political sports centres as well. Centres continued to preserve their organizational power, although they gradually ceased being a focus of partisan power and an instrument of political influence. The 'Fifty-Fifty' phenomenon dissolved, and nowadays athletes no longer choose teams according to their political association, but rather according to economic and personal considerations. Mobility from one centre to another is no longer problematic. Fans do not identify politically with teams any longer, and at most they identify with 'community' teams according to geographic area or with a team's success. Today, there are almost no sports teams which can be regarded as solely 'political'. Although several symbols of the past (such as the red colour and the symbol of 'Hapoel') have been preserved, no one really attributes any significance to them other than their being the 'symbol' and 'colour' of one's favourite club. The process of globalization has also

contributed to the blurring of tribalism and nationalism, and has led to the creation of multi-national teams and spectatorship beyond borders, cultures and status. In the new reality of professional and global sports, sectarian political sports have lost their position.

This change, in effect, meant that together with the loss of the unions' political recruiting force, their ideological Zionist significance has also been lost. In the 1990s, control over teams and athletes was transferred to private owners and business agents, for whom the political labels of the clubs they purchased were irrelevant. Sports became 'merchandise'. Players were no longer committed to their unions nor were they identified with them any longer, allowing them mobility among the various clubs according to their professional needs and in accordance with their abilities. Team symbols with Zionist orientations were replaced or appear alongside commercial company logos. In the various ball game branches, foreign players are in fact more dominant on the Israeli teams, and Israeli coaches and players are active abroad turning them into local heroes, without accusing them of betrayal to national values or of anti-Zionism.²²

Even more prominent is the fact that different teams that perform as representatives of Israel no longer gain sweeping public support as the 'nation's representatives', but rather only from their fans (and often provoke the hostility of the rival teams). The 'Maccabi' Tel Aviv basketball team, for example, which had always served as the national 'tribal bonfire' and as an apolitical source of national identity, today arouses only the interest of its fans.

Nevertheless, alongside the erosion of Zionist values due to the processes described above, sports are today one of the few instruments that glues together emotional consciousness and bonds the collective identity. The above-mentioned sectarian 'tribalism' which characterizes today's segmented society makes a cohesive identity with consensus among all strata of society virtually impossible. A closer examination of what emotionally binds all segments of society to one another reveals that it is always dramatic events, some of which are tragic, which generate a sense of common fate. This is true, in particular, when it comes to terrorist attacks or calamities. On the other hand, the number of 'positive' events engraved in the collective consciousness which form a sense of identity among the different 'tribes' of the nation is small – and most are related to the field of sports: 'Maccabi' Tel Aviv's many achievements in basketball (when it was still the 'Nation's Team') and the medals awarded to Israeli athletes in the Olympic Games are noteworthy as events which awakened national pride and inspired Israeli identification across the nation.²³ Such events have no substitute, other than the wave of national pride that sweeps the country when the National Team reaches the final levels in the Mundial or when it wins an actual significant international achievement. Yet, in Israel, as in the rest of the world, teams have lost their status as national representatives. Nevertheless, the national teams are still a centre of identification and a source of pride, or on the contrary, of frustration, reinforcing a sense of collective identification.

Zionism or Israeliness?

The sense of collective identification generated by national teams raises a question regarding the essence of such identification and whether today this identification can still be characterized as Zionist, or whether it now evokes a sense of civilian-Israeli identity. This question relates to the complex and problematic discussion regarding how to define the State of Israel's identity today. The State of Israel defines itself as a Jewish state which expresses the Zionist vision of a return to Zion, and at the same time as a democratic state, which does not discriminate against its resident populations according to ethnic background. Many argue that this self-definition as a Jewish state and as a democracy

is an internal contradiction, while others have tried in various ways to diminish the alleged contradiction that lies between the two definitions.²⁴

The Jewish character of the state is expressed in its language and its symbols, including its national anthem and official holidays. However, a quarter of the State of Israel's residents are not Jewish. The state, being a democracy, regards its non-Jewish residents as citizens with equal rights and requires that they identify with the state and its institutions, even when the country's official symbols do not express their ethnic identity, and often even contradict them.

As mentioned above, during the early years of the state, Israeli sports, both on a representative level and on a team level, were identified with the Zionist ideology of the country. National teams (which were for the most part strictly Jewish teams) regarded themselves as representatives of the new Zionist state and as an instrument of Zionist publicity, which was intended, among other things, to justify the existence of the new Jewish state and its values.

It seems that in recent years this foundation has almost dissolved. Representative national team games have become routine and their initial sense of mission has completely disappeared. The enthusiasm of those days of innocence, when the Israeli flag was carried as an equal among the flags of the rest of the world's nations, has long faded. The objective of the national teams is no longer to preserve ties with Jewish communities abroad or to spread national propaganda. In addition, Israeli national teams are no longer represented only by Jews – they include Arabs and naturalized non-Jewish Israeli players. The national team is Israeli, but is no longer an all-Jewish team and its Jewish character is preserved only in a ceremonial sense: the national blue and white colours, the game in the background of the Zionist flag which has become the nation's flag, and the anthem which represents the aspirations of the Jewish people.

The fact that Arab and naturalized non-Jewish Israeli players are representatives in the national teams turns the teams into a source of identification for the nation's non-Jewish citizens as well, who identify with them as citizens of the state but are completely disengaged from the Zionist ideology which led to its establishment.²⁵ As a result, today the national sports teams serve as the only source of collective identification with the State of Israel that is unrelated to the state's national Zionist values. In terms of representative teams, it can justifiably be argued that the sports field is practically the only place where the State of Israel can be defined as a state of all its citizens.

In conclusion, sports have been a central element of the Zionist ideal to create a 'New Jew', even though the meaning of the term did not necessarily include physical activity and was perceived differently in the Diaspora than in *Eretz Israel*. The establishment of the state turned sports into an instrument for recruiting diverse streams of Zionist ideology, both on a political and on a national level and as a means of internal and external Zionist propaganda, as well as a collective identification in the society taking shape in *Eretz Israel*.

The social, economic and political changes the country has undergone in the past 40 years have caused sports to lose their function as a political tool and as a tool for spreading propaganda. Instead, sports have become one of the only forms of producing collective identification that can unify the Israeli public, and this identification is not necessarily related to Zionist ideology, but rather to civilian identification with the State of Israel.

Notes

¹ Colet, *Jewish Existence*.

² Barzilai, *The Bund Movement in Poland*.

- ³ Gechman, 'Socialist Mass Politics', 326. Belking, 'Marxism in the Face of Muscle Judaism', 149.
- ⁴ Nordau, *Zionist Writings*, 126; Kaufman, 'The National Elements', 261; Sorek, 'Body Culture', 9; Zimmerman, 'Muscle Judaism', 56.
- ⁵ Glosman, *The Zionist Body*.
- ⁶ Almog, *The Tzabar*.
- ⁷ Yogo Mayer, 'Equality-Egality', 221; Eisen, 'Zionism, Nationalism', 247.
- ⁸ Zimri and Gil, eds, *An Anthology*, 91.
- ⁹ Ram, 'The Ideational Foundations of Physical Education', 51; Dar, 'And When Is There Time to Exercise?', 73. The first Jewish sports union in the East was established in Łódź in 1921 followed by the establishment of unions in Odessa (1913) and Warsaw (1914). Aluf and Galblum, *A Memorial Book for 'Maccabi' Warsaw*; Miller, "'Maccabi" Organization in Russia', 79.
- ¹⁰ *Davar*, February 8, 1926; Nadav, 'Half a Body Gone', 150.
- ¹¹ Naor and Giladi, *Eretz Israel in the 20th Century*; Eliav, *The Settlement*.
- ¹² Kaufman, 'The Conflict during the Mandate', 52.
- ¹³ Kaufman, 'Maccabi vs. Hapoel', 89.
- ¹⁴ Resnik, 'The Beitar Sports Union', 159; on Elizur *ibid.*, 184.
- ¹⁵ Kaufman, 'The Ideational Link', 56. Alparovich, 'Israel and the Olympic Movement' 302.
- ¹⁶ Harif, 'International Sports and Politics'; Kaufman, 'The Beginning of Hebrew Football', 37; Zameret, 'The Maccabias', 113.
- ¹⁷ Kaufman, 'The National Elements', 101.
- ¹⁸ Naor, *Olim and Ma'abarot*; Zameret and Yablonka, *The First Decade*.
- ¹⁹ Harif, this volume.
- ²⁰ Wingate Archives 1.10/23; Gil, *The Worker's Story*; Ben-Porat, *From a Game to Commodity*.
- ²¹ Ben-Porat, 'Football and Nationalism', 142.
- ²² Maguire, *Global Sport*; Almog, 'From "Conquering the Mountain"', 32; Ben-Porat, *From a Game to Commodity*.
- ²³ Harif, 'The Shadow in the Field of National Pride', 62.
- ²⁴ Wiler, *Jewish Theocracy*; Haraben, *One of Every Six Israelis*; Reches, ed., *Arabs in Israeli Politics*.
- ²⁵ Sorek, 'Identities on the Field'.

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