Research paper

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Foul or Fair play?
The role of sports in dividing or unifying Lebanon

By: Robert Feller - s2828030

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Content

Introduction

This paper discusses the role that sports can play in reconciliatory processes and focusses on sectarian-divided Lebanon as a case study.[1] Lebanon is rather unique as it has 18 state-registered sects, the three largest being: the Maronite Christian, the Shia Muslim and the Sunni Muslim. Lebanon has been – and to a certain extent still is – troubled by severe sectarian differences and conflict. The last big violent conflict in Lebanon dates to the civil war of 1975-1990, in which over 140.000 people were killed, over 180.000 were injured and over 750,000 Lebanese were internally displaced.[2]

In academic literature, different "instruments" are discussed that – supposedly – can play a conciliatory or unifying role in countries, like *nationalism* and the creation of an *imagined community* (Anderson), *institutionalization* (Anssi Paasi[3]), *governmentality* (Foucault[4]), but also *sports*.[5] This role of sports is, however, not undisputed. George Orwell is – perhaps – the most famous sceptic. In 1945, he referred to sports as 'war minus the shooting'.[6] Regarding sports, Orwell saw two tendencies. First, he noted that it was used to advance political messages and increase in-group feelings. Second, it divided people into separate units; whereby people belief in the superiority of their group over others; and feel a duty to advance the interests of their group through acquiring more power and prestige. In peacetime, (international) sport was, to Orwell, one of the most visible manifestations, and a militant tool, of groups as it promoted patriotic, competitive and aggressive attitudes.[7] A concrete example that seems to prove Orwell's view, is the case of Glasgow (Scotland), where there has been great animosity between two football clubs: the Glasgow Rangers (a protestant club) and Celtic (a catholic club). Rather, in Glasgow, 'sport has been the

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[1] This essay follows Nikolaos van Dam's definition of "sectarianism", who described it as: 'acting or causing action on the basis of membership of a specific religious community.' See: Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 15.

[2] Faten Ghosn and Amal Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war: peace or the illusion of peace?", *The Middle East Journal* 65.3 (2011): 382.

[3] For more on Paasi's theorization on the institutionalization process, see: Anssi Paasi, *Territories, Boundaries, and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border* (Chichester, England: J. Wiley &, 1996): 32, 37, 305.

[4] For more on Foucault's thinking on the "art of government", see: Andrew C. Billings, and Marie. Hardin, Routledge Handbook of Sport and New Media, (London: Routledge, 2014), 55.

[5] A standard work that discusses this aspect of sport is: D. Stanley Eitzen, *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

[6] Peter. J Beck, "'War Minus the Shooting': George Orwell on International Sport and the Olympics", *Sport in History* 33.1 (2013): 72-73.

[7] Beck, "'War Minus the Shooting'": 78, 80, 85.

symbol of social, political and religious causes that divided the community in the 20th century'.[8]

At the other end of the spectrum we can find people like Kofi Annan, former secretary-general of the UN, who argue that sport brings together people in a way few, if any other activity, can manage. Annan: 'It has an almost unmatched role to play in promoting understanding, healing wounds, mobilizing support for social causes, and breaking down barriers'.[9] In this regard, the concrete example of South Africa is given most often. Especially rugby has – as has been argued - played an important role in unifying the country after years of *apartheid*. The pinnacle of the display of reconciliation and unity was achieved with the Rugby World Cup of 1995. Hosted by South Africa itself and cheered on by both black and white people, the South African team (with one black player) won the Cup final. The newly elected president Nelson Mandela, wearing the South-African *Springbok* jersey, handed team captain Francois Pienaar the trophy and the two shook hands.[10]

The examples of Scotland and South Africa make clear that we need to take a closer look at *how* sport can play a certain role in the process of reconciliation, and what limits there are in this regard. With this in mind, this essay analyses Lebanon's experience. Seeing that conflict in Lebanon has been along sectarian lines, this essay will analyse the relation between sports and sectarianism vis-a-vis reconciliation processes, and will link this with theories on reconciliation after conflict. In this way, this essay hopes to add to the study of the interlinkages between sport and reconciliation. It should be noted that this essay limits itself by discussing the period of 1990 (the year the civil war ended) until 2010. As such, the period after the Arab Spring is excluded. A period of twenty-years will allow to see developments in the field of reconciliation after the civil war, while at the same time, ending in 2010 has

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[8] Celtic was founded as a charitable organization to provide free meals and clothing to the Catholic poor; the sports department was added to the club later. Celtic has always been proud of its ties to Ireland, as one can still see today in the green club colors. Rangers, on the other hand, was Protestant and represented the anti-Catholicism of the ruling elite in Scotland. It was not until 1976 that Rangers declared an end to its policy of not employing Catholic players. But even today matches between the two clubs are 'life-and-death struggles'. See: Danyel Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting? The Politics of Sport in Lebanon As a Unique Case in Comparative Politics", *Third World Quarterly* 32.2 (2011): 263.
[9] Kofi Annan Foundation, *Kofi Annan: we must use the power of sport as an agent of social change*, http://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/news-releases/kofi-annan-we-must-use-the-power-of-sport-as-an-agent-of-social-change/ (accessed: 15-12-2017).
[10] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting": 262. And: Kristine Höglund and Ralph Sundberg, "Reconciliation through sports? The case of South Africa", Third World Quarterly 29.4 (2008): 806-807.

the advantage of looking back from a bit of a distance, which generally eases analyses.

The main question of this essay is: **how have sports contributed to unifying, or dividing, Lebanon in the period 1990-2010?** The first sub question that will be addressed is: **how can sports unite or divide people?** This chapter will primarily be based upon the works of Höglund and Sundberg[11], Stanley D. Eitzen[12] and John Sugden[13], who have all written extensively on the effects of sports on societies. I will address the different factors that determine whether sports are unifying or divisive. What I will argue is that we cannot "essentialize" sport in any way, meaning that we cannot say that sports are either unifying or divisive, but rather must take into consideration the (socio-historical) context to get an idea of what role sports play within a society.

In the second chapter, I will address the Lebanese societal context and the role that sports have played within it. As such, the question that will be addressed is: **what has been the role of sports in Lebanese society?** Here, I will implement the factors that contribute to dividing or unifying a society as discussed in chapter one and will connect these to the Lebanese situation.

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[11] Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.
[12] Emeritus professor of sociology at Colorado State University.
[13] Emeritus professor of the Sociology of Sport at the University of Brighton.

Chapter 1: how can sports unite or divide people?

The role of sport in bringing people together has been much debated. Mainly in the field of politics has sport been emphasized as an important instrument to overcome conflict. The United Nations is a primary exponent in this regard and argues that: 'By its very nature sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and citizenship. Sport brings individuals and communities together, highlighting commonalities and bridging cultural or ethnic divides. Sport provides a forum to learn skills such as discipline, confidence and leadership and it teaches core principles such as tolerance, co-operation and respect. Sport teaches the value of effort and how to manage victory, as well as defeat'.[14] This quote from the UN mentions a range of things that sports – supposedly – contribute to: bringing people together, highlighting commonalities and bridging divides (these three I categorize as the "unifying" function of sports), as well as learning people: discipline, tolerance, co-operation, respect, and how to deal with both losing and winning (this educational side to sport I categorize as the "civilizing" function of sports). I will discuss these categories in the section that follows next.

The civilizing function of sports

There is some limited theoretical and historical support for how sport – supposedly – civilizes people. According to Norbert Elias (who is well-known for his book "The Civilizing Process"), sport, over time, has a moderating effect on social behavior that goes beyond the playing field itself and as such makes a positive contribution to human social development. Sport, by offering opportunities for the socially approved arousal of moderate excitement, gradually leads people to exercise stricter control over their public behavior and, in this way, has a civilizing influence on all levels (local, regional, national, international).[15] In this view, sports can successfully be used in demobilization and reintegration processes and in the rehabilitation and resocialization of, for instance, (child) soldiers, which is something that fits neatly in the ideas and programs of the UN.[16]

Rather than seeing sport as a form of war without guns (as Orwell does) we can, in this way, also perceive it as an *alternative* to war that provides communities

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[14] Fred Coalter, "The Politics of Sport-For-Development: Limited Focus Programmes and Broad Gauge Problems?", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45, no. 3 (2010): 303.

[15] J. Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism and Sport Interventions in Divided Societies", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45, no. 3 (2010): 261.

[16] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 811.

(whether nations, regions, localities or sects) with opportunities to express distinctiveness and rivalry without threatening the wider social order.[17] The impromptu truce in the Great War during Christmas 1914, during which various soccer matches were played between British and German soldiers, is used to exemplify the capacity of sport to divert hostile communities. In both cases, it is sport *instead* of shooting.[18]

It should be noted that there is some criticism regarding sport's - supposed - ability to function as an *alternative* for war, namely that: without structural changes, the gap between groups will not be bridged and conflict will simply persist.[19] Take the "soccer truce" of Christmas 1914. The armistice that ended the war came in 1918 and not in 1915 after this "truce". 'Millions of people died after the final whistle at the Christmas day match had sounded'.[20]

Moreover, rather than contributing to a truce or peace, in some cases sport has contributed to the exact opposite and worked as a catalyst for violence. The most famous example in this regard has been the "soccer war" between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969. Following a series of highly contested World Cup qualifying matches between two countries that were already in conflict over territorial and trade issues, a war broke out in which more than 30,000 people were either killed or wounded.[21] In the case of Lebanon, supporters were not allowed to attend matches between 2006 and 2010 because of several violent clashes between different sectarian groups.[22]

The combination of sport and violence can, to a large extent, be attributed to the connection between sports and collective identity, whereby the former functions as an expression of the latter. For spectators of a match, the sportsmen are the embodiment of their group's strength or weakness. Victory for their team will be victory for them; defeat for the team, defeat for them.[23] Sugden: 'Undoubtedly, sport

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[17] In this regard, the ancient "Olympic Truce" is often mentioned as an example. During the Olympic Truce warring, Greek city states laid down their weapons to participate in the Olympic festival. Nowadays, in the modern Olympics, this spirit of the Truce is still regularly evoked. See: Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 259.

[18] Eitzen, *Fair and foul,* 22. And: Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 260.

[19] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 260-261.

[20] Also, while it is the truce that is often remembered, it is less well known that during World War I British regiments literally went over the top kicking soccer balls or carrying rugby balls as a way of adding symbolic ardor to their attack on the enemy. See: Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 260-261.

[21] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 261.

[22] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting": 271.

[23] Eitzen, *Fair and foul,* 25.

is a very important element of collective identity, carrying meaning beyond anything intrinsic to the activity itself. Even in (relatively) stable societies, a high degree of social stratification and racial/ethnic heterogeneity means that expressions of shared identities through sport are complex, often ambiguous and can be generative of class distinctions and cross-community animosity and conflict. Sport concurrently included and excludes'.[24] Moreover, Sugden argues that, especially when there is a lack of shared understanding about what precisely constitutes "the nation" and/or a legitimately sovereign state, the function of sport in the politics of community identification and celebration is even more problematic.[25] As such, we need to acknowledge that sports do not necessarily unite on a national level, but rather might divide different groups. I will discuss this in more detail in the next segment.

The unifying function of sports

Supposedly, sports can play a unifying role in the sense that it can break down the walls between rivalling groups by facilitating a *neutral*, *easy* and *low-cost* context where people with different backgrounds can come together and interact. This interaction then contributes to the breaking down of stereotypes, the transformation of negative attitudes about "the other(s)", and the empowerment of communities to, in the words of Höglund and Sundberg: 'create a more homogeneous and less conflict-prone society'.[26] Sugden, who has set up cross-community sport projects in South Africa, Northern Ireland and Israel argues that 'in relatively neutral settings, given a common cause and goal, a shared set of values, and a committed mentor, a sport team was an excellent crucible within which to nurture intimacy and mutuality' whereby the result eventually can be that friendships blossom across community divides.[27]

Sports can thus help create a new and inclusive social identity, but two nuances should be noted, whereby the first is connected with grass-roots approaches of improving cross-community relations, and the second is more top-town. First, cross-community contact alone does not necessarily improve inter-group and inter-ethnic relations. Rather, the quality and nature of the contact experiences are vital in

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[24] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 261.
[25] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 261.
[26] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 811.
[27] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 264.

determining whether or not community relations improve.[28] Contact experiences that promote equal status between groups in a given situation, that promote common goals, that require co-operation, and that reward positively moments of cross-community intimacy have been shown to be most likely to reduce inter-group prejudice.[29] Using this knowledge, Sugden et al. have set up several cross-community projects for children (most notably in Israel, but none in Lebanon so far), known as the Football for Peace (F4P) programs, that have made "modest" contributions 'to wider efforts to promote conflict resolution and peaceful-co-existence'.[30]

The second nuance concerning the contribution that sport can make to create a new and inclusive social identity, is that this is most likely to happen if the new group has success in the field of sport as success can trigger pride across divisions within a country.[31] For example, even in Iraq, torn by war and divided along ethnic and sectarian lines, unity was achieved - briefly - in 2007 when the national Iraqi soccer team, composed of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, won its first ever Asian Cup, defeating Saudi Arabia.[32] Similarly, in South Africa black and white were united in their support for "their" successful rugby team in 1995 and together they were celebrating the winning of the World Cup.[33] This dependence on success is a significant limitation and as such it can be argued sport is not a viable tool for continuous nation building.[34]

Moreover, to be truly inclusive, a team needs to be an even representation of this new identity. In the case of the South African rugby team of 1995, there was one black player participating; without him it would have been hard to present the team as a "truly" South African team. However, due to different socio-economic factors, an overrepresentation of white sportsmen persisted after 1995. As such, sport did not so much help to create one single inclusive identity in South Africa, but rather showed (and was exemplary for) the socio-economic differences between the white and the

[28] John Sugden, "Teaching and Playing Sport for Conflict Resolution and Co-Existence in Israel", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 41, no. 2 (2006): 227.
[29] For more on this see: Pettigrew, Thomas F, and Linda R Tropp. "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators." *European Journal of Social Psychology,* 38, no. 6 (2008): 922–934.
[30] Sugden, "Teaching and Playing Sport": 221.
[31] Eitzen, *Fair and foul, 23.* .And: Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 812.
[32] Eitzen, *Fair and foul, 23.*
[33] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 808.
[34] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 808.

black population.[35] In Lebanon, where patronage plays an important role in society (something I will address in more detail in the following chapter), not only teams that play in Lebanese competitions are connected with certain patrons and sectarian groups, but also the different national teams (most notably the football- and basketball team). The result has been that different Lebanese national teams have not been regarded as representing the Lebanese society at large, but rather a certain sectarian group. As such, at some matches, Lebanese citizens have in fact cheered for the other team, if the latter shared their own sectarian identity.[36]

What also should be noted is that, even if there is success, it is very hard to hold on to the feelings of unity that result from this. Höglund and Sundberg argue that these feelings "evaporate" if no real changes in society are perceived: 'symbolism, after all, does not denote true transformation'.[37] Both Iraq (where, as mentioned, the feelings of unity only lasted "briefly") and South Africa are good examples in this regard. Although South Africa is usually mentioned as the prime example of how sport can unite a people, Höglund and Sundberg are rather critical of this view, arguing that, yes, sport has had an impact on reconciliatory processes in South Africa, but this impact seems 'to be limited, because of the fleeting nature of symbolic events'.[38]

What can be concluded is that sports can be the beginning of a unifying process, but this largely depends on the approach and the societal context. When there are disparities between different groups, structural political and socio-economic changes within the society are necessary. As such, I agree with the view of Bruce Kidd[39] who argues that: 'in and of itself, sport is of no intrinsic value: it is neither

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[35] To achieve balanced representations, South Africa made use of quotas, but these are not without their disadvantages and in fact, it has been argued that quota systems strengthen *group* identities, rather than *common* identities. On the one side, quotas result in seeing a team as not "at its best", because it's forced to make use of (black) "quota players". On the other hand, some (black) sportsmen in turn resent the system since it brands some of them as being "quota players" in the eyes of the public. Thus, although equal representation is important, quotas do not seem like a useful tool in achieving this. See: Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 809-810.

[36] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting": 273.

[37] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 808.

[38] As such, they notice that: 'the legacies of apartheid are omnipresent and inequalities and separation between the communities in South Africa persist. Social mobility is low and unemployment is high, leading to new conflicts emerging. The social and economic injustices promulgated through apartheid's different stages cannot be easily overcome, and not only must vast economic resources be funneled to impoverished communities, but there must also be major psychological transformation'. See: Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 815.

[39] Professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Toronto.

naturally good, nor irrevocably bad. It is, like all collective human endeavors, a social construction which is malleable according to the social forces that surround it'.[40]

Thus, we should not "essentialize"[41] sport and the role it plays in societies, rather it would be preferable to think of sport as 'a plurality of forms that have different results in different contexts'.[42] Therefore sport can be claimed and proclaimed in the name of both complementary and contradictory social goals and practices.[43] With this focus on the importance of context, I will discuss the above-mentioned unifying/divisive factors of sports in the context of Lebanon. In this way, I will try to come to a nuanced conclusion regarding the role of sports in Lebanese society.

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[40] Bruce Kidd, "A New Social Movement: Sport for Development and Peace", *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008): 379.

[41] Here, I mean that sport, as a concept, has no essential, or "natural", character of itself. Rather, what sports mean to people is shaped by people themselves (which follows Gerd Baumann's "processual theory"). For more on this see: Kidd, ''A New Social Movement": 379. Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 90-92.

[42] Kidd, "A new social movement": 379.

[43] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 262.

Chapter 2: what has been the role of sports in Lebanese society?

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how sports can have both a dividing and a unifying effect. On the unifying side, we can find: sports can be an alternative to war and conflict, it civilizes people, it can create a new inclusive identity (but this is dependent on success and even representation, and reliant on more structural political and socio-economic changes), and it can facilitate a place where people from different groups can meet and interact, which can, if rightly guided and supported, lead to the breaking down of stereotypes and distrust. On the divisive side, we can find: sport can be an expression of collective identity (whereby winning is a way of showing superiority and dominance of your group over the other) and as such work as a catalyst for conflict, it makes people violent, and sports excludes as much as it includes, especially when there is lack of shared understanding of what constitutes the nation. At center stage is the question whether sports can contribute to the creation of one inclusive identity in Lebanon. In order to answer this question, I will shortly discuss what has divided Lebanese society in the 20th and 21st century and what has been the cause for conflict. I will then move on the role that sports play in Lebanese society.

Conflict

To find the roots for the conflicts in Lebanon, we need to go back to the times of the Ottoman Empire and French colonial rule. As part of the Ottoman *millet* system, the different sectarian groups (there are eighteen nowadays, but the main three are: the Maronite Christians, the Sunni Muslims and the Shia Muslims) in Lebanon had, in return for the paying of a tax, considerable freedom to govern themselves through their own laws.[44]

Beside the religious community, there is another community that is of great importance, namely the *tribe*.[45] Over the centuries, a feudal system developed in Lebanon in which family clans (which, combined, form a tribe) became the most

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[44] Simon Haddad, "Lebanon: From Consociationalism to Conciliation", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 15, no. 3-4 (2009): 402.

[45] In the Middle East, it is common that villages and their lands are divided among families belonging to different tribes. The tribal confederations sometimes had more than one leader, and were in turn subdivided into tribes, each with its own "foreman". Although the leadership to of a tribe was usually acquired through inheritance, it was also possible to become a tribal leader due to personal qualities or through influence in power institutions at a higher level. See: Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 8.

influential socioeconomic actors.[46] Both the Ottomans and the French ruled through local elites and since that time, a few families and clans have managed to maintain power. Clientelism (which involves an asymmetrical relation between a patron and a client) plays an important role in this. What should be noted is that patrons have come to represent certain sectarian groups, whereby there can be conflict on two levels: in the first place, patrons can fight over dominance within their own religious group (intra-sectarian conflict), and in the second, patrons can fight over dominance of their religious group over another (inter-sectarian conflict). In this process, patrons mobilize their followers (clients), who are often socio-economically dependent on them as patrons provide employment, infrastructure, educations, permits and so forth.[47]

After Lebanon gained independence in 1943, it was decided, as a way of dealing with these different power actors and sectarian groups within Lebanon, to organize the political structure on the basis of *confessionalism*, which is a system of government that proportionally allocates political power among a country's communities (both ethnic and religious) according to their percentage of the population.[48] In Lebanon, this came into being through the National Pact of 1943, according to which the office of president was reserved for a Maronite Christian, the Sunnis were accorded the premiership and the Shia the speaker of parliament. Seats in parliament were distributed proportionally based on the 1932 census (the last official census taken in Lebanon at that time), which had identified the ratio of Christians to Muslims to be six to five.[49]

Although this may seem like a balanced way of dividing power, the result was a relatively weak state that was unable to implement substantive administrative reforms. Moreover, the prevailing political system tended to foster corruption, nepotism, clientism, and laxity in upholding the public interest when it conflicted with private interests.[50] As such tensions grew over time, something that was also fueled by the changing demographics in the country. Seeing that the share of Christians declined, voices were raised that Muslims should have a larger share of the seats in

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[46] Regarding Syria, see: Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
[47] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 270.
[48] Haddad, "Lebanon": 402. And: Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 269.
[49] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 382.
[50] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 383.

parliament. Eventually, 'internal domestic tensions over the political structure, issues of power-sharing, exploitation of sectarian differences, economic equalities and disparities, combined with external/regional conflicts pertaining to the Israelis and Palestinians, lead to the outbreak of war on April 13, 1975, with the already weak Lebanese government unable to prevent it'.[51]

Peace and reconciliation

In 1989, the Ta'if Accord officially ended the war. This sparks the question: what actions were taken to reconcile the conflicting groups? Has this been successful, or does sectarianism still play an important role in dividing Lebanon?

Concerning the general process of reconciliation in Lebanon after 1989/1990, Faten Ghosn[52] and Amal I. Khoury[53] are very skeptical and they argue that two documents have laid the foundations for future conflict. The first is the Ta'if Accord itself which was not inclusive as 'it did not truly represent the Lebanese people and their concerns; rather, it was mainly an instrument by which political leaders agreed to co-exist'.[54] As such, Ghosn and Khoury see the Accord as an elitist way of maintaining the status-quo, rather than as an instrument that has contributed to people from different backgrounds coming together. Moreover, the Accord introduced a new threshold for decision-making that has made it harder to reach consensus on a national political level. The result of this is that the relative role of sectarian groups has increased. In this regard, one can speak of eighteen states within the state of Lebanon as the government permits the eighteen recognized religious groups to administer their own family and personal status law, such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.[55]

The second important document was the General Amnesty Law, which was passed shortly after the civil war. In general, amnesty laws are necessary in order to get both sides in a civil war to put down their weapons. However, amnesties that grant impunity for human rights violations without investigation are incompatible with international law. Nonetheless, the Lebanese Parliament passed this amnesty that pardoned crimes committed during the civil war, including war crimes and crimes

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[51] Haddad, "Lebanon": 404. And: Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 383.
[52] Assistant professor in the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona.
[53] Assistant professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies Department at Guilford College.
[54] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 389.
[55] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 269.

against humanity. Instead of reconciling citizens, this has resulted in allowing political leaders (i.e. elite families) to consolidate their position. Here as well, maintaining the status quo has been the most important.[56]

As such, Ghosn and Khoury conclude that, rather than that a real process of reconciliation has taken place, the different groups have, since 1990, all stayed in their own camps whereby no inter-communal linkages have formed.[57]

Sectarianism and sports

The Lebanese division along sectarian lines, whereby one can speak of eighteen states within the state of Lebanon, is reflected in the social and cultural sphere. Sects all have their own television- and radio stations, their own newspapers and their own schools and universities.[58] Likewise, almost all professional sports clubs in Lebanon, have clear sectarian affiliations, most of them with one of the three largest religious communities.[59] In the 2008-2009 season, both the football champion (Nejmeh SC) and the basketball champion (Sporting Al Riyadi) were politically affiliated with the family of the former prime minister Saad Hariri, who supported both clubs directly as well as indirectly (through sponsorships from companies which belong to the Hariri family). Whereas in the 2007-2008 football season, the Shia Muslim club Al-Ahed (funded by Hezbollah) became the Lebanese football champion for the first time.[60]

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[56] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 390.

[57] A symbolic example is that Lebanon still has no unified modern history book today. Rather, the history books taught in school conveniently end with Lebanon gaining its independence in 1943. 'Since there is no unified history book about the war, for most Lebanese, especially the younger generation, all their information has been passed to them by their parents, grandparents, and relatives (or other survivors) who lived through the war'. Thus, the new generation is being raised on the anger, fear, and lack of trust that their parents and relatives have. Moreover, this generation only knows what has been done to its own community/sect, but is ignorant of what its community/sect did to others. See: Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 390.

[58] Haddad, "Lebanon": 401.

[59] Sects that have no clubs in the first league are nevertheless represented in lower divisions. See: Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 265.

[60] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 265.

Club name	Sectarian affiliation	Political affiliation
Al-Ahli Sidon	Sunni Muslim	Ahmad Hariri / Future Movement
Al-Ahed	Shia Muslim	Hezbollah
Al-Ansar	Sunni Muslim	Saad Hariri / Future Movement
Al Islah Bourg Shemaly	Shia Muslim	Amal Movement
Hikmeh	Maronite Christian	Lebanese Forces
Al-Mabarra	Shia Muslim	March 8
Shabab Al Ghazieh	Shia Muslim	Amal Movement
Nejmeh SC	From Shia to Sunni Muslim after acquisition by Saad Hariri	Saad Hariri / Future Movement
Racing Beirut	Orthodox Christian	Saad Hariri / Future Movement
Safa Sporting Club	Druze	Walid Jumblat / Progressive Socialist Party
Shabab Al Sahel	Shia Muslim	March 8
Tadamon Sour	Shia Muslim	March 8

*Football teams and their affiliations, Lebanese Premier League, season 2009-2010*[61]

Club name	Sectarian affiliation	Political affiliation
Anibal Zahle	Maronite Christian	Michel Aoun / Free Patriotic Movement
Antranik SC	Armenian	Ram Gavar
Blue Stars	Maronite Christian	Michel Aoun / Free Patriotic Movement
Champville SC	Maronite Christian	Michel Aoun / Free Patriotic Movement
Hikmeh	Maronite Christian	Lebanese Forces
Hoops club	Shia Muslim	March 8
Kahraba Zouk	Maronite Christian	Lebanese Forces
Al Mouttahed Tripoli	Sunni Muslim	Safadi Foundation
Sporting Al Riyadi	Sunni Muslim	Saad Hariri / Future Movement
Tebnin SC	Shia Muslim	Amal

Basketball teams and their affiliations, Division A, season 2009-2010[62]

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[61] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 264.
[62] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 264.

Like media outlets and schools, sports clubs are an interesting instrument for certain families and sectarian group as these help to mobilize their followers and improve their socio-political position. At the same time, seeing that sports clubs receive relatively little funds from television broadcast rights and ticketing (this has especially been the case in the field of football as supporter were banned from the stadiums between 2006 and 2010), they rely heavily on such patrons. Even more because multinationals are hesitant to sponsor the teams, which also has to do with the sectarian character of the Lebanese society. A few years ago, Coca Cola had to sponsor three different football teams representing the Sunnite, Shia and Christian communities in order to avoid being perceived as taking sides in the sectarian struggle. This shows that, in the Lebanese sectarian environment, sponsoring professional sports teams can be a risky business for multinational companies. Reiche: 'This brings patrons into a powerful position. They can dictate the conditions under which their sponsorship takes place'.[63]
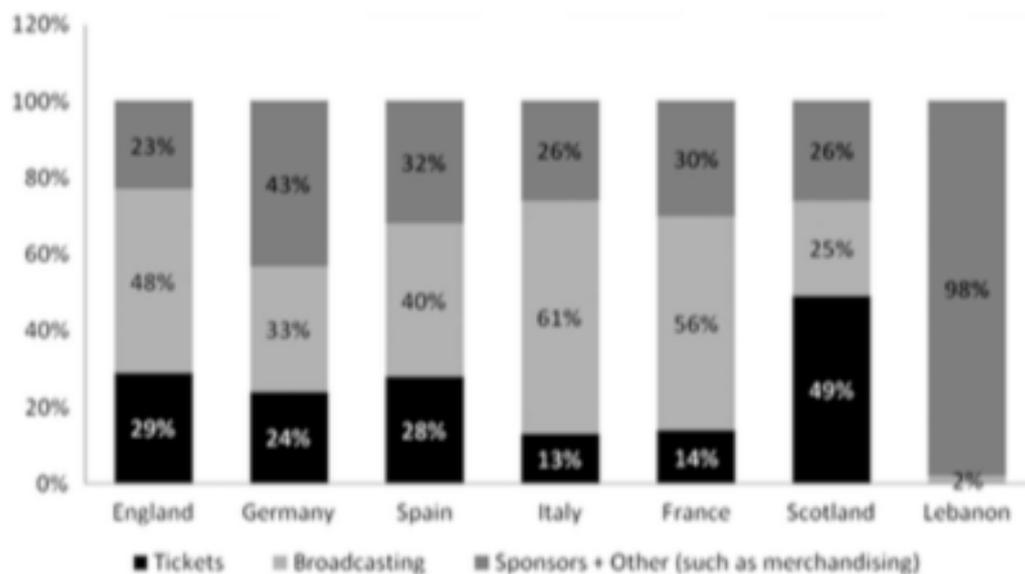
An international comparison of football clubs' revenues (season 2007-2008)[64]

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[63] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 272.
[64] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 272.

This has resulted in stadiums being named after their patron, the team wearing the colors of the party it is affiliated with, and usually large posters of the patron are displayed around the arena.[65] That this is not just something that is imposed from above, but also embraced by the population, can be seen from the chanting of slogan during matches, whereby fans refer to their religion, political leader and residential area.[66]

What should, as such, be concluded is that sports clubs in Lebanon are expressions of the different sectarian groups, rather than that they contribute to the strengthening of national unity. This is not just limited to the field of sports, but also reflects the general situation in Lebanon. Rather, Simon Haddad[67] argues: 'The primary allegiance of Lebanese people is to their sect. For the Lebanese, the religious community is the nation; that is the people to whom one belongs, and with whom one identifies. Membership in the sect serves mainly as a reference in regard to the world at large. [..] The notion of citizenship is weak and there is a lack of a unified national identity'.[68] As has been discussed in the previous chapter: if there is a lack of shared understanding about what constitutes the nation, the role of sport will be problematic. Considering the connections between sectarian groups and sports clubs, and seeing that Lebanon is a relatively new country that was created out of colonialist imperialism and pragmatism, rather than being the result of (grassroots) nationalist tendencies, this is an important point.[69]

As has been argued before, sport has the potential to eventually overcome division and create a new, inclusive identity, for instance if a nation is successful on an international stage. Is there any potential in this regard for uniting Lebanon? Broadly speaking, the answer would be no because Lebanon has, in general, not been very successful (which is something that can be attributed to multiple interconnected reasons that I will address below), and in areas where Lebanon has in fact been relatively successful, there have been some important obstacles that limit the possibility for uniting the country. I will first discuss Lebanon's lack of success on the international stage.

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[65] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 272.
[66] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 265.
[67] American University of Beirut, Department of Political Studies and Public Administration.
[68] Haddad, "Lebanon": 401.
[69] Sugden, "Critical Left-Realism": 261.

Both in the Olympics and in football (one of the most popular sports in the country) Lebanon has not been very successful. In the total Olympic medal count (which includes all the summer and winter Olympic Games since Athens 1896), Lebanon is placed 98th, whereby the country started participating since 1948. For a point of reference: Croatia and Slovenia, which have about the same demographic size, are placed 53rd and 70th respectively, and that while both countries only started participating since 1992.[70] In total, Lebanon has won four Olympic medals, the last one being a bronze medal in wrestling in 1980. When it comes to football, Lebanon has never managed to qualify for a World Cup in its entire history and in regional tournaments there has been only very limited success.[71]

For a large part, this lack of international success can be attributed to the fact that the Lebanese government never developed a national physical education program in schools, something that can be attributed to sectarianism. In Lebanon, most schools are privately owned[72] by sectarian/political groups and for a large part, these manage their own affairs. Giuditta Fontana[73] argues: 'The fragmented structure of Lebanon's education system has an important political function: it helps consolidate confessional communities and legitimizes their political elites'.[74] Just as with the issue over the history book, no agreement can be found in the field of physical education at school. This undermining of the importance of physical education is without doubt one of the main reasons behind the lack of sport culture in Lebanon and the result is that there are relatively few participants in sports.[75]

Basketball has been the general exception as Lebanon has had more success in this field. In fact, Lebanon is amongst the leading teams in Asia, finishing second three times at the Asian Championship (2001, 2005 and 2007). At the same time, there is sectarian interference here as well. The 2010 basketball championship is a

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[70] N. Nassif, *Sport Policy in Lebanon, 1975 to 2004* (Leicester: De Montfort University, 2009), 83.
[71] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 273.
[72] Rather, ever since the Ta'if Accord, the share of privately owned schools has only increased. See: Giuditta Fontana, *Education policy and power-sharing in post-conflict societies: Lebanon, Northern Ireland, and Macedonia*, (Springer, 2016), 233.
[73] Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security, University of Birmingham.
[74] Fontana, *Education Policy*, 238.
[75] Football, for example, while being one of the most popular sports of the country, has around 7,000 registered licensees, this number represents 0.17 percent of the Lebanese population. By comparison, in France, around 3,33 percent of the population is registered, making the proportion of football licensees in France almost twenty times higher than in Lebanon. Nassif argues: 'If football, the game in which the largest part of the Lebanese youth is attracted to, has such a small proportion of athletes inside the Lebanese population, it clearly means that competitive sport is not yet well established in the Lebanese culture'. See: Nassif, *Sport policy in Lebanon*, 82.

good example. Unlike in 2002 and 2006, the Lebanese basketball team did not qualify for the 2010 Basketball World Championship in Turkey. Because the FIBA awarded Lebanon a wildcard, the team could go to the championship anyway, but there was a fee for the wildcard of 500,000 Euro's. The fee was paid by prime minister Saad Hariri via one of his companies, Turkish Telecom. Reiche notes: 'Instead of making use of his position to reach a government decision to pay the fee from the state budget, by personally funding the team via Turkish Telecom, Hariri caused the national basketball team to be labelled a Sunni Muslim team. [..] He is in the eyes of many Lebanese now the only "owner" of the national basketball team'.[76] Another example of the negative impact of sectarianism would be the four-year suspension of the Lebanese Basketball Federation in 2013 by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA). The reason for the suspension was that there had been a dispute between two Lebanese basketball clubs: Champville, which is backed by the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement, and Amchit, which is backed by president Michel Suleiman. Amchit sued Champville over the results of the teams' quarterfinal match. FIBA argued the lawsuit was politicized, and so the league was suspended. Because of this, the Lebanese basketball was suspended from attending the 2013 Asian championship and the 2014 World Cup.

As such, where there is some success for Lebanon in sports, this success has, until now, not contributed to feelings of national unity. Nonetheless, basketball does have the biggest potential (if sectarian interference can be avoided) for being the sport the Lebanese society at large can rally behind. However, we need to keep in mind that feelings of unity are of a "fleeting" nature and as such, to have a lasting impact, more structural changes in the Lebanese society are necessary.[77] Also, programs such as the Football for Peace projects, could – potentially and modestly – contribute to improving cross-community relations from the grass-roots, but no such projects have, so far, been implemented.[78]

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[76] Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting?": 273.
[77] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 815.
[78] For more on the discussion of the potential success of Football for Peace see: Sugden, "Teaching and Playing Sport": 237-238.

Conclusion

'Political reconciliation', as Höglund and Sundberg argue, 'nearly always takes places at the top level. Such reconciliation efforts entail the acknowledgement of past suffering and can be achieved through events such as public ceremonies of forgiveness, truth commissions, or judicial processes. An important step in a national reconciliation process is to move away from conflict identities to a more inclusive and bridging national identity'.[79] As has been argued in this essay, sport has not served to move towards an inclusive, national identity, but rather emphasizes conflict identities. As such, in general, the different sports have contributed to dividing the Lebanese society between 1990 and 2010, rather than unifying it. What needs to be acknowledged is that this is inherently connected with the broader socio-historical context of Lebanon. In general, reconciliation has not been at the fore ever since the civil war. Maintaining the status quo, which entailed the keeping in power of the existing sectarian groups and elites, has been a priority. As a part of this, the credo "don't mention the war" has been more important than acknowledgement of past suffering, or the seeking of truth.[80]

What this essay tried to do, was to move away from an "essentialist" view of sports. Whether sports can help bring people together or not depends on the specific context. In the case of Lebanon, sports have been instrumentalized by the different sectarian groups, which has resulted in an emphasis on division, rather than on unity. Ever since the civil war, voices have gone up to get rid of the system of confessionalism and move towards a system of secularism, but lack of trust between the different groups have only lead to more entrenchment.[81] Sports have a potential to unify the Lebanese people, but this largely depends on the question whether the society can move beyond confessionalism and towards secularism. At the same time, secularism cannot be achieved without a unified Lebanese people, because a majority in politics will be necessary to facilitate this change. This stale-mate (that comes close to the chicken-and-egg problem) then sparks the question what eventually can in fact end the division. Although this question is beyond the scope of this essay, it can be argued that Lebanon should - perhaps - start with facing its own history.

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[79] Höglund and Sundberg, "Reconciliation through Sports?": 807.
[80] Oren Barak, ""Don't Mention the War?" The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon", *The Middle East Journal* 61.1 (2007): 56.
[81] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the civil war": 384.

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