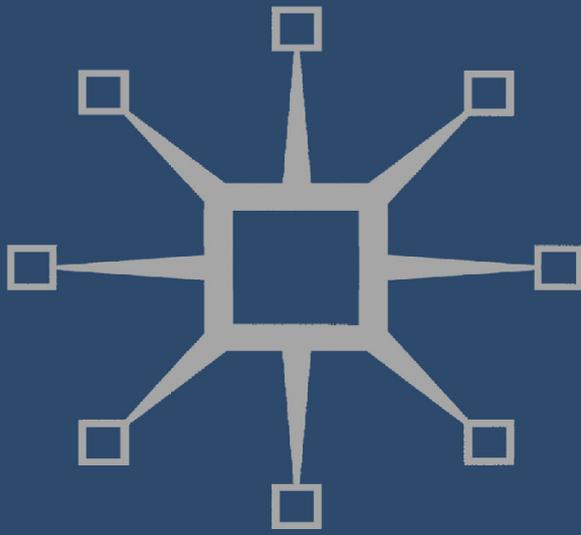


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Mahfoud Amara



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Mahfoud Amara

Loughborough University, UK

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*In memory of the victims of wars and oppression
in the Arab world*

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Introduction

The book endeavors to offer a critical reflection on sport in the polity, society and history of the Arab world. This theme is illustrated by six different examples; sport and development or development through sport in the Arab world; sport policy and politics in North Africa; sport (soccer) in post-colonial and toward post-conflict Algeria; the politics and business of sport and TV broadcasting in the Arab world; sport and the network of business and politics in the Gulf region; and, finally, the Muslim perspective on the global sporting arena. The book addresses the issues of modern sport and the legacy of colonialism; sport, the politics of identity and nation-state building; sport and political ideologies; sport and international relations; sport, modernization debates and the movement toward a market economy; and last but not least, sport as a site for political and social contestations in the Arab world.

About the collection

In Chapter 1, which deals with sport and development or development through sport in the Arab world, I examine the impact of culture and nation-state system in the Arab world on sport as a means of development. The chapter analyzes the ways in which sport was mobilized in the assertion of single Arab state ideologies of nationalism, as well as around post-national pan-Arab and pan-Islamic identities. Sport has been recently organized around the Arab world's process of integration into the new world order, which is characterized by the end of the bipolar system, the liberation of financial movement and the profusion of multinationals.

Chapter 2, on football in post-colonial and toward post-conflict Algeria, sets out to highlight the importance of football in Algeria as a cultural and political vehicle. Sport in post-colonial Algeria, as in other socialist, Baathist and party-state regimes in the region, was an instrument mobilized by the National Liberation Front (FLN) for political legitimization and for the international representation of the post-independence Algerian socialist development project. After 1988, with the fall of socialist ideology, which was followed by a period of economic instability and political turmoil, sport has been part of Algeria's transition toward the "post-conflict" period and a market economy.

In Chapter 3, on sport policy and politics in North Africa, I investigate how the political and economic systems adopted by North African countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) after independence have been reflected in their sport policies. This entails, first, the engagement of these three countries with the structure of international sport – including their membership, strategies to integrate decision-making positions and lobbying, both at regional level (such as in African confederations) and at international level (for instance, in *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), International Olympic Committee); second, these states' policy of hosting regional and international sports events such as the African Games, the Pan-Arab Games and the Mediterranean Games; and, finally, state intervention in the administration, regulation, financing and governance of the elite/performance sport system at national level in these three North African countries.

Chapter 4, on the growth and the challenges of the sports broadcasting market in the Arab world, uncovers the debate around the commercialization of the sport broadcasting industry in the Arab world. Thanks to satellite broadcasting technology, the number of TV stations offering a plethora of news, sports, religious and entertainment programs has seen an impressive increase in the last ten years (138 terrestrial channels and a total of 487 free-to-air channels). Starting from 2010, the Qatari-based Aljazeera Sport TV has dominated the TV broadcasting market, especially with its recent takeover of ART Sport (previously owned by a Saudi businessman) and, more importantly, as a result of its aggressive commercial strategy to buy the broadcasting rights of major international sport

competitions – including the FIFA World Cup, whose rights it has bought for the 2010 to 2022 period – for the Middle East and North Africa region.

In Chapter 5, I examine the global and local dynamics around regional development through sports-related projects in the Arabian Peninsula. In the past ten years, agents from the Arabian Peninsula have sought to attract the interest of business developers and multinational operators, in an attempt to boost the local and regional economy and prepare for the post-oil era. This can be observed in the numerous sports-related projects completed or underway, which link up foreign and domestic multinationals, international sport organizations and plans of local leaders in various commercial operations. Sport is becoming a means for branding the region and for the injection of local capital into the global market.

The Chapter 6 investigates the Arab world in the global sporting arena from an Islamic perspective. On the one hand, the Muslim world has accepted modern sport—at state level at least—as a symbol of modernization in Muslim societies and as a privileged tool for nation-state building. On the other hand, many Muslims—particularly the representatives of Islamist movements—are wary of modern sport as a symbol of secularism and as a deviation from the authentic societal concerns of the *ummah* (the nation of Muslim believers). Sport and gender questions in Arab Muslim societies and sport in political Islamists' discourses are used as illustrative examples to explore the current debates on “globalization” and “localization” as well as on “modernity” and “authenticity” in the Arab Muslim world. I end this chapter by revealing some zones of tension and reconciliation between the Arab Muslim world and the Olympic Games (movement and philosophy), as this is one of the most globalized sports event.

In the Conclusion, I return to the themes and core arguments that structure the book, to make sense of the complexity of our knowledge both about and through sport in the Arab world. I propose a reflection on the importance of societal changes, including the recent popular uprisings, for the transformation of sports values, sports policies and politics in the Arab world. Such a reflection can contribute to the building of a theoretical foundation for future studies on similar topics.

Conceptual frameworks: The complexity of questioning modern sport in the Arab (and Islamic) context, in “late modernity”

To create a link between the different chapters, it is important to clarify the structure of the book in relation to the theoretical debates concerning “modernity” and “authenticity,”: “the global” and “the local,” as these are framed, contested and affirmed through sporting structures, individual and collective experiences and events in the Arab world. This serves to explore knowledge about the Arab world through the study of sport as a complex social phenomenon, as well as knowledge about sport and the ways it has been shaped by history, ideology and culture (including religion) in the Arab world. The aim of the book is not to validate these conceptual frameworks. Rather, I treat them as “dominant interpretative discourses” (Touraine, 2007) that play a special role in the Arab world, and I treat sport as an important element in the production (and contestation) of these discourses.

In relation to debates on modernity versus authenticity, it has been argued that the emergence of modernity in Arab societies coincided with the beginning of western colonization on the one hand – which happened in the name of its so-called “civilizing mission” – and as a direct result of the decline of the Ottoman Empire (the last bastion of “Islamic” governance) on the other. Nonetheless, its materialization did not follow the same process as in Europe, and thus it did not come out as an alternative to religious fundamentalism, but as an effect of the struggle for liberation from colonial (imperial) domination and from the archaic tradition. According to Ghalioun (2000), Islam has played, or was asked to play, an important role in the three struggles that marked the birth and realization of modernity in various Muslim societies: the struggle against the hegemony of foreign domination; the struggle against archaic and traditional feudal systems; and the struggle against national systems of oppression and exclusion. In other words, we cannot understand the significance of the debate on modernity in the Arab world independently of the different historical trajectories of Arab and Muslim societies. Ghalioun’s argument is also applicable to western societies, where the affirmation of the existence of a homogenous interpretation and application of modernity constitutes a methodological

error. The position of religious institutions in the public sphere and the state's relation to religion are different in western countries, too. Furthermore, in Arab societies, as suggested by Ghalioun, the dissociation between secularism (understood as an objective claim for universalism) and *laïcité* (which it taken to cover the strict separation between church and state and between private and public spheres) is more obvious. The first reason for this dissociation is that the struggle for modernity was directed toward an external enemy – the colonial power – rather than toward an internal opponent – religious fundamentalism. The second reason is that the call for reformism and social injustice, as well as for resistance against forms of ignorance (*Jahilia*) and superstition, was first made by Muslim clerics and in the name of Islam (Rifa'a al-Tahrawi, Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani, Mohamed Abdou, Abd-Errahman Al-Kawakibi, Abdelhamid Ibn-Badiss are among such clerics – to name but a few). In contrast to those who claim that modernization and westernization reinforce each other and have to go together, modernity and progress/scientific reason in the Arab context cannot be dissociated from the claim for authenticity (culture and religion) (Bennabi, 1970).

Moreover, the analysis of modernity (including modern sport) in the Arab world is not meaningful without an analysis of the historical context of dominance/dependence/interconnectedness between the West and the non-West. As Edward Saïd (2000: p. 295) has noted:

we cannot discuss the non-Western world as distinct from developments in the West. The ravages of colonial wars, the protracted conflicts between insurgent nationalism and anomalous imperialist control, the disputations new fundamentalist and native movements nourished by despair and anger, the extension of the world system over the developing world – these circumstances are directly connected to actualities in the West.

One of the major consequences of the colonial project in de-legitimizing the pre-colonial history and geography of colonized societies, including those of the Arab region, is the establishment of a contrasting/conflictual relation with the past: namely one of (over-)glorification of the Islamic and pre-colonial past, which is designed to claim historical legitimacy as a substitute for political illegitimacy and to mobilize the national community around the

post-independence project of the party-states and of the monarchy-states. The other consequence is denial or trauma. From this perspective the past, at least in the way it was institutionalized by official history, is perceived as archaic, traditional, non-secular, and even anti-revolutionary – hence an obstacle to the political ideologies of party-states and monarchical-states. The nature of this colonial burden in the newly independent countries, including those in the Arab world, is well articulated by Berque (1958, p. 101–102):

Having long identified themselves with a world and a tradition appropriated by the west, the colonized had had to battle against the external and psychological worlds that the West had penetrated equally. Hence being curious about himself and about the Other, the colonized found himself in a predicament that posed not only “sociological” questions but also “psychoanalytic” ones (an ontological search for selfhood, the internalized contradictions of identity created the Western Other, the internalized absence of historical time). However, since the Other’s (the European’s) civilization had so deeply entered the colonized society, this technological civilization could not be rejected because refusing the Other, they [were] refusing themselves. (cited in Le Sueur, 2001, p. 221)

In the domain of sport, in studying the significance of sport in the Arab world we are challenged by the powerful discourse of western modernity, which claims its uniqueness, as a master signifier, in defining the meaning, and therefore the history and the territoriality (those who are in and those outside) of modern sport. Here Venn Couze’s concept of “Occidentalism” is applicable to the domain of sport:

Occidentalism directs attention to the becoming-modern of the world and the becoming-West of Europe such that Western modernity gradually became established as the privileged, if not hegemonic, form of sociality, tied to universalizing and totalizing ambition. Occidentalism indicates a genealogy of the present which reconstructs a particular trajectory of modernity, inflected by the fact of colonialism and of capitalism. (Couze, 2000, p. 19)

The appropriation of the colonial model of sport was accepted by the newly independent countries with little criticism or adaptation to local particularism, as happened in the majority of Arab countries. Thus the reconstruction of identity on the basis of a total rupture between the colonizer and the colonized, to be achieved through a revolutionary action where “the native would simply bury colonial society,” as predicted by Fanon and Sartre (Le Sueur, 2001), simply did not happen. The appropriation of the western dominant model of sport was seen as a necessity, given the multiple uses of sport as an element in political, social and cultural recognition. The adoption of sport was accomplished through the integration of the newly independent countries, including those of the Arab world, to different degrees, into the homogeneous and pre-established sporting and administrative structure, rules and regulations of the international sports federations (particularly FIFA and the IOC). Sport came to be regarded in general as an effective arena for future international treaties and conventions between North and South, East and West. As Wagg observes,

Soccer has always been considered to be one of the most important modernizing forces of the continent [Africa]. The degree of competence an African state has achieved is measured on the soccer pitch. [...] The World Cup Tournament, the ability to compete at the highest level, has become the ultimate measure of progress. (Wagg, 1995, p. 37)

However, one may have reason to suggest that the commitment of formerly colonized nations, including those in the Arab world, to the international sporting community was not straightforward. The newly independent countries have also used international sporting events, and particularly the media coverage that such events attract, as a space to express their regional, political and ideological concerns (such as anti-imperialism and pan-Africanism), which has led sometimes to a real situation of crisis (examples are the boycott of the 1956 Olympics over the Suez crisis; the hostage-taking of Israelis athletes by the Black September group at the Munich Olympics in 1972; and the boycott of the Olympic Games to denounce apartheid in South Africa in 1976). The use of sport to express discontent with the developing world – including some newly independent countries from the

Arab world and members of the Non-Aligned Movement – reached its peak with the initiation of the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO).¹ These were initiated by Indonesia under the leadership of Sukarno, one of the principal leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, as a reaction to the International Olympic Committee's suspension of Indonesia after its decision to exclude Israel and Taiwan from taking part in the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta. The GANEFO Games were held for the first (and last) time in Jakarta in 1963 (Luton and Hong, 2007).² Interestingly, for the Arab world, in addition to the participation of Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Tunisia, the Games witnessed the participation of Palestine – which had to wait until 1995 to be officially recognized by the IOC – and of Egypt, under the name of United Arab Republic (the title of the former union between Syria and Egypt, which collapsed in 1961 after three years of existence).

The debate on modernity and authenticity in the Arab world encompasses an important question – the issue of gender relations and the way they have been constructed by colonial ideologies and by resistance movements against colonialism, as well as by post-colonial projects (male dominated) for nation-state building. If the dilemma of the colonized is to construct the “self” as different, independently from the colonizer (the Other), then for colonized women the dilemma is to construct the “self” in opposition to male dominance in the colonized societies on the one hand, and to the colonial stereotype (as depicted in literature and in photos presenting the colonized woman as the exotic “other”) on the other. In this case, the aim of post-colonial critique and general approach – in academia, literature, cinema, art and so on – is to give a voice to women in former colonial societies, to create opportunities for them, to celebrate their womanhood, to tell their own stories about the “self” and to write the history of colonialism and decolonization/resistance against colonialism independently both from male dominated nationalist discourses in former colonies and from the western vision of women in former colonized societies – including that of western feminists.

Hence, with regard to sport, we have to make sense of the debate on women's participation (or lack thereof) in sport in the Arab world or within Arab communities in the West, or in relation to the body of the Arab and Muslim woman in sport as a site of struggle for feminine emancipation – which is at the centre of the debate on

the clash of cultures in relation to the question of the veil in sport. To make sense of these problems, we need first to make sense of, and to deconstruct, both the shared/contested colonial memory and the post-independent, state-controlled debate on the condition and emancipation of women in Arab societies. The question of the legal and the social statuses of women's rights have been promoted as a measure of secularization of Arab societies, in opposition to political Islam, by the secular Arab regimes, or, in contrast, as a measure taken by conservative Arab regimes in order to maintain tradition in society, for immunity against globalization and western cultural invasion.

Another relevant issue is that of national identity, nationalism and nation-state building. There has been considerable debate between sociologists, economists and political commentators concerning the role and definition of the nation-state. It is argued that nations are formed by groups of people united by a common sense of belonging to the same culture, history, language, race and religion. Nationalism is also defined as the assertion of the primary significance of national identity over other forms of identity (class, gender, religion, etc.). A nation can take the form of a nation-state if the bond of nationalism coincides with the boundaries of the state. The nation-state is also defined as an entity endowed with sovereignty. This sovereignty has to be applied within pre-defined borders and dominated by a single nation. It should be noted, however, that linking a nation to the borders of a distinct state does not take place without challenges. If the nation is to be regarded as a population bound together by a shared history, culture, language and ethnicity, then there is a considerable number of nation-states with ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous populations. In the Arab world, one can cite, for instance, the Kurds in the Middle East and the Berbers in North Africa.

It has been argued that notions of common heritage are often the result of constructed myths of shared history or, to use Benedict Anderson's (1991) phrase, of an "imagined community," rather than a real product of nature or a given truth. Similarly, if nation-states are to be regarded as the bearers of sovereignty, the rise of supra-national entities has led some authors to claim that the significance of the concept of the nation-state is in serious decline. The reason put forward is that the nations' ability to act independently has been lost.

Arguably, the nation-state system of governance today faces serious challenges as a result of processes of globalization and of the increase in the interconnectedness between societies and cultures. Millions of people are on the move because of ethnic, religious and political conflicts. This movement has set in motion what Delbrück (1994) calls a “denationalization process,” which has made the meaning of borders literally and geographically less significant. As Featherstone (1995, p. 10) points out:

More people are living between cultures, or on the borderlines, and European and other nation-states, which formerly sought to construct such exclusive sense of national identity, more recently have had to deal with the fact that they are multicultural societies as the “rest” have returned to the west in the post 1945 era.

Tahar Ben Jelloun (1997) states that today Arab ideology or *la pensée Arabe* is confronted by universalist challenges (global politics, economy and culture, in addition to pan-Islamism) and by internal conflicts, which were underestimated or ignored in the past, when populist unitary values held sway. In the name of unity, these internal problems have been used as a veil by political regimes in the Arab world, in order to resist the principles and conditions of democracy (a recognition of diversity) introduced by the new world system.

The values of national identities are perceived to be the core values of modern sport. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sport has become the vehicle par excellence for national sentiment, because sport involves a competition that is based on the very system of the nation-state. The Nazi regime found in the 1936 Olympic Games an ideal opportunity to celebrate the greatness (the Roman heritage) and supremacy of Nazi Germany and of the Aryan race. The same principle is true for the Soviet Union, together with its former satellite socialist countries, which employed the international sporting arena to reinforce its position as the new emerging super-power after World War II. The Olympic Games is an example of a truly global event, in terms of the number of participants, spectatorship and media coverage. Both the host nation and the participating athletes become, willingly or not, at least for the duration of this sporting event, the ambassadors of their countries, sometimes soldiers in the service of their states' ideology. The host nation seeks to prove to the