If you were lucky enough to be in Beirut before the start of the World Cup, you could not have avoided noticing the impressive display of national flags decorating cars, restaurants, windows, and buildings. Not Lebanese flags – this is the point – but the national flags of Brazil, Germany, Italy, and so on; not just a few flags but a massive number of them.

You might say that this is not such a big deal; after all, the Lebanese national team did not qualify for the final stage of the competition, and Lebanese football fans had to pick another team in order to enjoy the competition. And we know that even in countries that did reach the final stage, like Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Brazil, and Argentina, some people have been supporting teams other than their national ones.

But take another country. Take Ireland, for instance, whose national team did not qualify either. Ireland is different to Lebanon but in some respects similar: the size of its population is comparable to that of Lebanon, it has some religious-communitarian boundaries and cleavages, and it has had high emigration rates until very recently. Well, Irish people supported Poland in large numbers (sadly without great success, as Poland was sent home quite quickly), due to the large number of Polish residents in Ireland and the good relationship between Irish and Polish people, and because the Polish team reminded the Irish of their own team (which means that it had little small hope of passing through the group stage).

If you were lucky enough to be in Beirut some sixteen months ago, you will remember the impressive display of Lebanese national flags decorating cars, restaurants, windows, and buildings. At the time, I doubted the Intifadat al-Istiqlal’s chances of reaching its aims. One of the reasons, among many others, for such a pessimist view, was that you had the impression that the ‘revolutionary’ commitment was not as widespread, deep, and strong as it was depicted. It was the ‘Gucci Revolution’ that made you wonder. Now, I guess we could agree that Lebanese people, and more specifically a good share of that third of the population that normally lives in Beirut and surrounding areas, are in generally quite keen on fashion and on everything that is ‘hot’ and ‘up-and-coming’; they love that ‘cosmopolitan feeling’, they adore being the Middle Eastern trend-setters or the first to follow a trend.

The World Cup was fashionable almost everywhere. Democracy was (and still is) fashionable. A few months ago, following events in the Ukraine, did the Lebanese demonstrate in order to be the first country in the Middle East to go for a democratic revolution? Did the Beirut Spring happen just because democracy was ‘hot’? And did it not fully succeed for the same reason that explains why the Lebanese are not able to support, all together, just one team?

Let us add another small fact here: Brazil has enjoyed the best share of Lebanese support during the World Cup, and Brazil is by far the most fashionable of all national teams.