

# Egyptian Soccer in the el-Sisi era: A Political Double-Edged Sword

**Ofir Winter and Ezzat Hamed**

The Egyptian soccer team qualified for the World Cup in 2018 for the first time since 1990, and for the third time in its history. The man who led Egypt to this prestigious position is the talented forward Mohamed Salah, a 26 year-old player for the Liverpool team in England. The team's participation in the tournament in Russia, as well as Salah's personal achievements, has aroused huge waves of social and political interest far beyond the boundaries of sport. The reaction of the Egyptian regime was ambivalent: on the one hand, the enormous support for the national team and Salah was used by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as a lever to boost his internal position, and was exploited by his regime to launch an international campaign marketing Egypt as a destination for tourism and investment; on the other hand, the massive crowds assembling in public spaces, the launch of Salah as a hero of popular culture, and finally, the professional and management failure of the team in Russia have all presented the regime with challenges.

## **Historical Background: Soccer and Politics in Egypt**

Soccer is considered the most popular sport in modern Egypt, but its political role has fluctuated under different leaders and in various periods. While Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar el-Sadat did not generally frequent soccer stadiums, President Husni Mubarak managed to leverage the game's popularity in order to seem closer to the masses and deflect their attention away from their daily troubles. Mubarak and his sons, Alaa and Gamal, publicly attended important matches of the national team and of local teams, encouraged the establishment of soccer clubs representing army units and government ministries, and were occasionally photographed with

Dr. Ofir Winter is a research fellow at INSS. Ezzat Hamed is an Egyptian researcher.

local soccer stars. During Mubarak's presidency, Egypt hosted the National Africa Cup twice. In 1986 the President watched Egypt beat Cameroon in the final, where he presented the cup to the captain, Mustafa Abdu, and awarded medals to the players and professional staff. He was present again in the VIP box in 2006 when Egypt beat Ivory Coast in the final. A stamp issued to mark the occasion shows the President brandishing the cup as the crowds cheer, leaving no room for doubt about who was the star (figure 1).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1.** First day issue to mark Egypt's victory in the Africa National Cup, February 10, 2006

Egypt's loss to Algeria in the 2010 World Cup playoff led to exchanges of media blows between the two countries and a diplomatic crisis that culminated in the recall of ambassadors. The President, and in particular his son Alaa, whipped up the crisis and used it as a platform to strengthen their public status.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, in the final year of the Mubarak presidency, and even more so during the January 2011 revolution that led to his removal from office, the dual nature of the game as a political double-edged sword took shape: a device for uniting the people around the regime, and a platform where opposition forces can come together. In 2007, "ultra" fan groups of the two leading clubs in Cairo, al-Ahly and Zamalek, were established. Belonging to the ultras gave their members, mostly aged 16-25, a sense of pride, comradeship, and loyalty, which compensated for their feelings of alienation and anger against the state and its institutions. Although the ultras defined themselves as apolitical, they used the spectator stands as a stage for protests on subjects with a political hue, found themselves in

violent clashes with the Egyptian security forces, and were sometimes arrested.<sup>3</sup> In those days the stadium was almost the only arena where citizens could legitimately assemble, glorify national heroes other than the President, and chant critical slogans against the authorities.<sup>4</sup>

Until the revolution of January 25, 2011, the regime paid little attention to the threat from the soccer fans, and saw their activities as a means of letting off steam. However, during the revolution, the ultras proved to be daring and challenging political players. In retrospect it emerged that the fans' violent clashes with the security forces on the field had trained them to act as the spearhead in Tahrir Square, where they used their bodies to protect the revolutionaries in the "battle of the camels," an incident where regime mercenaries tried to disperse demonstrators. Their experience made them the only organized force that was able to act with coordination, cope with tear gas attacks, identify impersonators, withdraw and regroup, and deal with torture at the police stations.

In general, the ultras did not act out of cohesive ideology, but rather out of anti-establishment awareness based on the sense that "my enemy's enemy is my friend," plus age-based identification with a younger generation trying to shake off the sociopolitical order that was dominated by the older generation and its patriarchal rule. They were also a source of inspiration for opposition organizations such as "April 6" and "Kefaya," as they showed how young people could take to the streets, stand up to the security forces, and undermine the establishment's monopoly of the public space. Their presence in Tahrir Square played an important – and some have even claimed decisive – role in the ability of the demonstrators to maintain their resolve and continue waving the revolutionary flag until the President resigned.<sup>5</sup>

### **Soccer in Post-Revolutionary Egypt: From the League's Suspension to the Failure in the World Cup**

The revolution of January 25, 2011 was a milestone in the relations between the soccer fans and the regime. The role played by the ultras in Tahrir Square helped them accumulate enough confidence to "break through the barrier of fear," spurred them to become more involved in political matters, and strengthened their resolve to stand up to the security forces. At the same time, it demonstrated to the Egyptian authorities that the soccer "coin" had a second, negative side.<sup>6</sup> After the revolution, the fans continued to struggle against anyone they saw as a remnant of the old, corrupt regime, from officials of the Egyptian Soccer Association to the

Supreme Military Council of the Armed Forces. In a fight that erupted in November 2011 between the fans and the security forces close to the offices of the Ministry of the Interior in Mohammed Mahmoud Street in Cairo, 40 people were killed and some 1,000 wounded. The Association undertook to deal severely with the rioters, who for their part warned against trying to limit their freedom in stadiums.<sup>7</sup>

The Port Said massacre on February 1, 2012, in which 74 al-Ahly fans were killed, dealt a blow to soccer in Egypt from which – more than six years later – it has not yet recovered. The stand of the security forces with respect to the deadly trap set by Masri fans for al-Ahly fans was perceived by many as revenge for the ultras' support of the revolution against Mubarak. The timing, the eve of the first anniversary of the "battle of the camels," was deemed symbolic.<sup>8</sup> Following the bloody events, League activity was suspended for a year, and then renewed without spectators. Al-Ahly fans were furious at the refusal of General Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, then head of the Military Council, to recognize any responsibility for the massacre in Port Said. The legal proceedings against the accused were perceived more as an attempted whitewash than an unbiased effort to explore the truth.<sup>9</sup>

President Mohamed Morsi, who was elected in June 2012, maintained the restrictions at the soccer fields. His policy angered the ultras and led most of them to support the June 2013 revolution. However, they soon realized that the new government was also afraid of soccer stadiums becoming an arena for political protest and preferred to keep them closed to the public, while tightening the bans on public assembly in general.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the el-Sisi presidency the status quo in soccer stadiums has remained fairly stable, while from time to time the government reconsiders the restrictions on public assembly. An attempt to soften the restrictions in January 2015 ended in a bloodbath of twenty Zamalek supporters. Regulations issued in February 2018 permitted 300 fans to attend League games, although the actual numbers were higher.<sup>11</sup>

The official explanation for the restrictions was and remains the security threat, but behind it lies a political fear of anti-establishment gatherings led by the ultras. It was not by chance that in May 2015 the Court outlawed the ultra groups, defining them as terror organizations and their members as terrorists. In May 2018 the al-Ahly ultras announced they were dismantling, closed their Facebook group, and undertook not to separate themselves from the other spectators. The announcement following the arrest of some

of their members showed their willingness to lower the profile of their activity in return for an easing of government pressure.<sup>12</sup>

It is hard to ignore the irony in the fact that the Egyptian national team managed to reach the World Cup for the first time since 1990, precisely during a period when the Egyptian League has been somewhat paralyzed, operating without spectators, and the ultras of the top Egyptian clubs are persecuted and kept away from the stands. Soccer – which was kicked out the back door of the Egyptian public space – returned through the front door, onto the most prestigious international stage.

The historic match that took Egypt to the World Cup on October 8, 2017, when it hosted the Congo team, was not just a sporting event. The spontaneous celebrations that broke out in Tahrir Square after the dramatic victory, which was achieved with a goal in extra time, became a founding social-political moment. At the last moment, after many misgivings, President el-Sisi decided not to attend the game in Alexandria, possibly for fear of the public reaction to his presence. His absence from the stadium did not prevent the pro-establishment media from claiming the victory for the regime and directly attributing it to the President.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, as the event was described by the Egyptian journalist Khaled Youssef, achieving entry to the World Cup was experienced by many citizens as a rare moment of unity for a brutally divided and exhausted society that has difficulty in joining together around positive collective memories. For him, this was the moment when “the list of what was permitted was longer than what was banned,” above all the permission to gather in the city center for the first time since the June 2013 revolution. In an article published in the magazine *Maraya*, Youssef explains: “Egypt’s ascent to the World Cup was a symbolic event, not only because it happened for the first time in 28 years, but also because it occurred in the broader context of stifling public life and absolute control over it, a context that created a link between the January revolution and the phenomena of suffering and anarchy, and between soccer and the sights of tragedies and blood.”<sup>14</sup>

The ultimate defeat of the Egyptian team at the World Cup after losing three matches also demonstrated how the political role of soccer in Egypt is unstable and changeable. Before the team players left for Russia, the President arranged a festive reception for them in his office, but on their return there was no official welcome. The establishment media focused on the failure of the foreign professional staff to prepare the team and on the need for an inquiry to examine claims of corruption and flaws in the

conduct of the Soccer Association before and during the tournament.<sup>15</sup> Activists on social media also pointed an accusing finger at President el-Sisi as the person at the top of the pyramid.<sup>16</sup> As a publicist on *al-Ahram* summed up the World Cup experience, “the dream became a nightmare.”<sup>17</sup>

### The Mohamed Salah Phenomenon: The Political Angle

The person responsible for the greatest achievement of Egyptian soccer in 28 years – and who even scored the winning goal in the 94th minute of the World Cup qualifying match – is Mohamed Salah. For the last few seasons this rising Egyptian star has played in Chelsea, Fiorentina, Rome, and Liverpool and became a sports icon of global stature such as Egypt has never known. He was crowned Soccer Player of the Year in Africa for 2017, and in the 2017-2018 season won the Golden Shoe award of the English Premier League (with an all-time record of 32 goals) and was mentioned as a candidate for the European 2018 Golden Ball award. His injury in the final of the Championship League between Liverpool and Real Madrid, which prevented him from playing in the first World Cup match, won him a personal telephone call from the President. The only two goals that Egypt scored in the World Cup were kicked by none other than Salah.

Before the World Cup, Egyptian citizens began wishing each other good morning with the greeting *‘salah al-khayr* (instead of *sabah al-khayr*). Salah’s huge popularity among the Egyptian public is seen as an asset by the el-Sisi regime, as long as it can be leveraged for its own ends. El-Sisi sought to use the team’s hero as an avenue to the hearts of the people, with special emphasis on the younger generation. In January 2017, the President and Minister for Youth hosted Salah, after the latter donated five million Egyptian pounds to the Tahya Masr Foundation, established by the President for the economic development of Egypt. After the team qualified for the World Cup, el-Sisi greeted Salah personally at a meeting with the Egyptian players. The President also tweets praise of Salah whenever he wins awards. El-Sisi’s personal telephone call to Salah after his injury was described by the chairman of the Youth and Sport Committee in the Egyptian Parliament, Hamad Faraj Amar, as “a fitting human gesture on the part of the father of the Egyptian family” that “raised the morale of Salah and contributed to his swift recovery.”<sup>18</sup>

Alongside the public “romance” between el-Sisi and Salah, there is hidden tension of the kind that emerges as soon as the hierarchy between the political leader and a sporting hero is undermined. Salah’s popularity is

very useful to the head of the regime, up to the point where it overshadows his own popularity or is aimed against him. An example of the challenge posed by the rising status of Salah occurred in the March 2018 presidential elections, when about one million voters (5 percent of the turnout) put Salah's name on their ballot, double the rate received by the fictitious candidate who reached second place. Of course Salah was not running and the votes for him were disqualified, but unlike other soccer stars, he also avoided calling on people to vote for el-Sisi. Voting for Salah was above all a protest vote against the regime's decision to prevent authentic rival candidates from running for the presidency, but it also revealed the genuine affection for Salah among the Egyptian public that could theoretically be translated into political power. While posters with el-Sisi's image filled the streets, Salah's image was in voters' hearts.

Egyptian citizens were inspired to vote for Salah in part by the story of the legendary African soccer player, George Weah, who was a forward for the Italian team Milan in the 1990s and in January 2018 was sworn in as the President of Liberia. In 1995 Weah too was chosen Soccer Player of the Year in Africa. Moreover, both he and Salah are from lower middle class families, and both have donated to philanthropic causes for their fellow countrymen. Weah's election as President of Liberia caused Egyptian citizens to seriously consider the possibility that Salah could follow in his footsteps after retiring from his soccer career,<sup>19</sup> and set up Facebook pages proposing his potential candidacy for president.<sup>20</sup>

The broad public consensus around Salah does not derive solely from his performance on the field, but also from his image, which integrates five levels:

First, Salah is seen as someone who has not forgotten where he came from before becoming a global star; he remains loyal to his homeland and donates generously to his Egyptian brothers. Apart from his donation to the Tahya Masr Foundation, he set up a charitable association that invests in a range of social ventures, particularly in Nagrig, the village 120 km from Cairo where he was born. Salah has helped village youngsters to renovate the local soccer field, set up a first aid center, funded weddings, and provided monthly pensions for needy families of widows, orphans, and divorcees. He also participated in a national campaign against drugs. These and other actions were done with the regime's consent and even encouragement, although it appears that they also troubled it somewhat. An article in the Egyptian daily *al-Masry al-Youm* criticized the fact that

Salah's family home in Nagrig has become a pilgrimage site for needy Egyptians. The writer points out that Salah is not a "parallel state, a civic society organization, or a charitable association," but "simply a successful soccer player," and called on the Egyptian public to amend its attitude toward him accordingly.<sup>21</sup>

Second, Salah is perceived by both the public and the regime as a source of national pride and an important anchor for improving Egypt's international status. The rise of the Pharaohs team to the World Cup was identified by the Egyptian government as the opportunity for a marketing campaign to put Egypt on the world tourism and investment map,<sup>22</sup> and the unofficial role of "presenter" was given to the "Egyptian King" (as Salah is dubbed by Liverpool fans).<sup>23</sup> Salah's name is mentioned in Egyptian public discourse in the same breath as historical cultural heroes such as the writer Naguib Mahfouz, the singer Umm Kulthum, and the scientist Ahmed Zewail, and he is positioned as a national icon alongside the pyramids and the Sphinx.<sup>24</sup> Egyptian sports commentator Yasser Ayoub defined Salah as "the most powerful soft weapon that Egypt today has in Europe and the world," and as someone who "surprises us every day with what he can add to Egypt in the sphere of publicity."<sup>25</sup>

Third, for many people in Egypt, Salah's international success is not only a source of pride, but also an inspiration and example of how young Egyptians can break out of economic distress, and even achieve the dream of many to migrate to the West. In a reality of deep poverty and 30 percent unemployment among the young, Salah's story brings an empowering message that captivates many, stating that the fate of the ordinary Egyptian citizen lies in his own hands. This aspect of his image corresponds to the regime's efforts to bring hope for a better economic future in spite of the difficult circumstances of daily life. The message is also fostered by Salah, who tends to describe himself not as a gifted player with extraordinary talent, but above all as an example of somebody from a small village who has reached the peak of international soccer thanks to hard work and willpower.<sup>26</sup>

Fourth, Salah has always been a devout Muslim, but in the past year, in the eyes of many Muslims in Egypt and elsewhere, has become an ambassador of sorts for Islam. This image rests in part on the prayer ritual he performs every time he scores and the name he gave his daughter, Mecca, but took off largely due to a humorous chant sung by Liverpool fans ("If he scores another few, then I'll be Muslim too / Sitting in the mosque – that's



where I want to be”).<sup>27</sup> In the eyes of Muslim fans, the song positions Salah at the forefront of the global struggle against Islamophobia in the West, and represents the beautiful, moderate side of Islam. Moreover, some Muslims have taken the song literally, and credited Salah with a concrete contribution to the spread of Islam in England, or at least in the religious conversion of Liverpool fans.

The growing dominance of the Islamic-religious dimension of Salah’s image has been received by the ruling Egyptian establishment with mixed feelings: on the one hand, al-Azhar Institute praised Salah as an example of proper conduct and for his contribution to the image of Muslims and Islam;<sup>28</sup> on the other hand, there are some who have asked Salah to clarify that his religious fervor does not reflect identification with the Muslim Brotherhood. The veteran publicist Salah Muntasar went even further just before the World Cup, when he asked him to “shave off his full beard, which does not suit his age or his fame and which places him – externally at least – in the same category as extreme fundamentalists, or even worse, as terrorists and their supporters.” He also said that Salah should change his hairstyle, since “his thick hair grows in all directions, as if he hasn’t seen a barber for years.”<sup>29</sup> The call to Salah to cut his beard, which aroused controversy in Egypt, reflects the gap between the older, conservative generation represented by Muntasar and Salah’s young, liberated generation. Moreover, it reflects the establishment’s difficulty in imposing discipline on a global soccer star like Salah, and assigning him to the desirable political category of “a clean shaven soldier” who is loyal to the regime and works in its service.

Fifth, so far Salah has managed to foster an apolitical image and protect his status as representative of the “Egyptian consensus.” He has rejected pressure to decide between the regime and its opponents, and has avoided the internal Egyptian minefield by claiming that he is a soccer player and not a politician.<sup>30</sup> His position in the spotlight has made this task particularly difficult, as a variety of political forces have tried to exploit him for their purposes. One example is the series of photographs that was forced on Salah during the World Cup with the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, who hosted the Egyptian team in the capital Grozny and took Salah for a tour in his private car. According to media reports, Salah was so angry after this incident that he considered withdrawing from the national team.<sup>31</sup>

And indeed, Salah’s high public status also enables him to set “red lines” for the authorities and sometimes to place himself above the regular limits of “permitted and forbidden” in Egypt. For example, the regime has been

restrained about his public friendship with Mohamed Aboutrika, a former star of the national team whose property was confiscated and who was forced into exile after being accused of ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>32</sup> According to media reports, Salah even asked President el-Sisi to allow Aboutrika to return to his homeland.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Soccer arouses major enthusiasm in Egypt, and the team's participation in the 2018 World Cup, together with the rise of a huge Egyptian star like Salah, has turned the game into a hugely powerful sociopolitical phenomenon. The functions performed by soccer in the el-Sisi era vacillate between its two traditional roles: being "the opium of the masses" on the one hand, and acting as the arena for crowd assembly and political protest on the other hand. Rival political forces use soccer to create a discourse that promotes their public agenda and bends public opinion towards them.

The discourse around soccer in Egypt – which receives a broad platform in the official media as well as in coffee shops and on social networks – makes the game a political double-edged sword. The regime uses soccer to distract the public from the difficult economic situation, encourage feelings of national solidarity and pride which are so necessary for a divided country like Egypt, and unite the people round the President and the regime. At the same time, soccer brings together large crowds, which are linked in Egypt's national memory with the revolutions of 2011 and 2013, gives some freedom of expression to the Egyptian collective in the public space, and leaves an opening for the rise of new cultural heroes who challenge the exclusive status of the President.

The battle of images raging round the image of Mohamed Salah is an example of this duality. The Egyptian regime wishes to position him as an "exemplary" soldier in the service of the country and the regime, and as a decent citizen who demonstrates loyalty to his homeland in difficult times, makes sacrifices for the general good, and is happy to work for the country and its leader. The regime's political rivals prefer to paint Salah as an extraordinary success story that does not depict the prevalent situation, an individual case that is the antithesis of the general national failure, and a product of personal effort that can be credited to the sporting climate outside Egypt, which alone enabled Salah to prosper and blossom. The battle around his image does not ignore the role of religion, or the yearning

among many in Egypt for the model of a young, uncorrupted civilian of the kind that Salah seems to represent.

## Notes

- 1 Bahi Hassan: "What Happens when the President of Egypt Attends a Soccer Match? He can Absorb Three Goals or Win the Championship," *al-Masry al-Youm*, October 8, 2017, <http://www.almazryalyoum.com/news/details/1202029>; Carl Rommel, "A Veritable Game of the Nation: On the Changing Status of Football within the Egyptian National Formation in the Wake of the 2009 World Cup Qualifiers against Algeria," *Critical African Studies* 6, nos. 2-3 (2014): 157-75.
- 2 "Alaa Mubarak on the Program *Your Home*: We Will Not Accept Apologies from Algeria," *7aena* November 20, 2009, <https://bit.ly/2uZznAG>.
- 3 Dag Tuastad, "From Football Riot to Revolution: The Political Role of Football in the Arab World," *Soccer & Society* 15, no. 3 (2013): 376-88; Islam Ahmed el-Rabi'i Ahmed, "Ultras Organizations and the Issue of the Link between State and Society," Egyptian Institute of Political and Strategic Studies, October-November 2016, <https://eipss-eg.org/author/eslamrabie>.
- 4 Khaled Youssef, "Egypt and the World Cup: Notes on the Eve of October 8," *Maraya*, November 2017, pp. 20-25.
- 5 Tuastad, "From Football Riot to Revolution: The Political Role of Football in the Arab World."
- 6 Consider, for example, one of the songs sung by al-Ahly fans against the police, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5FLKF-nyV8>.
- 7 Hagar Shizaf, "Egypt: The Ultras – Football and Protest, Then and Now," *Kav Hutz*, April 17, 2012, <https://goo.gl/2hSESz>.
- 8 Tuastad, "From Football Riot to Revolution: The Political Role of Football in the Arab World."
- 9 For the response of al-Ahly fans against Tantawi after the Port Said massacre, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZgJHiaofms>.
- 10 James Dorsey, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016), pp. 82-85, 285.
- 11 Ahmed Abd el-Rasoul, "Egypt's FA Puts Fans' Return to League Matches on Temporary Hold," *Ahram Online*, February 14, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2L0QRXC>.
- 12 Ali Ahmed, "The al-Ahly Ultras Announce they are Dismantling: An Expression of Contrition or an Attempt to Deceive?" *Mobtada*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.mobtada.com/details/732196>.
- 13 'Atiyya Abu al-'Ala, "This is How the el-Sisi Regime Appropriated the Success of the Egyptian Team," *'Arabi 21*, October 9, 2017, <https://goo.gl/SS5F19>.
- 14 Youssef, "Egypt and the World Cup: Notes on the Eve of October 8," pp. 21-22.

- 15 For example, Eslam Omar, "Controversy in Egypt Over Celebrity Cheering Delegation's Presence at World Cup," *Ahram Online*, June 19, 2018, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/302834.aspx>.
- 16 See for example the tweet from an opposition activist, Mamdouh Hamza, June 26, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LIneHw>.
- 17 For example, Mas'ud al-Hinawi, "World Cup Trends: The Dream that Became a Nightmare," *al-Ahram*, June 26, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2A0LyTB>.
- 18 Rajab Ramadan, "Chairman of Sport Committee in Parliament: Salah's Injury is Reminiscent of the Murder of Princess Diana," *al-Masry al-Youm*, May 28, 2018, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1295589>.
- 19 Samir Badr, "Will Salah be President of Egypt in 2030?" *Masr al-Arabiya*, February 8, 2018, <https://goo.gl/XGQmMe>.
- 20 For example, a group called "Mohamed Salah for President of Egypt 2018," <https://goo.gl/jVVBm1>.
- 21 Alaa al-Ghtrifi, "Mohamed Salah, No Honor and Social Responsibility," *al-Masry Al-Youm*, May 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LsZGcW>.
- 22 Hani Sameer, "Egypt Eyes World Cup as Golden Opportunity for Economy," *al-Monitor*, May 28, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2N5h2d1>.
- 23 See for example "Liverpool Fans: Mo Salah The Egyptian King," December 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Jz1V1gt4GU>.
- 24 Nir Wolff, "The New King," *Yisrael Hayom*, May 10, 2018, <http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/555063>.
- 25 Yasser Ayoub, "At the Cairo Book Fair," *al-Masry al-Youm*, February 6, 2018, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1255487>.
- 26 See for example an interview of Mohamed Salah by 'Amr Adib on the program "Kull Yawm," May 11, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2uKiWJe>.
- 27 See for example "I'll Be Muslim Too!" at <https://bit.ly/2F6kMrS>.
- 28 Ahmed al-Buhayri, "The Monitoring Body of al-Azhar: The Values of Mohamed Salah Attract Liverpool Fans to Islam," *al-Masry al-Youm*, April 28, 2018, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1285747>.
- 29 Salah Muntasar, "Letter to Mohamed Salah," *al-Ahram*, March 11, 2018, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/641343.aspx>.
- 30 For example: "Mohamed Salah: I am not a Muslim Brotherhood Man and Have Nothing to Do with Politics," *Eurosport*, August 22, 2013, <https://goo.gl/qhekYs>.
- 31 John Sinnott and Alireza Hajihosseini, "Mo Salah Considering Quitting Egypt National Team," *CNN*, June 24, 2018, <https://cnn.it/2JcZfhz>.
- 32 "Former Star of the Egyptian Team Accused of Involvement in Terror," *NRG*, February 28, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2mH2c1n>.
- 33 "Mohamed Salah Mediating with el-Sisi Regarding a Pardon for Aboutrika," *al-Mesryoon*, February 6, 2017, <https://goo.gl/iktEso>.