

Call for Papers: “Sports in the Middle East: The politics of inclusion and exclusion”

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut (AUB) is inviting proposals for papers to be presented at a workshop entitled “Sports in the Middle East: The politics of inclusion and exclusion” in August 2019. Prior to the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, the workshop and the book publication, which is subsequently planned based on the presented papers, aim to provide information and analysis on issues around belonging in the Middle East through the lens of sports.

We are inviting contributions from a variety of disciplines, such as political science, history, sociology, economics, business and law. Scholars who have developed a research agenda on sport, as well as researchers who have not yet worked on sports but want to apply their field of study (such as citizenship, ethnicity, nationalism, women studies, amongst others) to the world of sports, are welcome to submit an outline of their papers. The papers can utilize diverse research methodologies, ranging from ethnographic work, surveys and in-depth interviews to reviews of government files and the growing body of academic literature and media articles on sports in the Middle East.

Apart from the growing inequalities within Middle Eastern societies, sporting excellence can be, at least in theory, a tool for social mobility regardless of class, ethnicity, nationality and religion. However, there are severe barriers to adopting such a meritocratic approach in sports in the Middle East, which ought to be at the center of workshop contributions.

A possible topic could be, for example, the rise of private football academies as an effect of increased privatization and exclusivity in football. Academies in Lebanon charge a fee of \$100 per month - about 10% of the average monthly per-capita income in the country; rates like these are turning football into a sport exclusively for children from middle and upper-class families. The same applies to watching football on television: For many low-income people in the Arab world, watching competitions such as the UEFA Champions League has become non-affordable, after Pay-TV network BeIn SPORTS obtained a de-facto monopoly on broadcasting.

The majority of the population in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates is foreigners. While there are well-paid white-collar expats, the majority of immigrants are blue-collar workers who are often completely disconnected from society and live in camps away from the domestic population. In Western countries, sport has been used as a tool for the integration of migrant workers. In contrast, there is a kind of sporting

apartheid in Gulf countries, with migrant sporting leagues operating completely separately from the domestic sporting systems.

In addition, there are quotas for Palestinians in Lebanese sports (only one Palestinian is allowed on a Lebanese football team, for example), so Palestinians have formed their own leagues. Sports does not integrate Palestinians into Lebanon; instead, it manifests their discrimination and exclusion. In Syria, footballers who sympathize with the opposition are excluded from the national team, and the national men's football team is nearly comprised of players and coaches supporting the Assad regime. On the other hand, the ultras fan movement in Egypt has shown that football can also be a tool for societal change and collective action and not only as a means for the ruling classes to control the public.

In many countries in the Middle East, discrimination in participation is gender-based. Women had not competed for Qatar and Saudi Arabia prior to the 2012 Olympic Games, although Saudi Arabia had begun Olympic participation in 1972 and Qatar in 1984. On the 2016 Qatari Olympic team, 95% of the athletes were men. Iraq even sent a men's only team to the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Other papers might focus on the role of the diaspora. Some countries are making excessive use of their diaspora to increase their representation in international sports. Several countries these days are represented at the Olympic Games by athletes who have never lived in the country they represent nor speak the local language. Other countries such as Bahrain, Turkey and Qatar even naturalize athletes who have no ethnic connection to the country.

Besides looking at specific countries, case studies can also be conducted on individual clubs or athletes. Showing support for specific clubs has become an important arena for people's identity. For example, Palestinian-Jordanians support the al-Wihdat team in particular, while FC Faisaly has become a locus of East Bank Jordanian nationalism. Mohammed Salah, for example, an Egyptian player for Liverpool Football Club, received over one million votes during the 2018 Egyptian Presidential election though he was not even an official candidate.

Apart from domestic issues, workshop participants can also look at the external dimension of sports - for instance, how sport is used by some Middle Eastern nations as a tool for gaining international recognition. Palestine was recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1995 and has participated in the Summer Olympics since 1996; in 1998 it was recognized by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association). In contrast, the Iraqi Kurdistan national football team remains unrecognized by FIFA and can only play friendly matches, primarily against other unrecognized nations.

Guidelines for submitting papers

Proposals should be no longer than 400 words and structured in the following manner: Research question, literature review, methodology, and a minimum of three but no more than six academic references, using the Chicago reference style. Please send your abstracts to Dr. Danyel Reiche, dr09@aub.edu.lb, and Dr. Dina El Khawaga, de26@aub.edu.lb, no later than Friday, January 18, 2019. Selected presenters will be informed by early February 2019 and are expected to submit their 8,000-10,000-word paper by August 15, 2019. All participants are expected to read all papers prior to the workshop and comment on them. The final versions which will include feedback provided at the workshop should be submitted no later than October 31, 2019. An edited volume is expected to be published in 2020.

For selected presenters, lodging, meals and airfare are provided. The workshop will last two days, from Friday, August 30, 10:00 am to Saturday, August 31, 5:00 pm, and will be held at the Asfari Institute at AUB. Attendance is expected for the entire workshop.