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Citation:

Dart, J (2022) 'Snipers Stop Play': The Israeli Defence Force and the Shooting of Palestinian Footballers. In: The Palgrave Handbook of Sport, Politics and Harm. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 515-534. ISBN 9783030728250 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72826-7_27

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This is the pre-publication version

This is the submitted version of the chapter which will be published in the *Palgrave Handbook on Sport, Politics and Harm*, edited by Steve Wagg and Allison Pollack (2021), pp 151-534.

First Online: 01 January 2022

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-72826-7_27

The chapter appears here in its final draft version. It has not been copyedited, proofread, or formatted by the publisher.

‘Snipers Stop Play’: The Israeli Defence Force and the Shooting of Palestinian Footballers

Jon Dart

Introduction

The Israel/Palestine conflict is one of the most contentious, longest-running and divisive in the modern era with sport becoming a *de facto* battleground. In this chapter I discuss the extent to which the Israeli state is using violence to deliberately suppress Palestinian football and curtail the emergence of a successful league structure and national football team. As the sports journalist and activist, Dave Zirin (2014), has suggested,

Just imagine if members of Spain’s top-flight World Cup team had been jailed, shot or killed by another country and imagine the international media outrage that would ensue. Imagine if prospective youth players for Brazil were shot in the feet by the military of another nation. But, tragically, these events along the checkpoints have received little attention on the sports page or beyond.

The chapter begins with an outline of the origins of the Israel/Palestine conflict. This is followed by a brief summary of Palestinian football. This chapter then explores the claim that the Israeli military, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), have deliberately targeted Palestinian footballers in an attempt to curtail the development of Palestinian men’s soccer.

Background

At the end of the 19th century, in response to centuries of European anti-Semitic prejudice, Zionist settlers and Jewish refugees began to arrive in Palestine to join a longstanding but small Jewish community (‘Yishuv’). Jewish settlement was enabled by the 1916 Sykes/Picot agreement, in which the British and French governments, upon the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, sought to define mutually agreed spheres of influence and control across the Middle East (Barr, 2012). This was followed by what was to become a very significant statement from the British government, ‘the Balfour Declaration’ (1917), in which they announced they would support the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. Between

1920 and 1948 the British governed Palestine under a Mandate, before relinquishing control to a nascent United Nations (Morris 2001; Pappé, 2006; Segev 2000, 2001; Stanislawski 2016).

After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, an event described by Palestinians as ‘al Nakba’ (*the catastrophe*), the Israeli state has fought in a series of wars, most significantly in 1948, 1967 and 1973. Two conflicts in Lebanon (1982-1985 and 2006), the isolation of the Gaza Strip, the building of the ‘Peace Wall’ and the continued construction of illegal settlements across the ‘West Bank’ have increased international public criticism of the Israeli state. The dispossessed Palestinians moved away from unsuccessful armed struggles to civil protests, Intifadas (uprising), between 1987-1993 and 2000-2005. This change in tactics saw increased international public support coalesce around the nonviolent Boycott, Disinvestment and Divestment (BDS) movement (Bakan and Abu-Laban, 2009; Barghouti, 2011; Lim, 2012; White, 2012, 2013; Wiles, 2013). Adopting a human rights approach and drawing inspiration from the successes of the US Civil Rights movement and South African anti-apartheid campaigns, the BDS movement seeks the end of the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands, an end to the racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees as enshrined in the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (adopted December 1948). The movement adopts a decentralized, grassroots structure with groups free to develop their own initiatives and activities (for example, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Medical Aid for Palestine, Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, and Red Card Israeli Racism are all reasonably autonomous).

The Palestinian people are geographically dispersed across Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the Occupied Palestinian Territories), refugee camps in neighbouring countries, or in a global Palestinian diaspora. Approximately 4.9 million Palestinians live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, split between 3 million in the West Bank and 1.9 million in the Gaza Strip (Berger and Khoury, 2018). The Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) and Palestinian Authority (PA) estimate that between 1.5 and 1.8 million Israeli Arabs live in Israel (constituting between 17% and 20% of Israel’s population). Although they have ‘equal legal rights’, this segment of the Palestinian population has been subject to discrimination in terms of education, employment, health and housing opportunities (Bregman, 2014). The lives of the Palestinians are unlikely to improve given the introduction of the ‘nation state’ law, in 2018, which defines the Israeli state as belonging exclusively to the ‘Jewish people’ (Beaumont, 2018).

The violence the Palestinian population has experienced is enduring and has come in many forms. B'Tselem (2017), an Israeli human rights organisation, has shown how the lives of all Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (hereafter, OPT), are subject to a daily routine of violence by Israel's military, civilian, legal and administrative structures. The violence can be overt, coming from the IDF, the security services, and the religious settlers (Thrall, 2017; Zertal and Eldar, 2007), or at other times the violence can be implicit. Regular acts of symbolic violence includes, but is not limited to, the checkpoints that limit Palestinian movement within the OPT, the denial of travel documents, intense levels of surveillance, the denial of basic human rights (including the ability to work, education, health and security), the denial there was ever a Palestinian population with a legitimate claim to its land, the denial and erasing of Palestinian records, its history, and numerous villages and towns which have vanished from the landscape and maps (Chomsky, 1999; Pappé, 2006). Such acts have become so routine that they attract almost no attention from the mainstream media. Other, more blatant, displays of Israeli state violence include its disproportionate use of physical force to control the Palestinian population.

Research by United Nations (2016), B'Tselem (2017), Human Rights Watch (2017), and Amnesty International (2018) has detailed how Palestinians living in the OPTs are subject to collective punishments (including house/village/community demolitions), arbitrary road closure and travel restrictions, expulsions, state torture, arrest and detention (with or without charge and/or trial), shootings, assassination, and border closure – all of which are justified on the grounds of ensuring Israeli state security. As a consequence of Israel's actions Palestinians living under occupation do not enjoy basic human rights and instead experience mass unemployment, subsistence wages, poor living conditions, inadequate health services, intermittent power and water supplies, sub-standard transport, housing shortages and inferior educational opportunities (Pappé, 2017). Oxfam (n.d.) have reported that nearly one in three working age Palestinians under 29 are unemployed, with many having little option but to work in 'illegal' Israeli settlement factories and farms that are part-funded by the Israeli government. As a consequence, the three million Palestinians who live under occupation have very little control over their lives.

Palestinian football in the OPT

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Anderson (2006) showed how a nation is a ‘community writ large’, and celebrates its civic rituals and symbols, history, landscape, architecture, food, music, art, literature, flag, national anthem, statues, shrines, and coinage. Although sport was initially omitted from discussion of the nation, Bairner (2001) suggested that sport offered multiple opportunities to create and foster a sense of nationhood. Responding to Bairner’s proposal, others have gone on to show how sport acts as a site for the construction, expression or (re)imagining of national identity and national heroes (Smith and Porter, 2004; Tomlinson and Young, 2006; Wagg, 2008; Dolan and Connelly, 2019). For the Palestinians, who are a nation without a nation state, sport has become an important expression of their national identity and struggle for nationhood.

The Palestine Football Federation, which was initially established in 1952, was in 1962 reformed as the Palestine Football Association (PFA) (Blincoe, 2019). The PFA obtained provisional member status of FIFA in 1995 and full membership in 1998 after the creation of the Palestinian Authority. The PFA operates two leagues, one in the West Bank (since 1977), the other in the Gaza Strip, but due to the Israeli occupation and internal disputes, its seasons are often incomplete. Various incarnations of Palestine football league structures have operated with the West Bank Premier League (WBPL) currently the larger and more professional than the league in Gaza. In addition to better living conditions (including a more regular supply of electricity, clean water and freedom of movement, see Tawfiq, 2016), those playing in the West Bank leagues can earn an income from playing football, partly due to subscription television coverage. Thus, the West Bank teams are a popular destination for players of Palestinian origin, as they can often earn more money than they would playing for a club in the Israeli second or third tier (Khaled, 2015). The ongoing tension in Gaza, the political differences between those governing Gaza and the West Bank, and the lack of free movement of players and teams have prevented the creation of a national Palestinian football league structure (Mendel, 2017).

In 2008-9 during Israel’s military intervention in Gaza (‘Operation Cast Lead’) substantial damage was caused by the Israeli military to Gaza’s sports infrastructure with the Rafah National Stadium and Palestinian FA buildings destroyed along with damage to 20 sports clubs and 10 fields (BBC, 2012; Tawfiq, 2016). The stadium was targeted again in 2013, with FIFA each time promising to support its reconstruction (Habeeb, 2014).

In 2014 the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) in conjunction with a Palestinian NGO, published a report (‘Israel hinders Football in Occupied Palestine: 2008-2014’) which

documented numerous human rights violations and the systematic obstruction of the development of Palestinian football (Jennings, Kuttab and Shalabi-Molano, 2014). The report detailed the extensive restrictions placed on the movement of players and officials, military violence against players, the prevention of stadium construction and pitch developments, and military actions which had prevented youth tournaments and training schemes from taking place. Further violations were detailed in the Palestine Football Association document '*Sports Under Siege: Israeli Transgressions against Palestinian sports*' (PFA, 2017) which described the damage caused to the sporting infrastructure and how athletes, officials, coaches, visiting players and the import of sports equipment had all been restricted by Israeli officials.

As with the wider Palestinian population, Palestinian football players routinely face checkpoints and travel restrictions not only when traveling between the territories and overseas, but also within the West Bank. This is a particular problem for team sports when, if they want to leave Gaza to participate in a training camp or competition; it is rare that all players are issued travel permits and often results in the whole trip being cancelled (Tawfiq, 2016). Israel regularly refuses to issue travel permits to foreign players and teams to enter the OPT for games or tournaments, citing concerns over national security. In 2000, football teams from Gaza were unable to play against teams from the West Bank and since then the leagues have experienced repeated interruptions. The 2005 season was interrupted four times and only officially ended in 2007 (Mendel, 2017). In 2016, after representation were made to FIFA, Israel agreed to allow players from Gaza to enter the West Bank to play the final match of the Palestine football cup (Hawwash, 2016). Again in 2019 Israel refused to grant access to 31 players and officials from Khadamat Rafah FC (who had just won the Gaza league) to travel a few kilometres to play in the second leg of the final against Balata FC (champions of the West Bank) (Warshaw, 2019). Nicholson (2019) cites how only the Club President, Vice President, one doctor, and one single player were allowed to travel. FIFA continued its position of 'neutrality' and refused to get involved in resolving the dispute.

In 2009, Gaza-based Mahmoud Sarsak, 22, a member of the Palestinian national football team, was arrested whilst entering the West Bank to take part in a training session. He was arrested under the administrative detention laws and tortured and denied a trial or family visitations. After two years in prison Sarsak began a hunger strike and won international support from Glasgow Celtic FC's Green Brigade, Amnesty International, film director Ken Loach, Noam Chomsky, and footballers Eric Cantona, Frédéric Kanouté, Abou Diaby and Lilian Thuram. During his 92-day hunger strike representation was made to the Israel Football Association

(IFA) from UEFA, FIFA and FIFPro (an organisation which represents professional football players). Sarsak ended his hunger strike in exchange for early release; but after detention without charge for three years, his football career was over. Zirin (2014) suggests that Sarsak was detained because 'Israel was afraid that he would become a sporting hero for his people'. Sarsak is just one example of many young, aspiring football players targeted by Israeli security forces with numerous media reports detailing the extent of this abuse (Nieuwhof, 2013; Gelblum, 2014; UNHRC, 2019; Wall, 2014).

Shoot-to-Kill

The targeting of Palestinian youth by the Israeli forces has become so commonplace, it rarely features in the mainstream media. The Israeli state spends significant time and money in seeking to shape the domestic and international media narratives, but with the advent of social media has found it much more difficult to control the coverage, which now includes internet posting of 'live' footage of shootings which makes it more difficult to justify. Palestinian deaths are typically described as unintended consequences (or 'collateral damage'), but there is evidence that indicates the IDF have a policy of targeting high-profile Palestinian politicians. This has resulted in a situation where there was no-one left, with any credibility, who could negotiate with the Israeli state. The number of casualties is especially shocking when one includes children, innocent civilians and peace activists shot by a single bullet fired by an IDF sniper.¹ This is not a recent occurrence; back in 2003, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) identified a policy of "indiscriminate shooting, excessive force, a shoot-to-kill policy and the deliberate targeting of children" (McGreal, 2003).

In 2001, during the Second Intifada ('uprising'), 11-year old Khalil al-Mughrabi was shot dead by the Israeli army as he played football with a group of friends near the security fence. The death of al-Mughrabi was subject to an investigation after the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, who forced an inquiry to be held (B'Tselem, n.d.). The Israeli army response to this incident was to become a template when facing calls for inquiries into deaths of Palestinian civilians. The response was one of obfuscation and denial with an accompanying narrative that defended the actions of the IDF and their soldiers, who when faced with violence, acted with 'restraint and control' (Konrad, 2018).

US sport journalist and activist, Dave Zirin, drew attention to the increasing number of deaths of Palestinian footballers. Zirin identified the case of Palestinian footballer, Tariq Al Quto, who

was killed by the IDF during the Second Intifada in 2004 (BBC, 2004). Zirin (2014) goes on to detail the killing of three national team players: Ayman Alkurd (34), Shadi Sbakhe (27) and Wajeh Mostahe (24) in 2009, as a consequence of Israeli missiles fired into Gaza during its ‘Operation Cast Lead’ in which 1000 Palestinians were killed and over 5000 injured. Zirin (2014) also cites Omar Abu Rios [Rwayyis] (a former goalkeeper for the national team), who was arrested in 2012 by Israeli police on ‘terrorism charges’, as was Muhammad Nimr (striker for the national team), and Zakaria Issa (former international footballer) who was imprisoned for sixteen years.

While many instances of killing and injury go un(der) reported by the foreign media, one incident did generate international condemnation. Four brothers, Ismael Mohammed Bakr (9), Zakaria Ahed Bakr (10) and Ahed Atif Bakr (10) and Mohammed Ramiz Bakr (11), were killed while playing football on a beach after Israeli warships opened fire in ‘Operation Protective Edge’ (Sengupta, 2014). During this same period, Ahed Zaqout (Ahid Zakut) (49) was killed while sleeping in his apartment block. Zaqout was a star in the 1980s and 90s and played in the first ever Palestine national team, and played against a team of French stars in 1994, four years before Palestine was accepted into the FIFA ‘family’. He went on to coach Riadi Gaza to a championship title and then host of popular sports programme in Gaza. During this nine-day period of Israeli aggression 213 Palestinians were killed with a further 1,200 injured, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilians.

2014 also saw a high-profile incident involving Johhar Nasser Jawhar (19) and Adam Abd Al-Raouf Halabiyaⁱⁱ (17) both of whom were trying to cross at one of the checkpoints in the West Bank. On their way home from a training session at the Faisal al-Husseini Stadium in al-Ram in the central West Bank, the youngsters were shot multiple times in their legs and feet, beaten up, and had dogs set upon them (Robbins, 2014; Zahriyeh, 2015); the injuries they sustained prevented them from ever playing football again. The IDF claimed they were attempting to throw explosive devices at police officers.

In March 2018, Palestinians living in Gaza began large scale protests in an attempt to break the decade-long blockade; this became widely known as the “Great March of Return”. These protests, held alongside the border fence, led to a sharp upturn in the shooting of Palestinians and eventually generated an UN Inquiry to investigate the levels of violence and deaths caused by the IDF. One of those taking part the border fence protests was Mohammed Khalil (23), who played for Al-Salah FC. Khalil was shot in the leg, destroying his knee. Mobile phone

footage of the incident of the shooting was posted on the internet by a Gaza-based journalist, Mohammed Kareem (Weiss and Robbins, 2018). Khalil was shot with an explosive type of ammunition known as 'the butterfly bullet' which explodes upon impact, pulverizing tissue, arteries and bone, while causing severe internal injuries. Gadzo (2018) highlights how these explosive rounds are banned internationally under the Geneva Convention because of the "unnecessary injury and suffering caused from large bullet wounds". Cook (2013) has suggested that Israel is using the OPT to test various military hardware which it then sells on the international arms market as 'battle tested'. Israel is the largest per capita weapons exporter in the world (Cook, 2017). The shooting of Khalil generated wider awareness when he called on Argentina to cancel its upcoming friendly against Israel. As a result of the negative publicity, Argentina did cancel the game, citing concerns over the safety of its players. Other footballers also shot during their participation in 'Great Return March' protests included Mohammed al-Ajoury (17) whose leg was amputated after being shot by the IDF in 2018 (The Palestine Chronicle, 2018), Abed el-Fatah Abed e-Nabi, a Palestinian football player shot in his leg posted footage of the incident on social media (Sanchez, 2018) and Mohammad Obeid (23) who also played for the Al-Salah club before he was shot in both knees (Yaghi, 2018).

All those shot needed surgery that was regularly unavailable in Gaza. Hospitals in Gaza are unable to respond to the scope and complexity of the injuries inflicted and lack the necessary medicines equipment, qualified staff, and regular supply of electricity and clean water (Landau, 2019). This is because Israel controls what medical equipment and who (here, medical staff) can enter the OPT, at the same time as preventing those injured from leaving to seek medical treatment abroad. While the IDF has confirmed that its snipers had orders to target the limbs of protestors as part of the military rules of engagement, it has been noted they do this because of the pressures it places on the Palestinian authorities, not only in terms of the immediate medical attention required but also the resources needed to provide long term medical rehabilitation and care.

As a result of the injuries and deaths caused by live fire the UN launched an Inquiry on the 2018 Gaza protests (Landau, 2019). As was expected the Israeli state chose not to cooperate with UN investigators. In February 2019 the United Nations found that the Palestinian demonstrations did not constitute combat or military campaigns (UNHRC, 2019). The report found that the Israeli Security Forces had killed 183 protestors with live ammunition, 35 of whom were children; three of those killed were clearly marked paramedics, with two others clearly marked as journalists. The Commission determined that Israeli snipers had shot at

journalists, health workers, children and persons with disabilities, knowing they were clearly recognizable as such. However, without meaningful international sanction, it would appear that the IDF feels it is immune from censure from the international community.

The official response of the Israeli state

As noted previously, the attitude of the Israeli state, and some of its supporters can be described as both delusional and arrogant, underpinned by an attempt to dehumanise the Palestinians. In response to the disproportionate treatment shown towards Palestinian protestors, the Israeli state claims it is necessary on the grounds of national security. In 2003, in response to criticism of Israeli aggression, the Chief Rabbi in Britain, described the Israeli military as the most humanitarian army in the world because of its efforts to avoid killing non-combatants (McGreal, 2003). In 2018, the continued attitude that Palestinian life was worth less than Jewish life was shown by the Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman who stated that the killing of Palestinians was acceptable because there were “no innocent people” living in the Gaza Strip (Lazarof, 2018).

Whilst the Israeli Football Association (IFA) claims it has worked to support the movement of Palestinian football players to attend training and matches, the Israeli state has a default position that the Palestinians are using football as a cover for terrorist activities. In the struggle for public opinion the Israeli state has claimed it is judged by different standards to those made of other countries. Various Israeli advocacy groups (nominally independent but usually pro-Israel and often funded by Zionists) are using *hasbara* (Hebrew for explanation) to justify its actions (Dart, 2016). The Israeli state has made significant investment in its public diplomacy machinery to make *ad hominem* attacks on BDS activists (“they are anti-Semitic”) in an attempt to generate a counter-deligitimisation narrative (Oren 2016). The Israeli state is also using legal methods (‘from warfare to lawfare’, and ‘blacklisting’) to discredit those who document the human rights abuses of Palestinians and/or propose boycott, disinvestment or sanctions of the Israeli state (Schulte, 2016).

The position of UEFA and FIFA

The position of football’s governing body is highly problematic. FIFA do not want to be seen as being political and have thus either ignored or vacillated on adhering to its own statutes when

responding to the actions of the Israeli state. On all the points raised earlier in this chapter regarding the treatment of Palestinian football, FIFA has been virtually silent. FIFA appear to be guilty of using double standards; willing to become involved in certain aspects of the conflict, such as arranging 'Peace Matches' between the different parties, and fining clubs whose fans express support for the Palestinians, most notably Glasgow Celtic FC (McKenna, 2016); however, FIFA are less willing to follow their own human rights policy when it comes to the Palestinians (or the six Israeli clubs located in the OPT, see Dart, 2018). While FIFA eventually got involved in the Sarsak case, they remained mute on the wider issue of free movement of players, officials and equipment / travel restrictions placed on Palestinian players and officials. However, FIFA officials were quick to involve themselves in the case of the footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi, who as an Australian refugee, was detained in Thailand at the request of the Bahraini government (Ellis-Petersen and Davidson, 2019). Al-Araibi's case was immediately taken up by high-profile footballers, the Australian government, the IOC, and the world players' union FIFPro.

So serious have been the attacks of Palestinian footballers and their footballing infrastructure and the number of violations committed by the Israelis that FIFA were obliged to form a committee to monitor Israeli actions. However, after much vacillation FIFA disbanded its working group on Palestine/Israel, refusing to take any action. As Nicholson (2019c) concluded "It was a stunning piece of political duplicity from the FIFA president who has shown zero support for Palestinian football."

When one of FIFA's own officials, Susan Shalabi, vice president of the Palestine FA, was arrested at the Israeli border upon returning to Palestine having attended the opening of the 2019 Asian Cup tournament (Nicholson, 2019b), FIFA were reluctant to intervene. FIFA General Secretary, Gianni Infantino, took little note of Palestinian football, until, US President Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, took an interest in 'solving the conflict' and proposed building some football pitches in the region in a naive attempt to launch a 'sport for peace' initiative (see Dart, 2019). Consecutive Israeli governments have restricted the importation of building materials into the Gaza Strip (U.N., 2016a) with all donations of sport equipment from international sports organisations subject to restriction on entry to the OPT if the Israelis feel they could be used for terrorist activity. Thus, FIFA's promise to (re)build football pitches in the OPT would require Israel to allow equipment and engineers with the necessary expertise into Palestine to build the pitches; Israel have typically been unwilling to allow this (Nicholson, 2019c).

Fighting Back

Individual athletes have shown support for the Palestinians, including retired Malian-French professional footballer Freddie Kanoute who organised a campaign against Israel hosting a UEFA tournament in 2013 (Dart, 2016), Fleetwood Town manager Joey Barton who tweeted criticism of the Gaza bombing, and English cricketer Moeen Ali who wore a pro-Palestine wristband (Bacchi, 2016; Burdsey, 2015; Rice, 2014). At the time of writing, however, there was not significant levels of support for the Palestinians coming from the world of sport, perhaps due, in part to Pink Floyd founder Roger Waters' suggestion that individuals are 'scared off' (Gallagher, 2016), and fearful of being labelled as antisemitic were they to express support for the Palestinian footballers shot by the Israeli military.

However, support for the Palestinians has increased with protests against Israeli sports teams often resulting in sanctions by sports governing bodies (MailOnline, 2014; Zirin, 2014; Gellar, 2015). Support for the Palestinians has also been generated by amateur football teams that have visited the OPT (FARE, 2015; Simpson, 2016), and in demonstrations when Israeli (national) teams play, by groups such as 'Football against Apartheid', 'Red Card Israeli Racism' and by fans of Glasgow Celtic FC, despite repeated threats of sanctions by UEFA (McKenna, 2016). In an attempt to draw attention to the plight of the Palestinians, supporters have protested at sportswear manufacturer Puma's sponsorship of the Israeli Football Association, not least because of its support for the six football teams located in Israel's illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land. The participation of these teams in Israeli leagues is a direct violation the rules of football's global governing body FIFA and of international law (Dart, 2018). Grassroots protests have led to the cancellation of a friendly between Argentina and Israel (Guardian, 2018) with activists calling for, but ultimately failing to get the Argentinian and Uruguayan national football teams to cancel its "friendly" in Israel. Activists see the use of sport by the Israeli state as an attempt to present itself as a 'normal country', to normalize its occupation and treatment of the Palestinians and thus acting to 'sports-wash' its crimes. Parallels are drawn between Israel and Apartheid South Africa, with the slogan 'No sport in an abnormal society' increasingly being heard.

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism

The recent adoption by some groups and political parties of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)'s 'working definition of antisemitism' has been highly controversial and problematic, not least because it conflates Jews with Israel and allows for very little criticism of the Israeli state to be made (see Philo, et al, 2019). Arguments against the IHRA were stated in an open letter written by Palestinian trade unions and other groups who stated it was a,

non-legally binding definition attempts to erase Palestinian history, demonise solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality, suppress freedom of expression, and shield Israel's far-right regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid from effective measures of accountability in accordance to international law. (PCS, 2018)

In short, the IHRA document has become a genuine threat to freedom of expression with legitimate criticism of the Israeli state being dismissed as anti-Semitic.

As Corrigan (2009) has noted, accusing those who are critical of the actions of the Israeli state and of Zionism as somehow being antisemitic has no rational basis, just as it makes no sense to accuse those who were critical of South African Apartheid as being racist towards white people, or those opposed to Nazi policies towards Jews as somehow being racist towards all German peoples. Many pro-Palestinian activists would argue that the expansionist Israeli and Zionist political agenda will continue to go unchecked until it is subject to direct and sustained pressure. Given this pressure is unlikely to come from within Israel (given its shift rightwards), the international community must become a key advocate for the Palestinian people. de Jong (2012) rightly recognises the contemporary situation in Israel/Palestine is a human rights struggle and not a 'value free' exercise. Academics, sport governing bodies, and sportsmen/women who were involved in the, now historic, struggle against South African Apartheid are invited to consider their position in relation to the contemporary Israel/Palestine conflict.

In order to avoid being accused of anti-Semitism, it is essential to maintain a clear and absolute distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, and to distinguish between individual Jews and the actions of the State of Israel. As Klug (2013: 470) has suggested 'if Zionism is seen as the only alternative to antisemitism, then it follows that hostility to Zionism (or to the state of Israel as the expression or fulfilment of Zionism) must be anti-Semitic'. Those opposed to the racist ideology of the Israeli state and who are opposed to the political ideology of Zionism,

cannot automatically be dismissed as a racist or anti-Semitic. It is the Israeli state and its supporters who have deliberately sought to exploit antisemitism by conflating Zionism with Judaism, as evidenced in the IHRA tragedy, and in creating a situation whereby any criticism of Israel or Zionism is seen as antisemitic (Greenwald and Fishman, 2016; Habeeb, 2016). This tactic has proved effective in closing down support for the Palestinians.

Conclusion

Sport will inevitably feature low on the list of priorities of those living in an inherently violent society and in which those affected have no control over their lives. As research from the United Nations (2016b), B'Tselem (2017), Human Rights Watch (2017), and Amnesty International (2018) have each shown, Palestinians living under occupation lack the basic human rights of security, health, freedom of movement, education and work. The five million Palestinians in the OPT have, for the past 70 years, been subject to systematic ethnic cleansing, house/village/community demolitions, collective punishments, travel restrictions, state torture, detention without trial, assassination, mass unemployment, subsistence wages, poor living conditions, inadequate health services, sub-standard transport, housing shortages and inferior educational opportunities.

Targeting the structure of football and individual footballers has a ripple effect on wider Palestinian society. It was noted earlier that Anderson (2006) proposed that all nations are imagined or constructed upon a sense of national identity which combines invented traditions and popular mythologies. Following this, a nation's football team can act as an important display of/for such 'invented traditions' and unrealised fantasies. Hobsbawm (1990: 143) claimed the cultural production of football seizes the popular imagination and that,

What has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings, at all events for males, is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at what practically every man wants, or at one time in his life has wanted, to be good at. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people.

It is concluded that the Israeli state has, deliberately or otherwise, sought to destroy (symbolically and physically) the lives and aspirations of individual Palestinian footballers and

of football in the OPT. What is needed is for the international 'footballing family' to become more aware of the increasing number of Palestinian footballers who have died or become amputees as a result of being shot by Israeli snipers. If more were known about the conditions under which Palestinians played their football, they might be less willing to allow Israel to 'sportswash' its brutal military occupation, and its maiming and killing of Palestinians.

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ⁱ This is not a new tactic. International peace campaigners, killed as a result of Israeli action, include Iain Hook, James Miller, Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall who was shot in the head an IDF sniper despite wearing a bright orange jacket signifying he was a foreigner (McGreal, 2012). That these individuals were non-Palestinian and 'Westerners' meant that their cases drew international media attention, unlike much of the routine, day-to-day violence experienced by resident Palestinians.

ⁱⁱ Adam's mother was originally from the Ukraine and although allowed to visit her son in hospital in Jerusalem, she was also threatened with deportation (RCIR, 2014).