

# **WHEN THE PRIVATE SPHERE IS HIDING FROM THE PUBLIC SPHERE: ISRAEL'S' DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE AND THE SPORT VIEWING EXPERIENCE**

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On May 13th, 2012 Israeli sports fans were deprived of one of the season's most important soccer tournaments, after the scheduling of both legs of UEFA Champion's League semi-final matches overlapped with national days of remembrance. A week before, Israel's sports channels refused to play the first leg of semi-final matches since one of the games coincided with Holocaust Remembrance Day. And, again, a week later, Israeli sports fans were confounded with the same issue, with Memorial Day coinciding with the soccer tournament's second leg of semi-final games. It is well known that sports spectatorship is a transformative experience through which fans escape their humdrum lives, just as religious experiences help the faithful to transcend their everyday existence. In an era where alternative channels (TV, Internet etc.) are easy to find, we used in-depth interviews with sports fans to learn more about the dilemma of both public and private media expressions and watching and enjoying soccer matches while the Israeli nation is in agony. Findings reveal a whole different viewing experience whereas instead of group watching, cheering and eating together rituals, on a regular match day, an unaccompanied, quiet and even embarrassing experience was marked.

**Key Words:** Television, Sport, Israel, Public sphere, Days of Remembrance

## Introduction

Beginning in 1995 and for nearly two decades now, Israel's Sports Channel has been bringing *The Champions' League Studio* to hundreds of thousands of television-viewing households. The programme, considered the channel's main anchor and flagship production, covers those football matches where Europe's top teams go head-to-head with one another, complete with a lustrous and star-studded packaging. Over the years, the programme became increasingly popular amongst football fans for whom watching it had become a sacred ritual<sup>1</sup>. As part of the ritual, the anchor hands over the broadcast from the studio on to the stadium where the match is being held, using the signature phrase, "Have a good one," which by now has practically earned itself 'cult status.' Naturally, fans' interest in The Champions' League matches and in watching them on television only grows, the closer the competition etches towards its final, decisive stages<sup>2</sup>. If one were to look at sport from a religious standpoint then the competition's decisive matches arguably stand for one of the most significant rituals within the sporting community.

The 2012 football season presented Israeli football fans with quite the challenging conundrum. Not one but two of Israel's single most important, non-religious dates of the year, namely the Eve of Holocaust Memorial Day and the following week, The Eve of the national memorial day for Israeli Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism, both coincided with The Champions' League two semifinal matches. The significance of these two memorial days within Israel is well anchored within both the education system and national consciousness, thus creating a climate where society is highly intolerant of its own members when those fail to abide by the norms and codes of behaviour customary on those two dates. Even though the two

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<sup>1</sup> Israel's *Champions League Studio* programme took home the 1997-98 award for Best Broadcast Network Coverage of The Champions' League. The award, given out by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) was handed to the Israeli channel out of 75 broadcast networks in the running that had been broadcasting The Champions' League matches in 200 countries worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Owing to the fact that *The Champions' League Studio* airs on a niche network, data collected has revealed exceptionally high ratings during the Final matches' airings. In 2006 for instance, at its peak, the Sports Channel brought in a whopping 26 percent ratings share during the broadcast of the Champions' League finale between Arsenal and Barcelona. In honour of the event, the programme's studio was set up on the beach and sure enough, went on to attract thousands of fans who had turned up, hoping to catch a glimpse of the channel's most familiar and beloved faces.

semifinals featured two extremely popular teams, i.e. England's Chelsea FC and Spain's Barcelona, Israeli football fans did not have live access to those matches on any of the local broadcast networks. Israeli law prohibits any form of "Public Entertainment" on those dates, consequently banning sport channels (as per their licencing agreements) from featuring any type of broadcast on the eve of either Memorial Day. From a place of wanting to honour the memory of the dead, the Sport Channel made a conscious decision not to broadcast the matches online either. As a result, Israeli football fans were left with only one alternative – watching the matches online using direct-viewing, streaming websites. Obtaining access to those football broadcasts involved some hands-on, precursory action and often, came at an actual financial cost<sup>3</sup>.

In other words, Israeli football fans were grappling with a genuine quandary, putting to the test their loyalties to both their football and national communities. On the one hand, civic religion codes stipulate that all citizens exercise some degree of self-restraint on those Memorial Days and partake in the overall mood of national melancholy. On the other hand, a bona fide sport fan would struggle to turn his or her back on a chance to see a high-profile match so pivotal, mainly from of a place of wanting to be part of this enthralling experience along with with all other members and followers of the sporting religion.

In order to wrap one's head around the difficult place that football fans found themselves in, caught in this proverbial tug of war between their two "religious communities" and also, in an attempt to outline the solutions that they had come up with for this internal conflict, twenty Israelis who are also self-proclaimed football fans that have admitted to having watched the matches on the two Memorial Days, were interviewed for the purposes of this study.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the websites where the matches were available for direct viewing demanded payment. Some had the prospective viewers contact the company's customer service department while others insisted certain media players and software be downloaded as a precondition for viewing. At any rate, not one of the viewers could argue that they simply "happened to come upon the match" and therefore, ended up watching it.

## **Theoretical Background**

Benedict Anderson's most substantial contribution to the study of Nationalism was perhaps in his having brought the discussion around nationalism as a phenomenon, into the realms of consciousness. In his book (1983,) Anderson argued that the modern nation state is an "imagined" political entity, residing in people's consciousness. According to Anderson, nationality is forged when a group of people bands together around several ideas or likeminded perceptions and notions, prompting them to act as a unitary group which shares a common goal, regardless of whatever the nature of the relationship between its members in reality, be. For at the end of the day, even in the smallest of modern countries, the majority of citizens may go through an entire lifetime never having known or met one another and yet, all the while, consciously and individually still perceive themselves as being part of a community (Anderson, 1983, 62-77).

Nationalism is a product of the elites having rallied the masses together, using education for instance. A noteworthy term within this context is 'civic religion,' which relates to those prevalent beliefs, customs, symbols and ceremonies amongst the citizens, tying them together with the nation state and thus, granting nationalism a form of religious-esque status (Bellah, 1964, 358-374.) In this particular context, Ernest Gellner (1994) also describes how nationalism is made up of joint characteristics and of those symbols and myths that are in fact, an extension and expression of modern nationalism. Each group and nationality has its own icons, symbols, rituals and myths, and those are the very things that form one's sense of belonging to one's country and political culture (Gellner, 1994, 65-72.)

In Israel, those same myths, beliefs and hallowed symbols shared by society as a whole, fall under the heading of "popular religion (Liebmann, 1977.) The popular religion is based on a number of elements, primarily traditional religion which comes with its own set of values and icons, e.g. the sanctity of the Sabbath, the Western Wall, etc. A second element can be found in secular religion whose notions of Zionism, Pioneering Settlement and "Sabraism" have nothing common with the would-be reality of a higher power. Finally, the third element is the civic religion. This religion is rather akin to the secular one, containing the system of national symbols and providing that sacred seal of approval for whatever social agenda the

country may be promoting at the time. The civic religion includes public holidays such as Independence Day and Memorial Days, in addition to sacred sites such as Mount Herzl and the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. The civic religion need not necessarily be secular as well, in spite of whatever affinity it may share with the secular religion for after all, some state ceremonies do in fact also feature religious references, usually in the form of reading out various passages from the scriptures. Liebmann is of the impression that since the Six-Day War, the younger generation has been increasingly doubting the meaning of the state and its symbols. The reasons for that tie into array of issues, from the country's geographical legitimacy within its new borders to the burden of mandatory military service, the financial tide that ensued on the heels of the war and with it, the advent of consumer culture and the capitalist market. One of consequences of these phenomena can be observed in the younger generations that have taken to trading public sphere symbols in favour of private ones. That is to say, religion has become increasingly private; a phenomenon that is too, related to global trends of modernisation and technological developments (Liebmann, 1977, 95-107.)

Upon the founding of Israel, the need for a Memorial Day that would honour the nation's fallen immediately presented itself. As David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister saw it, Memorial Day was to be a day of national mourning where the bereaved families' mourning was to be "nationalised" if you will by the whole country, operating as one extended family unit grieving its own (Azriahu, 1995, 13). Memorial Day services, entrusted into the hands of the education system, were already in place during the days of the Yishuv<sup>4</sup> and had sought to establish a new national tradition. The ceremonies were devised with the notion of banding the country together and creating a sense of camaraderie and shared destiny in mind, whilst also maintaining and nurturing one's affinity for both land and motherland (Lumsky-Fedder, 2003, 354.)

Be'eri-Yaacobi's 2002 study in search of changes Israeli civic religion has undergone since the founding of the nation (echoed in media coverage during Memorial Days and Independence Day,) has in fact revealed the presence of many.

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<sup>4</sup> The umbrella term coined for the body of Jewish residents who had been living in Palestine prior to the establishing of Israel.

The study identified a transitioning from a mode of collectivism into individualism, highlighted for instance in a shift from mass Independence Day celebrations towards more private, toned-down affairs. Also evident was a considerable drop in one's willingness to carry the burden of collective tasks at hand. Moreover, it appears that there has been a decline in the country's status on several fronts; from a discernible drop in the status of Independence Day alongside mounting criticism of the state, to a decline in the status of the country's most fundamental, incepting myths – namely the IDF and the resurrection of the Jewish people in their own land – and all in concurrence with a rise in media's active challenging of those very myths (Be'eri-Yaacobi, 2002, 2-5.)

Similarly, David Gourevic (1997) describes Israel as a mix of an ideological society on the one hand with a society that is growing increasingly ironic and cynical towards its own incepting myths, on the other. Gourevic identifies a mode of conceptual and practical pluralism that has emerged; one that does not strive towards integration within education and the collective identity, and is also driven by privatisation trends. The multitude of both global and local means of communication, coupled with how easily accessible they are to the general public, have created a climate where wide-ranging discourses were now possible, along with multiple modes of expression for a variety of audiences and cultures (Gourevic, 1997, 14-33.)

For many years, the Israeli public has expressed its implied consent and acknowledgement of the importance of Memorial Days, aligning themselves accordingly with the rules stipulated by them. The dead's honour and the memory of those lost were to be preserved. Television and radio programmes were adjusted to fit the "mandatory" atmosphere with the public sphere as a whole, effectively shutting down.

These facts tie into how during Israel's first few years, two main avenues of coming to terms with the casualties of war had emerged. The first being a glorification of death *and* of the dead, and the second, promoting the act of collectivising and nationalising death. Since the 1973 Yom Kipur War, those two avenues have been subject to steady and intense scrutiny and deconstruction in both public and private spheres (Naveh, 2000, 56-57.) Meanwhile, Israeli society has also been experiencing a shift away from collectivist norms, most evident in the

prioritising of hedonistic values and the individual over the state. One of the most prominent conduits to echo this process is television which entered our lives towards the end of the 1960s, and which created amongst Israelis a sense of indifference and of lacking influence which in turn, empowered one's sense of individualism (Liebes, 1999, 96.)

Meanwhile, in concurrence with the above-stated, a similar trend has been taking root in the world of sport. Over the years, one has borne witness to a transition process from seeing the match at the actual stadium, to watching it on television. The small screen, an entertainment vehicle of the highest order, has become one of the single-most influential factors on one's perception of sport and how it is consumed (Galily, 1998, 399-402.) The development of the complex relationship between television and sport over the last few decades is intertwined with two primary trends: the first being the shift in the coverage of sport; a trade that has gone from being a mere hobby into an actual profession and a commercialised one at that, while the second relates to television's recognising of sport as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to bringing in the large audiences a turning a solid profit in the process (Weingarten, 2003, 42-48.) Already in Ancient Roman times, sport was viewed as an instrument of mass entertainment; "bread and circuses" if you will. This view of sport only grew stronger and more solid with time, and along with the economical-media factor, has now become the most prevalent driving force behind popular sport on all its various fields (Galily, Leedor & Ben Porat, 12; 27).

One of the reasons provided as a way of accounting for sport's unprecedented popularity refers to how it allegedly acts as a platform by which one might escape reality. Sport allows people to break away from their overbearing, day-to-day lives and into a world ripe with relief (Pearson, 1986). Television in fact appeals to billions of people who would not have made it into the stadium anyway, offering them the chance to be at the very heart of the main sporting events as they unfold. This is how television has turned sport into a first-rate entertainment event; a fact which ties in directly with the large scale involvement of those advertisers, sponsoring the sporting events. In order to feed the masses' hunger, television plays to its strengths, utilising its advantages (e.g. camera angles, commentary, statistics and the propensity to dramatise events even when there was no actual drama to be had) towards offering viewers a comprehensive and wholesome viewing experience (Galily, 1996, 88-90.)

During the 1990s, the landscape of Israeli media was rapidly changing whilst the migration towards and into the small screen was steadily growing stronger, particularly upon the arrival of new broadcast networks which marked the dawning of the age of multi-channel television. Accordingly, the Israeli viewer became the happy recipient of a great many broadcast experiences which extended well into the realm of sport as well. The newly launched Sport Channel took the broadcasting of English Premier League and Champions' League football matches, turning them into an outright institution. The wide range of available programming, both on domestic and foreign channels, turned the Israeli viewer from your run-of-the-mill sport fan into a bona fide, worldwide sport savant. Watching sport effectively became a defining experience in modern society, particularly in Israel. Groundbreaking technological advances turned the experience of sport-watching into the equivalent of an all-out entertainment extravaganza, complete with multiple cameras and ever-present slow-motion repeats; all of which kept the viewer safely glued to the small screen, certainly when internationally popular sporting fields were involved. (Galily, 2002, 389-393.)

Of those various popular sporting fields, one of the most prominent ones has to be Football's Champions' League which brings together Europe's finest *and* richest clubs – a competition that was the brain child of a journalist with French daily paper, *L'Équipe*, who had come up with the idea of organising a competition between football clubs from all over Europe. With time, the tournament became the largest and most influential football arena in the world. The biggest change in its status arguably took place when television came into the picture and helped the competition's popularity take root practically everywhere, bringing in worldwide audiences and essentially changing the tournament's structure by adding additional matches. As far as Israeli fans were concerned, two major changes occurred as the result of these emergent European football competitions. The first meant that Israeli teams were now eligible to partake in those European competitions, consequently elevating one's sense of belonging to the world of international football (incidentally, at the expense of one's affinity towards one's own national football team.) Moreover, the viewer was given a "premium," Grade A product in the form of *The Champions' League Studio* and of course quality European football, without ever having to leave the house.

When the multichannel revolution first began sweeping through the nation, viewership of foreign league matches was rather modest. However, it was not long before Israeli viewers became only too happy to embrace and take on the new viewing habits and opportunities now at their disposal. And indeed, in a number of surveys conducted, over 90% of the subjects confirmed that they were regular viewers of foreign league matches while over 50% reported that they were in fact, supporters of some foreign team or another (Ben Porat, 2007.)

## **Methodology**

This current study sets out to explore one's viewing considerations and as a whole, the entire viewing experience amongst Israeli fans who in 2012, on the eve of both Holocaust Memorial Day and Israeli Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Memorial Day, opted to watch the Champions' League semifinals after all. The two matches which brought together two European football teams, England's Chelsea FC and Spain's Barcelona FC, were not shown on their local, designated television channel where they would otherwise be broadcast, nor were they available on the Israeli Sport Channel's website. Therefore, viewers who wished to watch the match had no other choice but to turn to other online outlets.

At the very heart of this study is an underlying assumption positing that watching the football during national Memorial Days is considered a deviation from standard Israeli norms and codes of behaviour that are customary on those dates. Watching football matches, an act perceived as being escapist and as a means of breaking away from reality, does not bode with the same values that lie at the heart of Memorial Days which stand for national-civilian grief and bereavement. The most prevalent opinion, as presented in the theory chapter argues that popular sport's essence in the 20<sup>th</sup> (and 21<sup>st</sup>) century is sheer commercial, televised entertainment. For that reason, a clash of such public magnitude between two of Israeli society's most consecrated dates and a world of content that thrives on escapism, entertainment, and the letting off of steam, might in fact be extremely charged in nature; compromising social solidarity values and offending bereaved families. Moreover, from an individual standpoint, that Israeli who would opt out of meeting social expectations

and seek out alternative means by which they might watch those decisive football matches might experience internal dissonance and discomfort. The competition's semifinal matches are of the utmost importance to the football fans and therefore, one might claim that this tug of war between the two "religions" is taking place at what is arguably the height of either one's essence.

For the purposes of this study, twenty Israelis of different backgrounds who had watched the matches on the eve of both national Memorial Days were interviewed. The subjects were chosen randomly and were asked about their decision to watch the broadcast after all. Additionally, they were also asked about their feelings and opinions on the subject, whether there had been any kind of preparation towards the match, and also regarding the viewing experience itself and its aftermath. The interview followed a semi-structured template, with the subjects interviewed in the course of the fortnight that followed the matches' original airdates.

## **Findings**

### **"Make an Appearance at the Square and then Catch the Match" – The Decision to Watch the Match**

The first issue up for discussion was that of Memorial Days and the meaning they held. All subjects described the two Memorial Days as being very sad days indeed, of individual and national significance alike. That said, the football fans did highlight the latter, i.e. the soldiers' and terror victims' Memorial Day as an event of exceptional significance. The fact that all Israeli citizens are mandated by law to enlist in the military has made military service into a cornerstone of Israeli identity. "I identify with the values for which those boys gave their lives on a personal level as well because they remind me of my own difficult experiences in the army" (subject #1). "Nowadays, the meaning of that day after you've done your service runs a lot deeper...during the service, after seeing and doing some things I've done, Memorial Day has taken a whole new twist. No doubt this is the saddest and most hallowed day on the Israeli calendar (subject #2.) At the same time however, not one of the subjects attempted to underplay or challenge the significance of Holocaust Memorial Day.

"However way you spin it, it's a difficult day. You can't very well be oblivious to it now can you? Every thought you have or word that comes out of your mouth, you've got to stop and think whether they are appropriate for a day of this nature" (subject #15.) It therefore emerges that the clash between the national sanctity of memory and the sanctity of the sporting ritual is in fact a major one. All subjects expressed clearly and explicitly the difficulty brought on by the reality of the date-clash.

"I was swearing, crying, you name it, 'cause I love watching the football and here it lands on a day when I'm told I can't watch the match as I was looking forward to. I was really upset."

"It's not going to be simple. Watching the game and next door, you've got people in tears."

"I thought it sucked, how the dates turned out like that, and on the semifinals no less. Usually you watch it with the lads; it's an experience, there's this feeling of joy and festivity that now, you have to hide."

Having said that, it was painstakingly obvious to all subjects interviewed, immediately upon the announcement of the dates that they would in fact watch the match. In order to conquer the conflict created, two primary techniques were employed by the football plans in order to allow the sporting sphere to prevail over national sentiment. Through the glorifying of the sporting event on the one hand, and calling heightened attention to the personal facets of memory on the other, the fans were able to put their consciences to rest and minimise the conflict at hand.

### **Glorifying the Event**

Of all top European football clubs, Spain's Barcelona and England's Chelsea are considered exceptionally revered amongst fans worldwide. Therefore naturally, any occasion which brings the two sides together will attract a considerable amount of interest. Nevertheless, during the interviews, the impression was that Israeli football fans were inclined to over-dramatise the significance of this match, going as far as endowing it with historical or mythical importance, so as to account for why they

would be willing to "desecrate" this holiest of national days for the sake of a football match.

"It's a game you simply must watch. How often in your life do you get a chance to see teams like that go up against one another?"

"It's a 'must'. We're talking 90 minutes of pure suspense; one of the better matches you'll ever watch. Obviously, what sealed the deal for me was the suspense and the implications of the match's turnout...otherwise I would have given it a miss."

"I wouldn't have lost it like this over any another match...this match is a must-see. Historical"

"It's a once in a lifetime match...we're talking the semifinals...there's a hell of a lot at stake here"

"As far as I'm concerned, this game is a historical occasion. I want to know what goes on during."

"The Champions' League is a super important competition...any other match won't have held the least bit of significance for me...I was expecting a match that would be the height of aesthetics."

"This one's a special match. A very interesting one. A lot is going to be decided and there will be drama. And that played a role in my decision to watch it."

Although the competition's final match was not mentioned, and despite the fact that these two teams *have* gone up against each other several times before, the subjects made a point of reiterating how much was at stake in this match in addition to calling repeated attention to its alleged historical significance. In doing so, those fans effectively legitimised their choice to turn their backs on standard National Memorial Day norms and practices.

## **Calling Heightened Attention to the Personal Aspect of Memory**

In concurrence with glorifying the match between the two sides, it appeared that some Israeli football fans wished to make it abundantly clear that the reason why they chose not to follow Memorial Day rules as dictated by state and society was on account of their ability to contain and carry the memory of the fallen in a more personal manner; one that is removed from all the mass, national-scale traditional codes and rules.

"Memory is a personal, not public matter."

"This is a consensus-fuelled day. One cannot go overboard with enforcement (of all that is prohibited) because then all that does is just turn the memorialising into something forced. If I pause to remember someone, then I want it to be of my own accord. I don't need to be told by anyone on the outside whether I'm sad or not."

"I have no doubt that this is the saddest, most consecrated day on the Israeli calendar. I have decided I shall be the one to decide how I behave. For instance, I make a point of driving around on Memorial Day, playing maudlin songs in my car."

"I have my ways of remembering. I think about those who never made it to my age. In our country, especially over the past year, you don't really need ceremonies in order to immerse yourself in the sadness...all it takes is one or two films and I'm already in the thick of it all."

What is particularly interesting is that not one of the subjects actually challenged the concept of Memorial Day, nor its timing, calendar-wise. That is to say, the subjects interviewed did indeed accept the fundamental concept of collective, national-scale Memorial Days. Therefore, it would appear that the statements made with regards to the personal aspect of memory ought to be judged and weighed up against reality. With that in mind, one might assume that to a certain extent, those sentiments can be used as a means of reconciling the internal conflict experienced by the football fans. Moreover, some of those fans did see it fit to highlight the

importance of national unity during Memorial Days, though mainly to the younger generation. They themselves, as stated, are capable of grappling with the memory and whatever difficult aspects come with the territory of this day. In other words, the divide between "Self" and "Other" it would seem, was in fact used as a means of justifying the fans' pro-football decision.

"There's no added value in it for me but it is important on a national level for the younger generation. Making sure they grow up with this feeling of shared memory."

"I have the utmost respect for this day. Completely understand its importance...but it is a day that is easy enough to remember...I don't relate to all the ceremonies that can be quite hypocritical at times."

### **"20,000 People Died and I'm Stuck with a Tunisian Anchorman" – Watching the Matches**

Despite having decided to watch the match in the end, the variety of Memorial Day events remained ever-present on the football fans' minds. Their presence in the air may have been preempted by an hour or so, however; their echoes were anything but unheard in the fans' viewing experience and the emotions that accompanied it.

Gantz, Wang, Paul & Potter's 2006 study identified several unique characteristics that make up the television sports-viewing experience. For instance, the scholars found that unlike with other TV genres, sports-viewing is predominantly a social experience which includes social get-togethers, multiple discourses and overt displays of emotions. The element of food and alcohol too, has become synonymous with sports-viewing; an engrained part of the experience.

This current study has found that while they had decided to watch the semifinals, the looming presence of the two Memorial Days did in fact have a direct and rather substantial influence on the Israeli football fans' viewing habits and practices. Nearly all of them had put into effect a series of self-imposed limitations and restrictions, undertaking to watch the matches in a far more reserved and subdued manner. Some hid the fact that they were watching whereas others took on a far more

forgiving approach when it came to a variety of technical difficulties with the broadcasts.

### **Self-imposed Restrictions – "I Decided I Wasn't Even Going to Swear"**

While sports-viewing is commonly associated with heightened, public displays of emotion as well as social camaraderie, Israeli viewers who made the decision to watch the Memorial Day matches, chose to curb their enthusiasm and curtail their behaviour. They were all watching the match on their own with not one of them even contemplating inviting their friends and usual "partners in crime" over to their homes for the event. Furthermore, the majority of them had also imposed a series of additional limitations onto themselves concerning the actual viewing and the atmosphere surrounding it. For instance, without exception, all subjects gave up the traditional food and drinks that are usually part and parcel of every football match. Subjects described how they would contain their enthusiasm and refrain from communicating with their friends whilst the match was underway. Some of the viewers would turn the volume down. Some used headphones while others would close their room doors so as to avoid compromising the public sphere.

"It is Memorial Day after all. I don't think that on a day like today it's appropriate to get together with the lads over some beers...I for one, did not feel right about watching the match with the sound on, so I watched it with the volume muted."

"During games I usually get very excited and vocal. This game though, there was none of that...I put the speakers on 'weak' mode and decided there wasn't even going to be any swearing."

"I was watching the matches with my headphones on; heaven forbid that they should disturb the neighbours. It's showing minimal respect. I wouldn't dream of going somewhere public or having people round. Having a get-together would be inappropriate."

"I wasn't going 'Yeah!!!' at the top of my lungs, nor was I texting my mates. At most, I'd grab my head but that's about it. I wasn't celebrating because I did not wish to offend...was wearing headphones...felt odd cracking open a beer on a day like that..."

"The truth is I wasn't even nibbling on anything. It's Memorial Day Eve. I made sure my room door was shut...didn't turn the volume up...the quiet during these days is paramount and essential."

"I usually go bat-shit happy when someone scores a goal, jumping for joy, the works. This time though, I was not watching it over at friends'. There was no swearing. I felt it would be taking it too far."

"I was watching the match, whilst standing on ceremony, complete with the mandatory, self-flagellating darkness and silence."

The decision to go against civic religion rules and etiquette and watch the matches after all did not entirely resolve the conflict the football fans were grappling with. An unrelenting sense of unease which one might interpret as guilt, accompanied the viewers throughout the entire course of the matches, leading them in turn to opt for those self-imposed restrictions and limitations, designed to make them feel that choosing to watch the football does not in fact undermine the sanctity of Memorial Day. That many of the subjects chose to mention of their own volition, the fact that they had consciously refrained from swearing whilst watching the matches is a prime example of just that. Sport offers its fans an escape route from one's routine and is thus consequently seen by others as sphere where emotional and psychological release is both allowed and enabled. It is a sphere which legitimises alternative modes of behaviour, namely vulgar ones which stand in contrast to one's conformist, normative behaviour (Pearson, 1986.) Refraining from profanities whilst watching the football during Memorial Days, in fact epitomises Israeli football fans' connection with reality, or rather, their difficulties escaping it.

### **Watching in Secret**

Some Israeli football fans felt especially ill-at-ease confessing that they had actually watched the Memorial Day matches. Memorial Days in Israel carry quite the heavy load, mainly on account of the Jewish people's unique history and Israel's current volatile security climate. More than once has the local media taken to criticise those who turn a blind eye to the sanctity of the memory and choose to ignore for instance, the Memorial sirens that are traditionally sounded on either day. On account of that, a degree of unease was discernible amongst Israeli football fans, lest they be

seen as desecrators of the national sanctity of memory. Those fans who had watched the football matches did not tell their friends about it, with some even keeping their decision to challenge traditional Memorial Day norms from their families.

"I told no one I was planning to watch the match. Only a week later, while I was chatting to some mates did they realise it wasn't the repeat I had watched, but the live broadcast."

"I didn't want any of my friends in the know. Look, it's a touchy subject. Didn't want to harp on too much about it. Who knows what the others might think."

"If you *are* going to do it, at least do it quietly and on a small scale. I sat alone in my room with my computer and told no one. Not even the people at home. They would only be offended. It wasn't on."

"I wasn't chatting or texting anyone. I think my mother knew but we did not talk about it. Certainly not with the rest of the family."

At its core, sport fandom means aligning oneself with a group (Ben Porat, 2007.) Sport fans fancy themselves part of a broader community and are thus frequently inclined to share their emotions and experiences whilst watching the matches with other members of their own group (Gantz, Wang, Paul & Potter, 2006.) To a great extent, the fans' desire to watch the matches live (as opposed to delayed viewing) is an overt expression of their sense of commitment to their own community. In this particular instance, the effect that the national experience has had on the sporting one is beyond evident. Sport fans' dual loyalties led them in turn to hide their actions and watch the match in secret; a stark contrast to the classic sport-broadcast viewing experience.

### **Lack of Criticism**

Yet another unique aspect of Memorial Day football watching, as it emerged in this study, was the lack of complaints or criticism on the fans' behalf. The relative simplicity of many sporting fields is considered by many to be one of sport's biggest draws, seeing as how it allows fans to fancy themselves experts, and if only for a few hours (Craig & Beedie, 2012.) One's sense of expertise, combined with the engrained

emotional aspect of sport fandom, often leads to harsh fan criticism of the team, the coach, the referee or the even the broadcast itself (Gantz, Wang, Paul & Potter, 2006.)

As part of underplaying the sport-viewing experience under the national circumstances at hand, football fans seemed to take on a far more lenient and tolerant approach towards any disturbances or glitches during the matches' broadcasts.

"I was watching the matches online. The quality was shit but I wasn't bothered. When you weigh up 20,000 dead soldiers against me being stuck with a Tunisian anchorman, then I really haven't got a leg to stand on."

"The broadcast was awful but it is what it is...it kept dropping during the match and I had to look for other sites. But it was all good. No big deal."

"I wasn't that bothered with viewing conditions being less than optimal, to put it mildly. I only wanted to see the match. I wasn't about to bend over backwards, trying to find alternatives."

"The broadcast kept freezing up all the time. It was annoying but I put up with it. I don't feel as though I'd been terribly wronged or something because after all, there is no normal television on, on Memorial Days so I'm counting my blessings that I *was* able to watch what I wanted to."

### **"It's Important to me to Feel Sad on Memorial Day" – The Aftermath of the Matches**

When subjects were asked to describe their emotions after watching the matches, the need to reconnect with the melancholy mood of bereavement and remembrance was particularly resonant. Sport fans sought to rejoin their national community almost immediately and in some instances, at the expense of underplaying the sporting event for which they had just broken their own civic religion's rules.

"Dunno...after the match, I took things down a few notches again...didn't take me very long to re-immense myself in it all. Even half a song will do the trick. It's important to me to feel sad on Memorial Day...end of the day, it's only sport, isn't it?"

"The truth is the match finished late and there you were, back in Memorial Day mode, 'cause of the overall atmosphere and the media. No doubt about it."

"After the match I went to bed...switched back into Memorial Day mode atmosphere and hardly gave the match a second thought."

"It hit me like a juggernaut, this day. Suddenly it dawned it me, everything around me. I became despondent. Even though I was still watching the match only one hour ago. It is Memorial Day after all."

One can therefore establish how from the moment the sporting religion stepped off centre stage, members of the community quickly rejoined the national ranks, reassuming rather instantly all the customary, collective norms and rules, i.e. playing sad music, watching Memorial Day-themed films, and so forth.

## **Discussion**

Memorial Days have long since held hallowed status amongst the Israeli public, seeing as how they stand for the necessity and importance of the Jewish state's very existence. For that reason, it is of little coincidence that both Memorial Days were scheduled in such close proximity to the country's Independence Day (Holocaust Memorial Day being one week apart and Memorial Day for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism, a mere day earlier.) Israeli law stipulates that during either Memorial Day, no form of "Public Entertainment" is to take place, with television and other media outlets having to adjust their programming accordingly. The licences issued to both cable and satellite broadcasters in the country (the platform for all local sport channels) also dictate that there is to be no programming during Memorial Days. "The proprietor of the licence is to run the channel as per the licence's stipulated conditions, regularly and steadily throughout the full duration of the licence's period, on all days of the year, excluding Yom Kipur, Holocaust Memorial Day and Memorial Day for IDF Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism (Clause 20.1, taken from The Cable TV and Satellite Broadcasting Council's issued licence.) Public television programming too must be revised in accordance with Memorial Days. "The owner of the franchise is to revise their programming on national mourning and Memorial Days, guaranteeing that it be in compliance with the traditional spirit of those days (taken from Israeli commercial television's franchise conditions.) Inevitably, as a

result of the paramount significance and meaning given to those days, Israeli society tends to be intolerant of those in its midst who have desecrated the sanctity of memory and have broken the customary rules and codes of behaviour.

Then, on the other hand, football fandom is too, a tie that binds, with members of the community expected to show a level of commitment to the team's values and important dates. Therefore, the clash between Israeli and European football calendars as it came to pass in the spring of 2012, created a profound conflict in terms of identity for Israeli football fans.

The power of sport has yet again been illustrated in this study; even in the face of hallowed national sentiment that is so profoundly prevalent in Israeli consciousness and society. That said, under no circumstances could one describe the tug of war between the sporting religion and the national religion in absolutist 'winners' and 'losers' terms. While opting to watch the football did in fact break traditional Memorial Day norms, one cannot ignore the influence that the rules and overall national atmosphere of the two Memorial Days did in fact have on the viewing experience.

This dual communal sense of belonging was put to the test on two events of high magnitude, and it appears that sport fans were successful in coming up with some form of middle ground. A very large chunk of Israeli football fans were unwilling to waive the sporting ritual, despite the sacred public days ahead and the inevitable logistical difficulty of finding an alternative outlet where the matches were available, live. That said, the actual viewing experience emerged as being altogether different when weighed up against the standard experience one has come to expect when traditionally watching sporting events. The civic religion was never truly banished from the sporting sphere; even when the football fans did decide to prioritise the latter over the former. To some extent, the civic religion ended up delimiting, disciplining and constricting the sporting experience.

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