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SPORT, ARAB NATIONALISM AND THE PAN-ARAB GAMES

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Abstract The aim of this article is to outline the manner in which the Pan-Arab Games reflect the tensions within the pan-Arab project of political and cultural unity. Within the movement there has been a traditional cleavage between those advocating the political unification between Arab states and those promoting inter-Arab-nation-state cooperation. The Pan-Arab Games were established by the League of Arab Nations in 1953 as means of expressing cultural unity between Arab peoples across nation-state boundaries. As an institution it is founded therefore on a philosophy of ethno-cultural group identity (based on race and language), rather than on territorial divisions (such as continental games) or philosophies of multi-culturalism and universalism (as is the case for the Olympic Games). The history of the Pan-Arab games has been fraught with difficulties, largely (though not exclusively) founded in the conflict between Israel and the Arab states, as well as the more recent wars in the Gulf and in Afghanistan. The article provides an historical analysis, identifying the implications of these conflicts and the associated divisions in the pan-Arab movement reflected in the recent history of the Games, in particular those held in the Lebanon in 1997 and in Jordan in 1999. It argues that the Games provide a useful lens through which to identify the contradictions of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism.

Key words • modernity • nationalism • Pan-Arabism • Pan-Arab Games

Introduction

The aim of this article is to review the role which the Pan-Arab Games plays in relation to the philosophy and politics of pan-Arabism. It will focus specifically on the Beirut (Lebanon) and Amman (Jordan) Games of 1997 and 1999 respectively. The use of the games as a vehicle for promoting pan-Arab ideology means that difficulties and contradictions associated with the promotion of this world view are reflected in the difficulties associated with staging them. Sport in this context acts as a barometer of, as well as a promotional vehicle for, pan-Arab unity.

The article is divided into four sections. The first deals with the modernist European origins of the concept of the nation state. The second outlines the nature of pan-Arabism and its relationship to sport and to western thought. The penultimate section evaluates the key events associated with the staging of the games in the context of recent developments in pan-Arab politics, while the concluding

section promotes the argument that three key sets of interests lie at the heart of questions of pan-Arab identity and that sport reflects the tensions between these three sources.

Modernity and the Development of the Nation State in Europe

While the acceleration of globalization processes is overlaid on, and to some extent has diluted, the representation of interests via nation states, the centrality of the nation state to the political, economic and cultural world view of late modernity is still significant. It is difficult to conceive of a world which is not subdivided into nation-state 'parcels' of interests, identities and activities, such that some writers can claim that 'states as nation-states appear almost natural entities beyond the realm of political discourse' (Taylor, 1993: 5). Of course there is discourse about the role of the nation state and its future. The place of the nation state in international relations (see Huntington, 1996), in economic activity (Rhodes and Van Apeldoorn, 1998; Sklair, 1991), or in cultural identity (Featherstone, 1990; Maguire, 1999) is now subject to open debate, although analysts continue to assert that most aspects of transnational cooperation, competition and conflict are still located firmly in a framework of inter-nation interaction (Hirst and Thompson, 1995). The place of sport within this debate is also clearly evident since sport is subject to political regulation by states, is a key source of cultural and national identity and is a tool of international relations as well as a significant sector in the growing service economy.

Because of the ubiquity of the political/cultural form of the nation state, which in turn is a reflection of its adaptability to changing contexts, it is important to emphasize that the concept of the nation state is a product which derives from processes of modernity that originated in Western Europe, and that current nation-state forms have been developed and often imposed on unwilling subjects in the newly independent states of the postcolonial period but also, historically, in core western states themselves. The need for continual maintenance of the integrity of the nation-state form is evidenced by struggles with separatist movements in EU states, including France, Spain and Italy, and the struggle for a united Ireland.

The emergence of the modern nation state in western Europe was bound up with processes of modernity — an increasingly complex, secularized, industrial, urban and 'rational' society could not be organized on the basis of tradition and kinship-based, religion oriented, political systems. Historians date the establishment of the modern system of international relations, and the basis for international law, back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This agreement was based on acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the state in all matters internal to its territorial jurisdiction. It recognized that all states were equal before the law, and implied that differences between states would largely be settled by force or effective power (Held, 1992). The French Revolution fostered the development of ideas of the liberal democratic state, while the displacement of mercantilism by the neo-liberalism of Adam Smith's political economy implied a strong state as regulator for a free economy. Thus:

Europe's nation-states evolved on the basis of a relative congruence between bounded *territory* within which sovereignty was exercised, a collective *identity* arising from the dominance of nationalism, and a set of *functions* — internal and external security, economic governance, the fostering of a social consensus and the maintenance of a balance between different levels of government. (Laffan et al., 2000: 13)

As Laffan et al. point out, the European state system has proved to be malleable and adaptable, allowing the absolute monarchies of the 18th century to give way to the modern liberal, industrial states of the 19th century and the welfare states of the 20th. The hegemony of the west has allowed the imposition of many of the features of this nation-state system onto territories which were former colonies or protectorates.

Pan-Arab Nationalism: Beyond and Alongside the Nation State?

The imposition of the European nation-state model on the Arab world inevitably provoked resistance. Boundaries between the newly designed nation states were often relatively arbitrary. Wallach (1996) describes how, for example, in 1918 the official boundaries of Iraq and Transjordan were the results of a 'whimsical' sketch on tracing paper by Gertrude Bell, a junior diplomat, who with T.E. Lawrence sought to establish Faisal as the king of the new nation of Iraq. Such boundaries also reflected the interests of the colonial powers, such as when France, having, with Britain, countered the attempt to establish an Arab Kingdom under Faisal, divided up Syria, separating out the mainly Christian Lebanon as a separate state, a separation which Syria continues to refuse to accept.

Political resistance to the imposition of western-style nation-state divisions has been focused most clearly in the activities associated with the Ba'athist Party (Renaissance Party) established in 1943 by three Syrian intellectuals (a Sunni Muslim, Salah al-Din Bitar, a Greek Orthodox Christian, Michel Aflaq, and an Alawi, Zaki al-Arsuzi). This movement reflected three core principles — Arab unity based around Arab *ethnos* (rather than around religious identity through Islam); socialism; and a willingness to use, if necessary, revolutionary rather than democratic action through, for example, military coups to promote Arab unity and socialist goals. Ba'athist influence, particularly in Syria, was responsible for the short-lived political union between Egypt (under Abdel Nasser) and Syria from 1958 to 1961 as the United Arab Republic, and the even shorter lived attempt to unify Iraq, Syria and Egypt in 1963. These attempts at political Arab union foundered on the tension between local sets of interests in the different national contexts. In the aftermath of the defeat of Arab forces in the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, secular Pan-Arabism has gradually ceded ground to pan-Islamic ideology.

The ideology of 'Pan-Arabism' has been described as being 'a macro nationalism, or the projection of micro nationalism onto the larger geographical area, based on common interests (religion, culture and race) as the basis of aspiration for political entity, in more than one state' (Tibi, 1981: 44). It has known throughout its history many political and ideological developments. Nonetheless, orient-
alists, historians and social scientists agree that the first example of a modern

Arab state emerged in Egypt under Mohammed Ali's rule, who, according to Tibi (1981), introduced Egypt to European 'progress'. His modernization project of Egyptian society included the building of a modern state organization (autonomous from Ottoman rule), with a rational economic system, and a modern army, trained and equipped along modern lines. Significantly the establishment of the first western academic institute in the Arab world, known as the institute of Egypt, dates from this period, its mission being to translate major secular subjects, and the works of major European (particularly French) philosophers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau.

Among the first Arab nationalist thinkers of that time was Al-Tahtaoui. His conception of nationalism, *Watan*, was different from predominant western notions. In comparison to western nationalism, which preaches individualism and secularism (or *laïcité*), Al-Tahtaoui insists on the formation of political authority within the tradition of Islamic values that take the Prophet and his companions as a model. He also emphasizes the importance of *sharia*, Islamic legislation, which was described as being similar to the rationalist and natural law of modern Europe. With Al-Tahtaoui, the new era (known as *Nahda* or the renaissance) in Islamic and Arab world history began. The leaders (like El-Afghani and Abdou) of this movement aimed to impose Islam as an ideology, and project for society, by enriching it with discoveries of rational European science (at least those which are not contradictory to Islamic values). During this period Islam became an anti-colonialist ideology, which called for political actions against imperial (British and French) Europe, in addition to the adaptation of progressive elements of European civilization that might strengthen Islamic universalism and maintain Islam as an important part of national education. Huntington (1996) defines the *Nahda* as a reformist movement, which was the dominant response to the west on the part of Muslim elites for 50 years from the 1870s to the 1920s (until the rise of Kamelism and 'fundamentalist' movements). It combines modernization with preservation of the central values, practices and institutions of the society's indigenous culture. In other words, reformism attempts a new reconciliation of Islam with modernity, and the best of western rational thought (Huntington, 1996: 74).

In addition to the reformist movement, which sees Islam as the foundation of nationality for Muslims, superior to any other form of association or any national commitment, another movement or Arab nationalist mode of thinking was part of the modern Arab history of nationalism. It developed as a consequence of western acculturation or depersonalization of Arab societies, in the form of a cultural bourgeois movement or literary renaissance that sought at the beginning (under Ottoman rule) an independent Arab cultural nation without a state, promoting both religious toleration and separation of religion from politics, and the adoption of a liberal model of freedom and bourgeois democracy based on western lines, partly Francophile and partly Anglophile. However, after the First World War and due to colonization by French and British troops (the early supporters of Arab separatist movements in the Ottoman Empire), Arab nationalism took a different form. There was a shift from the cultural bourgeois form to that of a political (populist and separatist) movement and subsequently, with the influence of Al-Husri, a form of Pan-Arab nationalism. Al-Husri's ideas of Arab

national liberalism were based principally on two schools of thought, the traditional German concept of nationalism and Ibn Khaldoun's philosophy.

First, the German concept of nation (in contrast to the modes dominant in French or British thought) perceives the nation in terms of a cultural grouping, with the national language as the skeleton or barometer by which the culture of people and the level of development of nationalism may be measured (Herder, 1964, reported in Tibi, 1981: 103). From Al-Husri's perspective and the German interpretation of nationalism, if a nation is able to keep its language alive under foreign rule, it has been able to survive. While language is the soul of the nation, its history which is defined as the common memory of the people, should be seen as its consciousness. Based on these conditions in relation to language and history, Al-Husri claims that all Arab people, though living in a number of states (with borders designated by the colonial power), actually belong to a single all-Arab nation, which could form a macro Pan-Arab state, united by a single language and common historical memory.

Second, the social and historical philosophy of Ibn Khaldoun, particularly the issue regarding the concept of *assabia*, which has been variously interpreted by modern sociologists as 'group feeling', 'solidarity', 'nationalism' and 'nationality' is also key to Al-Husri's thinking. According to Ibn Khaldoun, group feeling is at its strongest in the early phase of civilization (which he designates the nomadic stage), but as the process of civilization continues, its intensity decreases. As a consequence of this decline in group feeling or solidarity, the civilization unravels, and its place is taken by other groups (civilizations or dynasties), whose group feeling is younger and therefore stronger. This was described as the cyclical theory of civilizing process consisting of two main stages; the growth stage characterized by urbanization, specialization and ideology (e.g. religious values), and demographic development; and the decline or regression stage characterized by the decline of group feeling, growth of internal conflicts and susceptibility to external invasion.

After the Second World War a new stage in the historical development of Arab nationalism began. It was based on a nationalism that presents its opposition to the west entirely in terms of western imperialism. Its main goal, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, was to combine Pan-Arabism or Pan-Arab national considerations with those of local identities, 'ensuring the separate independence of the Arab states, while at the same time keeping the doors open for gradual measures of co-operation, integration and unification' (Ibrahim, 1996). The establishment of the League of Arab States was a formalization of this compromise. It was composed at the beginning mainly of Arab states situated in the Middle East, which were under the protectorate of the British Empire and gained their independence earlier than the states of the Maghreb Union in North Africa. It should be noted that national discourse, particularly in the post-independence era, manifested the first 'break' with religious language (reformism). According to Hussein (1997: 169), dignity and progress were invoked, not in terms of 'eternal truth' but in terms of 'historical legitimacy'. In other words, it:

... is not God who speaks forever, but it is the nation [in the figure of the father, Abd al-Nasser, Bourguiba ...] which inspires ... The symbols of this coming period are not those of sacred words, but the greatness and glory of the past.

Thus, it is not Islam but the Arab ethnos which is the uniting feature.

This hostility towards western values however did not last. It lost its strength (in varying degrees) for a number of reasons. The new world system, globalization, multinational diversification and division of labour, and the generalization of the western model of the nation state, in combination created contradictory imperatives for 'Third World' countries, particularly for Arab nations, resulting in disillusionment with a previous era of nationalism that had not realized its 'populist hopes' (Buell, 1994: 116). The new geopolitical and economic situation has had an impact on the fragmentation and localization of Arab nationalism politically, ideologically and economically. The division of Arab nations between Maghreb and Gulf unions, and Middle East cooperation, the 'Islamization' of Sudan, 'Africanization' of Libya,² the crisis between Western Sahara and Morocco, the political division of the Arab League during the Gulf War, and at various points in the Palestinian and Israeli conflict, these are all evidence of the heterogenization of Pan-Arab nationalism. As a result new protest movements developed seeking the reconstruction of Arab society's lost identity and integrity, which was seen as under threat as a consequence of the failure of Pan-Arab modernism. The ideology of this movement could be described as being neo-reformist, proclaiming (like the early reformist movements) a return to pre-national values of religion and Islamic solidarity (the re-Islamization of Arab society). Tahar Ben Jelloun (1997: 159) 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 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 to resist the principles and conditions of democracy (a recognition of diversity), introduced by the new world system.

Arab nations today are hesitating between the options of local political identity (the western model of the nation state), cultural identity shared with the rest of the Arab world, or the more extensive category, Islamic community (Hussein, 1997: 168).

The new challenges that arose in an international system polarized by the ideological and geopolitical conflict of the cold war (1945–90) changed the orientation of Arab nationalism. Based initially on anti-imperialism, anti-colonialist ideology, Arab nationalism experienced another orientation based on socialism and the Soviet model of development. A group of Tunisian socialists claimed that 'Arab unity is the only alternative to building socialism in order to create a real independence from imperialism and a common market for our resources and our products as a precondition for our industrialisation' (Tibi, 1981: 180). Huntington states that Arab elites, and other political leaders in Third World countries, in Africa and Latin America, imported socialist and Marxist ideologies and combined them with nationalism in opposition to western capitalism and western imperialism (1998: 100). The Arab nationalist leaders in the post-independence period concentrated their efforts on state building, consolidating independence, achieving socioeconomic development and ensuring reasonable measures of equity, as well as quests for a greater share in power, wealth and prestige in their newly independent countries (Ibrahim, 1996). They introduced

new measures such as land reform, nationalization of foreign and upper class assets, and an open and free system of health and education.

Given these tensions between competing sources of identity and value sets, we must ask ourselves whether Pan-Arabism can survive in the new global political, economic and cultural order. It is in this context that this article addresses the issue of the significance and role of the Pan-Arab Games, a context in which the all-Arab nation (as conceived by Al-Husri) is experiencing fragmentation and regionalization (which in Khaldoun's terms would be seen as a decline in Arab unity or *assabia*).

An Overview of the Pan Arab Games³

The process of the diffusion of western sport into Arab countries has taken different means and routes. One of the major influences was the presence of colonialism in its different forms, namely direct colonialism or protectorates. Sport was part of the colonial strategies for integration with different intensities into the colonial order. It was alternatively used by nationalist movements (consciously or not) as a tool for resistance against colonialism and struggle for independence (e.g. the FLN football team, see Fates, 1994; Lanfranchi and Wahl, 1996). In the case of the Gulf States, the introduction of modern sports was mainly through multinational petroleum companies and labour migration (Al-Tauqi, 1998).⁴ After the gaining of independence, sport played an important role in Arab states' policies in the formation of nation states and mobilization of the masses, as well as a measure of cooperation, integration and unification between Arab populations, to become an important element in pan-Arab ideology. In November 1946 a Cultural Treaty⁵ that included aspects of sporting exchange (Article 4) was signed by the members of the Arab League, and the establishment of the Pan-Arab Games came to reinforce such treaty.

The Pan-Arab Games aimed to raise the interest in sport as an educational tool and strategy that seeks to prepare strong youth, who believe in their Arab identity (*uruba*). It intended to provide an opportunity for Arab youth to increase their awareness about the development projects, traditions and cultural diversity in different Arab states. The other goals of the games were to provide a competitive environment for Arab youth to enhance their sporting skills, which would allow them to better represent their nations (and their Arab identity) in international sporting festivals like the World Cup and the Olympic Games (Jordanian Olympic Committee, 1999). The Arab League has been committed to contributing financially to the staging of the Pan-Arab Games. Accordingly it is required to ensure that the organizing committee receives part funding one-year before staging of the games. For instance the Arab League contributed \$500,000 for the Amman Games in 1999, some of which was allocated to ensure participation of the less privileged nations. The other financial contribution comes from the Minister of Arab Council through the fund for activities and sport facilities.

The games, inaugurated in Egypt in 1953, reflected the concern with cultural unity through sport. Egypt was selected to host the first games for two main reasons; first because of its sporting status, having been the first autonomous

Arab nation to participate in the 1920 Antwerp Olympic Games and to qualify in the 1928 Amsterdam Games for the soccer semi-final (Wagg, 1995: 93). In 1940 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session was held in Egypt in preparation for the Tokyo Olympic Games (subsequently cancelled because of the Second World War). The other reasons for choosing Egypt were political and ideological. The organization of the games coincided with the rise of what is known as the Nasserism or the Jamal Adul-Nasser era. He transformed Egypt into a new pole of opposition against imperialism and in support of liberation movements in Arab land against colonialism. The Pan-Arab Games in this environment thus was perceived as an opportunity to create a positive condition for Abdul-Nasser's leadership of the Arab nationalism and struggle against western (including Israeli) invasion of Arab soil.

The establishment of the Pan-Arab Games in 1951 could also be seen as a part of the globalization process reflected in the creation of regional games (mini-Olympics) following the establishment of the Mediterranean, Pan-American and Asian games. These games were all recognized by the IOC in the 1970s. However, although the Pan-Arab Games apply international sport rules and regulation and serve the amateur sports code, they are not under IOC patronage. Interestingly, the IOC and International Sport Federations (ISFs), which had effectively opposed all fragmentation attempts of international sport space, or organization of any parallel (ideologically) competitive games, did not show any objection to the foundation and development of the Pan-Arab Games. This was not the case for the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO Games) that were initiated in 1963 by leaders of the Non Aligned Movement,⁶ which the IOC and ISFs had strongly opposed and effectively boycotted (Kanin, 1981; Simri, 1983). The IOC and the ISFs perceived the GANEFO games as a threat to their domination (hegemony) of the international sporting space.

The managerial structure for the organization of the Pan-Arab Games consists principally of the High Commission of the Organizing Committee, and five subcommittees (namely, the technical, medical, athletes, referees and the post-games committees). The competition programme is required to include at least 12 modern sports events for men and 8 for women and must incorporate the following sports: track and field, swimming, gymnastics, wrestling (roman and free style), weight lifting, cycling, football, basketball, volleyball, hand ball for men. Sports for women are: track and field, swimming, gymnastics, basketball, volleyball and hand ball (Jordanian Olympic Committee, 1999).

The Pan-Arab Games have been held eight times in different Arabic cities (see Table 1), but the level of participation has been relatively low. The 1999 Amman Games, named the Hussein tournament, in memory of King Hussein who passed away on 7 February, enjoyed the highest level of participation in the games' history, with 4500 athletes from 21 Arab countries, competing in 27 of 62 Olympic events (compared to 19 in the previous games). This included 10 delegates from the Comoros, Somalia, and Djibouti, with their participation expenses covered by the organizing committee.

The Arab countries located in the Mediterranean throughout the history of the games have been dominant in terms of sporting performance. This is in part a reflection of early acceptance of sport culture in their societies as a result of

Table 1 Hosting countries of the Pan Arab Games

Cities	Year
Alexandria (Egypt)	1953
Beirut (Lebanon)	1957
Casablanca (Morocco)	1961
Cairo (Egypt)	1965
Damascus (Syria)	1976
Rabat (Morocco)	1985
Damascus (Syria)	1992
Beirut (Lebanon)	1997
Amman (Jordan)	1999
Algeria (Algeria)	2003

Table 2 Medals gained by country in the Pan-Arab games

	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Egypt	425	273	116	814
2	Morocco	201	143	145	489
3	Syria	189	186	227	602
4	Algeria	118	140	141	399
5	Tunisia	116	111	154	381
6	Lebanon	65	113	153	331
7	Iraq	50	61	80	191
8	Jordan	42	74	115	231
9	Qatar	31	21	31	38
10	Saudi Arabia	30	56	69	155
11	Sudan	14	20	17	51
12	Kuwait	13	27	68	108
13	Libya	8	15	33	56
14	UA Emirates	8	13	17	38
15	Oman	5	6	10	21
16	Bahrain	5	3	19	27
17	Palestine	3	16	52	71
18	Yemen	2	3	6	11
19	Somalia	0	4	1	5
20	Djibouti	0	1	0	1
21	Comoros	0	0	0	0
22	Mauritania	0	0	0	0

Source: <http://www.angelfire.com/ak2/EgyptianSports/panarab.html> (4 May 2001)

(imposed or negotiated) urbanization and modernization compared with other Arab states. Furthermore, the secularization process favoured the participation of both genders; which consequently gives those countries a significant advantage in the final table of medals (see Table 2).

Despite these significant differences in term of athletic performance, the Pan-

Arab games is still one of the largest sporting events providing an opportunity to Arab states to promote and illustrate their sense of Arab identity and unity beyond geographical boundaries.

The Pan-Arab Games between Unity and Fragmentation

Sport, which is based on the nation-state system and described by Vidacs (2000: 110) as being the vehicle par excellence for nationalist sentiments, has also been an arena of ultra-nationalist, popular chauvinism and political conflicts between Arab states. This according to Fates (1994) makes the feeling of solidarity and unity between Arab people in the Pan-Arab nations as seen by Al-Husri, and even within the Maghreb Union, hard to achieve. Iraq was refused permission to participate in the VIIth Pan Arab Games that took place in Syria in 29 September 1992 by decision of the Syrian Organization Committee, after the threat of the Gulf countries, members of the GCC⁷ (the principal sponsors of the Games),⁸ to withdraw. In 1997, six years after the Gulf War, the Arab Games were held in Lebanon. It was an occasion for this country, as expressed by its Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in his opening speech, to re-establish its credibility within the Arab League after long years of civil war and destruction. To show that the country had returned to normality, despite heavy criticism by local industrialists and economists, a large amount of money (estimated at \$113m) was invested in building the Sports City complex and an accompanying commercial centre, which were seen by supporters of the project as a way to restore foreign investors' confidence. However, from a political point of view, the project merely represented costly items of little merit at this stage in Lebanon's reconstruction programme (*Lebanon Report*, 1996).

The other aim of the games was to reinforce Arab unity against the Israeli occupying army, which was accused in Rafic Hariri's opening speech of transforming Lebanon into a graveyard. As a result of the games, Hariri claims that Lebanon had become 'a place for unity, peace and Arab solidarity under President Elias Hrawi's mandate'.⁹ The president of the Pan Arab Games Association, Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Bin Abdel Aziz, claimed that:

This is a tournament of solidarity between the Lebanese people who have established credibility in their country and given rise to this great sporting event . . . Bombs can destroy a city but can never shake the faith of believers. (*Lebanon Pan Arab Games*, 1997)

However, the events that occurred before and during the games which manifested symbols of Arab unity and solidarity with Lebanon, did not incorporate the Iraqi people. The Iraqi team was banned from participation in the Pan Arab Games — according to General Secretary of the Arab League, the 'least harmful (option) had to be chosen'. Reflecting on the reasons for this decision, the Lebanon Foreign Minister stated that:

Lebanon was left in a difficult position, inviting Iraq and losing the participation of countries whose (economic) relations with Lebanon are of paramount importance, or excluding Iraq to safeguard relative inter-Arab accord, because full accord was not possible. (*Lebanon Pan Arab Games*, 1997)

The head of the Iraqi delegation commented that this decision was against the Arab nationalist ideology preached by Lebanese politicians and Arab League personalities, of which Iraq was once deemed to represent the intellectual centre.

The case of the Amman Games includes both signs of old unity and Pan-Arab solidarity, and in addition hyper-localism and nationalist feelings. Unity is illustrated by the return of Iraqi athletes after their exclusion from the previous two games. The Iraqi participation could be interpreted as an effort on the part of the Arab League to re-establish relations with Iraq, beginning the gradual process of resolving the internal Arab conflict resulting from the Gulf War. However, Kuwait boycotted the games in solidarity with Kuwaiti prisoners-of-war still held in Iraq and made a decision to send diplomatic representatives (instead of athletes) to the opening ceremony. This unilateral action was not followed by other Gulf countries, which perceived their own participation as essential to the interests of Arab solidarity. As a result, three days after the opening ceremony, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahd al-Sabah, president of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee, resigned from his position as a representative of the Arab Sports Federation¹⁰ in protest against what he described as the interference of the Arab League in sporting matters.

Despite those diplomatic incidents, the Amman Games witnessed the largest ever participation. Given that the games were also dedicated to the recently deceased King of Jordan, the large-scale participation of Arab countries might be seen as a way of paying respect to and showing sympathy for the dead king as well as welcoming the new leader of Jordan, King Abdallah.

In contrast to this show of unity, the games also gave evidence of support for a localist discourse. This is illustrated by the way the games were mobilized by the royal family for political and nationalist purposes. For example, in the opening ceremony,¹¹ the new king attended wearing the national Jordanian soccer team jersey. Princess Haya¹² also played a role in mobilizing nationalist feelings by carrying the Jordanian flag at the athletes' parade, which according to the *Jordan Times* (25 August 1999) symbolized both the life of King Hussein (described as a sport fan and athlete in his own right: Raad, 1999)¹³ and the future of the new king. This hyper-localism was transformed on some occasions into chauvinism expressed by the behaviour of Jordanian supporters as well as other teams. In the basketball game between Jordan and Syria, Jordanian supporters rained bottles and soda cans on the court because Jordan were steadily losing, which obliged Princess Haya to intervene to calm the fans and reminded them of the symbolic value of the Pan-Arab Games and to welcome all brothers (*sic*) warmly (*Jordan Times*, 25 August 1999). This chauvinism reached its highest point during the violence which occurred after a football match in which Iraq beat Libya 3–1 to reach the final against Jordan. As a result of this violence over 50 people, including several policemen, were injured. The hooligan behaviour of Libyan fans including the football squad was repeated in another match against the Palestinian team. They let off fireworks at the stadium, ripped up seats and hurled the pieces onto the pitch and attacked photographers and bystanders. The *Jordan Times* (25 August 1999) quoted 'informed sources' as saying the Libyan team also damaged facilities at a western Amman hotel where they were staying. In addition the paper reported that the head of Libyan delegation Saidi Ghadafi

(the son of Maamar Ghadafi) had also 'joined the rioting and shoved a Jordanian policeman'.

The Iraqi equestrian team was under the threat of exclusion, not for political and diplomatic reasons, but rather because of veterinary concerns. Teams from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and elsewhere feared that horses which had been poorly cared for (due to 10 years of UN sanctions against the country) could pass on diseases to their prime thoroughbreds. The organizers insisted that, unless the Iraqis provided health certificates issued by international bodies, their horses would not be allowed into the area where the games were to take place. The Iraqi team had no choice but to leave their horses behind (el Sherif, 1999).

The games also became an arena in some instances for the quest for glory at any cost, beyond the values of Arab unity and sport ethics. For instance, Qatar was accused by other participating countries of recruiting elite athletes (weightlifters) from other Arab countries such as Syria and Lebanon, and from non-Arab countries like Pakistan and Bulgaria, who did not fulfil the citizenship conditions to participate in the games. After the weightlifting events were suspended, it was determined that one of the Qatari weightlifters had represented Bulgaria in another international competition with another name. As a consequence the entire Qatari weightlifting team was disqualified from the competition.

A second controversy at the games had risen over what Dr Hassanen described as part of the negative impact of globalization on Arab sport.¹⁴ This relates to drug scandals, which are not a new phenomenon in the contemporary history of the Pan-Arab Games. During the 1997 games in Lebanon, five Egyptians, two Saudis, and one participant from each of Syria, Kuwait, Tunisia and Algeria tested positive. At the 1999 games, two Moroccan female athletes were the first to fail doping tests. They were both tested positive for the steroid nandrolone and were stripped of their medals. The same action was taken against six weightlifters (from Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Lebanon) who were suspended and lost medals for various drug offences (*Middle East Times*, 1999).

Despite the growth in the number of countries participating at the Amman Games, there are fears of a decline in the significance of the Pan-Arab Games. One of the reasons for this fear is that individual Arab countries seek international prestige to promote nationalist identity or 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1978) among their citizens via participation in other major events with higher media exposure. Recently some countries have preferred to abstain from participation in the Pan-Arab Games in order to prepare or participate in other international sporting events which they consider to be more important. For instance, Egypt decided to withdraw its football team from 1997 games in Lebanon due to preparations for the All Africa Games. This happened also in the 1999 Amman Games, because of Egypt's participation in the Confederation Football Cup in Mexico. The president of the Egypt Football Federation claimed that 'the national team will be too exhausted from the Mexican trip to take part in the Pan-Arab Games . . . We cannot risk ruining the reputation of Egyptian Football' (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 1999). The Jordanian Organizing Committee took the decision to start the basketball tournament early, to allow Lebanon and Syria to participate in the Asian Basketball Championship, organized one month later. These incidents illustrate a decrease in the importance and the significance of the games.

Concluding Remarks

In looking at the chronological order of the games, and the countries hosting them (see Table 1), several points may be noted that merit further investigation. The table shows instability in organizing the games, which reflects the political and military crises of the region (e.g. the Algerian revolution 1954–62, the triple attack of Israel, France and Britain on Egypt 1958, the Israel–Arab Wars of 1965 and 1973, the Gulf War 1991). Additionally, the Pan-Arab Games have been held only in countries situated on the Mediterranean Sea, a region known to be more ‘western’, ‘secular’ and multi-religious, where colonial cultural influences still persist. Even though some countries in the Arabian Peninsula like Saudi Arabia hold a higher position in the Pan Arab Games Association, and play an important role in financing the Games (for example, in the case of the Lebanon Games 1997), these countries have yet to host the event. This could be argued as due to ideological and cultural barriers, particularly in relation to female participation, which is limited to some events such as the chess and the shooting competitions.

This attitude towards women’s participation has recently been challenged by Qatar and UAE, which have organized international sporting competitions¹⁵ allowing foreign women athletes to participate. In the same vein Qatar’s success in bidding for the Asian Games in 2006, may be the first stage towards Qatari women’s participation in other sports disciplines which were previously restricted to men. One other factor in the change of attitude towards women’s participation in sport could be the Islamic Women Games, newly created in 1993, which may increase Muslim women’s participation in other sports though in the context of closed (to males and the media) sports events.

We can conclude that, as a consequence of the global diffusion of the western model of the nation state and (western) sport systems based on nationalist values, national identities and national political and economical interests have taken the place of single all-Arab nation considerations of unity and cooperation. The Pan-Arab Games, supposedly based on non-nationalist feelings, which reject the borders drawn by colonial powers, has become throughout its history another arena for ideological struggles and regional conflicts which may lead to more fragmentation based on regional solidarity rather than unity (e.g. the Maghreb Union, Gulf Council of Co-operation, the West Asian partnership). The further challenges for the games which merit a critical review are related to both external and internal factors; a) the place and the need of Pan-Arabism in the global political, economic and cultural order; b) the fragmentation and regionalization of Pan-Arab ideology, due to subnational political and economic interests, c) the emergence of ‘Islamist’ ideology (calling for Islamic unity or universalism), which is perceived as threat to (secular) Pan-Arab nationalism.

Notes

1. In the literature there is a significant distinction drawn between *laïcité* and secularism. Secularism designates a tendency towards necessary and universal objectivity. *Laïcité* on the other hand is a representation, and consequently a subjective fact, which has a link with the con-

- sciousness and the position of the subject (individual or social group) in the system. Both notions impose a categorical separation between the spiritual and the temporal (see Ghalioun, 2000).
2. The Africanization of Libya is reflected in its 'turning away' from its Arab connections and its movement towards links with its non-Arab southern neighbours. In Oct. 2002 Ghadafi proposed to withdraw Libya from the Arab League list of permanent members after the Arab League's refusal to break UN sanctions imposed following the Lockerbie bombing.
 3. The material which follows draws on records of the games and journalistic accounts of the events surrounding the staging of the games, much of it stored in and recovered from internet-based materials. The reliance on such sources reflects the relative absence of materials from more traditional sources.
 4. For other materials on sport diffusion in the Arabian Gulf see Schwich (1987), Stevenson (1989) and Rosandich (1991).
 5. For details of the Cultural Treaty see: <http://www.arabji.com/ArabGovt/ArabLeague.htm>
 6. Abdel-Nasser was one of the key actors in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, in addition to Sukarno the president of Indonesia, Ben-Bella the president of Algeria, and other leaders from Africa and Asia (see Dodds, 2000).
 7. Gulf countries which are members of the GCC (Gulf Council of Co-operation) are Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
 8. Lebanon received \$28 million from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to help in the construction of sports facilities destroyed during the civil war (*Jordan Times*, 8 April 1999).
 9. Source: <http://www.lebanon.com/news/local/1997/7/14.htm> (retrieved 28 November 2001).
 10. Arab Sports Federation was founded in 1976 to encourage the development of regional cooperation in sport.
 11. A French expert who was in charge of the opening and closing ceremonies during the 1998 World Cup was contracted to provide expertise at a cost of JD 250,000 (*Jordan Times*, 8 April 1999).
 12. A bronze medallist in showjumping.
 13. He was known as being a sports fan. He raced cars, water-skied and had advanced belts in taikwondo and karate.
 14. See El-Jazeera programme on Arab sports and globalization, 9 April 2001.
 15. Examples include the Dubai Golf Open, Dubai Tennis Open, Qatar Grand Prix in track and field, Qatar Squash Masters, Qatar Tennis Open.

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