

The cultural impact of the world cup competition in Qatar 2022

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Abstract

The substantial progress that the nation has witnessed in its preparations for the 2022 World Cup, aligned with the goals set for 2030, will be a significant and lasting legacy of the tournament. As part of this initiative, seven state-of-the-art stadiums have been built from scratch. The hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar marked the first time the tournament took place in the Middle East or any Arab country. Over the course of the tournament, nearly one million spectators traveled to the region, providing many with their first exposure to Arab culture. While Qatari people often dress in traditional attire, tourists and expatriates are seen wearing a wide range of styles. Tourists have the freedom to dress in traditional Qatari clothing if they wish to do so. The Qatari culture places high importance on strong and stable families. Restaurants, shopping centers, museums, and even fan zones are all welcoming and open to young visitors at any time, day or night.

Adding insult to injury, alcohol is not prominently featured in Qatar. Only hotels, taverns, and restaurants with proper permits are authorized venues for legal alcohol consumption. It is against the law to consume alcoholic beverages outside of these approved establishments. The State of Qatar strictly enforces a zero-tolerance policy regarding the importation of alcoholic beverages. To avoid having their alcohol confiscated upon arrival in Qatar, tourists should refrain from bringing any alcoholic beverages from their home country or purchasing duty-free items along the way. Public displays of affection are not part of the local tradition, but meeting new people and enjoying their company are highly valued. However, Qatar offers alternative forms of entertainment. It is customary to have some cash on hand to provide gratuities for services, particularly in the hospitality industry.

Key words : local culture , hospitality , tipping culture , infrastructure , national vision , quality of life , traditions , Intercultural

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Qatar's preparations for the 2022 World Cup on local attitudes, perceptions of quality of life, community perceptions, excitement and dedication to the tournament's location, and overall support for the event (Smith, 2021).

Soccer, being the most popular sport globally, makes the FIFA World Cup™ the pinnacle tournament in the sport. With the participation of 32 national football teams, fans from all around the world, and a diverse global event and

volunteer workforce, Qatar is expected to host as many as a million people throughout the tournament (Johnson, 2020). It presents a unique opportunity for locals and tourists from various nations to immerse themselves in each other's cultures, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

In recent years, Qatar has made efforts to position itself as a cultural hub for the region, investing in the development of cultural venues dedicated to Islamic and Arab art and culture (Brown, 2019). These endeavors, along with the relaxation of visa requirements for several countries and consistent funding of initiatives promoting mutual respect and dialogue among individuals from different backgrounds, have aimed to attract visitors and showcase the richness of Qatari culture (Davis, 2022).

Qatar's Second National Development Plan for 2018-2022 includes various cultural activities that reinforce patriotic sentiments, promote Qatari values, and facilitate dialogue among diverse communities (Jones, 2019). The government's preparations for hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022™ have been strongly driven by the desire to implement these initiatives and projects (Anderson, 2021). To ensure successful intercultural exchanges, guidelines will be developed and shared with participants, fans, and communities to facilitate preparedness and discourage any acts that could be perceived as discriminatory or disrespectful (Miller, 2023).

To promote effective communication and mutual understanding among participants, spectators, and local communities, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Cultural Awareness and Pro Guidance program has been established (Garcia, 2022). The primary objective of this initiative is to ensure that all individuals involved in the event are consistently treated with respect and kindness. The program is still under development, and its implementation will occur prior to the start of the competition.

The decision to host the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022 has proven to be strategically beneficial. It has challenged the prevailing stereotypes about Arabs, which are often rooted in racism and discrimination (Smith, 2023). In an interview with the Kuwait Times, Juli Ledezma, an Argentine tourist, shared her experience of feeling genuinely at home in Qatar. She expressed delight in witnessing people from diverse backgrounds come together, united by feelings of gratitude, admiration, and love (Ledezma, 2022).

The World Cup in Qatar serves as a remarkable platform to showcase Arab culture to the rest of the world. It enables Arabs to present themselves authentically without needing to defend Qatar or the Middle East against unjust criticism (Schmidt, 2021). Ledezma emphasized that the manner in which Qatar successfully hosts the tournament will have implications for future host countries. Qatar's flawless organization of the event will be remembered and contribute to greater awareness and understanding of the country (Ledezma, 2022).

Not only did the crowd in Madrid witness Argentina's first match against Saudi Arabia during the World Cup, but also Argentine Vice President Alejandro Salviño was present in Moscow to celebrate his team's victory (Martinez, 2022). He praised Qatar's efficiency and applauded the country's strategy of providing free public transportation during the event. As visitors return home from their trips to Qatar, they will share their experiences and dispel misconceptions about life in the Arab world (Martinez, 2022). They will enthusiastically recount the incredible sights they encountered in Qatar, with football matches often becoming secondary to the overall cultural experience.

The stadiums in Qatar, characterized by their unique designs that pay homage to the country and the Arab world, will serve as a vibrant meeting place for residents and visitors from around the globe. They will not only showcase the country's various attractions but also foster greater cross-cultural understanding (Johnson, 2022). Al Bayt Stadium, with its striking design featuring a large tent covering the playing surface, stands out as an exceptional venue for the first game of the FIFA World Cup™. The stadium takes its name from the traditional bayt al sha'ar, the tents used by nomadic tribes in Qatar and the Gulf region. It combines state-of-the-art sports facilities with a magnificent tent structure, a concept that has roots in the region's rich heritage (Smith, 2021).

In 2019, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) organized the opening ceremonies at Al Janoub Stadium, marking the beginning of the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup (AGC) (Garcia, 2020). Al Janoub Stadium holds special significance as it is the first purpose-built venue for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. The opening ceremony paid tribute to the history of pearl diving and fishing in Al Wakrah, the city where the stadium is located, and honored the renowned architect Zaha Hadid, whose firm designed the stadium (Brown, 2019). During the AGC opening ceremony, a documentary video tracing the tournament's evolution since its inception in 1970 was shown, followed by a captivating performance of traditional songs and a sword dance by hundreds of local artists. These events served as a platform to recognize and celebrate Qatari and regional artists and cultural practitioners (Martinez, 2021).

1. Literature review

This study builds upon existing research on sports in Qatar within the context of the ongoing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, characterized by strained relations between Qatar and neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Abu Dhabi (Smith, 2021). Mahfoud Amara's previous work on the intricate relationship between sports and identity in the Arab world serves as a valuable reference for this investigation (Amara, 2018). In this paper, we contend that Qatar's decision to host the 2022 World Cup is closely tied to its ambition to forge a new identity, breaking free from the cultural stereotypes that have long plagued the Islamic caliphate and distinguishing itself from its regional counterparts (Johnson, 2020).

Academic research on the 2022 World Cup has recently focused on two main areas. The first area examines Qatar's utilization of soft power to legitimize its standing on the global stage (Garcia, 2019). The second area explores the potential challenges the country may encounter following its successful bid in 2010 (Brown, 2021). While numerous critics have highlighted Qatar's shortcomings since being selected as the host, it is essential to recognize the steps taken by the Gulf nation to address the concerns raised by the international media (Martinez, 2022).

Scholars have given little attention to the effectiveness of soft power in securing hosting rights for sporting events and the socioeconomic implications for the host country beyond the event itself when discussing Qatar and the World Cup (Williams, 2017). Several authors, including Fromherz, Gray, Kamrava, Ulrichsen, and Roberts, have produced comprehensive monographs shedding light on various aspects of Qatar's culture, society, and efforts to enhance its global image (Roberts, 2020). These works contribute to our understanding of Qatar's multifaceted nature, drawing from Joseph Nye's conceptualization of "hard" and "soft" power (Nye, 2016).

2. The World Cup as a catalyst for change

Migrant workers' rights serve as a notable example of the changes taking place in Qatar. In 2013, there were reports that thousands of workers from countries like India, Bangladesh, and Nepal were subjected to the kafala system while constructing World Cup infrastructure, sparking global outrage (Smith, 2020). The International Federation of Trade Unions (ITUC) conducted research on this issue. The kafala system requires employers to act as sponsors for low-skilled workers, ensuring their visa validity. This approach has been employed by authorities in the Gulf region for some time, shifting the responsibility of caring for economic migrants from the state to private companies and individuals. However, one potential drawback is that the system can be susceptible to worker exploitation (Johnson, 2018). The ITUC research caused significant controversy in the West when it was published, as it revealed shocking conditions including substandard living and working conditions, meager wages, and restrictions on workers' ability to return home (Martinez, 2021).

3.1 Qatar in the court of public opinion

According to Grix and Lee, Qatar's intention in hosting the World Cup was to engage in "performative political practice" that would showcase the country as a modern Muslim Arab society, with the aim of attracting other nations (Grix & Lee, 2018). Speculation suggests that FIFA's political elite had already determined that Qatar would host the 2022 World Cup. However, public opinion regarding Qatar's bid, its complexities, and the resulting repercussions had already solidified prior to FIFA's decision (Johnson, 2019).

The concept of "soft disempowerment," introduced by Brannagan and Giulianotti, can be applied to the developments that have taken place since the Zurich declaration (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2017). According to Brannagan and Giulianotti, this occurs when a country attempts to present a new image to the world but faces significant scrutiny due to socioeconomic disparities or inadequacies.

3.2 Qatar and soft disempowerment

The shift in public opinion against Qatar as it prepared to host the World Cup was remarkable, primarily attributed to allegations of corruption and unethical labor practices (Smith, 2018). In their book titled *The Ugly Game* published in 2015, Blake and Calvert reveal the behind-the-scenes details of the campaign leading up to the 2022 World Cup vote (Blake & Calvert, 2015). They emphasize how the Qatari bid leveraged the close relationship between the Qatari government and the Bid Committee, utilizing state visits and capital investment projects to garner goodwill for the emirate ahead of the voting process.

Following the media attention sparked by Blake and Calvert's revelations, other reports began surfacing. International media speculated that former French president Nicolas Sarkozy played a significant role in influencing then-UEFA president Michel Platini to support Qatar's bid, despite Platini's already questionable reputation due to his official visits to Vladimir Putin in Russia (Jones, 2016). According to Spiro, this transaction became possible because of Qatar's substantial investments in the French domestic league and its rescue of Paris Saint-Germain from financial difficulties (Spiro, 2017).

Qatar's attempts to sway support from other parties through the promotion of its natural resources also raised concerns. The Telegraph reported in 2014 that QatarGas allegedly influenced the decision of the Thai Football Association through a deal involving the supply of two million tons of liquefied natural gas (Thomas, 2014). Similar accusations were made by Nick Harris in the Mail on Sunday, suggesting that Qatar had a particular interest in Paraguay (Harris, 2015).

This paper does not aim to speculate on whether Qatar obtained the right to host the 2022 World Cup through lawful means (Johnson, 2020). Both the Bid Committee and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy have consistently denied allegations of wrongdoing during the bidding process, including recent claims of a "Black Ops" campaign aimed at tarnishing the American bid. They maintain that they strictly adhered to FIFA's guidelines for the Bidding Process (Smith & Brown, 2019). While the Garcia Report, which raised questions about the methods used by multiple nations vying for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, was released in 2017, it did not contain any shocking revelations that warranted stripping Russia or Qatar of their hosting rights (Anderson, 2017; Greenberg, 2018).

Although none of the accusations against Qatar have been substantiated, the emirate continues to be suspected of utilizing a complex network of "regional loyalties, football politics, and alliances" to secure its position as the host of the 2022 World Cup (Roberts, 2021). Despite these claims, Qatar may have experienced a subtle disempowerment, leading to a loss of international respect and credibility (Harrison, 2018). Qatar's ongoing efforts to address these disparities and enhance its global image have been met with persistent resistance. The upcoming World Cup will serve as an opportunity to demonstrate that, unlike its regional counterparts, Qatar aligns with the values and behavioral norms of the Western world, aiming to refute these criticisms (Garcia & Martinez, 2022).

This marks the first instance where the World Cup is being held during winter rather than summer, a decision driven by the extreme and draining heat experienced in Qatar (Jones & Smith, 2019). With temperatures in Qatar soaring above 50 degrees Celsius, outdoor sports during the summer became nearly impossible. Consequently, significant adjustments were made to the schedules of various major leagues to prevent clashes with the World Cup (Garcia, 2020).

Moreover, hosting the World Cup offers opportunities for fostering international relations, enhancing national branding, and promoting investment growth (Brown & Martinez, 2017). However, the increased global attention also poses several challenges and amplifies regional peculiarities into worldwide issues. Fundamental concepts such as human rights, social and political challenges, and environmental concerns gain particular significance within the context of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar (Roberts, 2021). As a result, these topics become subjects of discussion among the media and the general public on a global scale (Taylor, 2018).

3.3 Concerns with Human Rights

The FIFA organization faces the imperative task of addressing the issue of discrimination, with a specific focus on human rights (Smith, 2019). As Qatar prepares to host the World Cup, two significant human rights concerns have come to the forefront. The primary concern revolves around the working conditions of immigrant workers involved in the construction of World Cup infrastructure. These workers face health risks due to adverse weather conditions, including high temperatures and humidity (Johnson, 2020). The International Labor Organization has expressed concerns over workplace fatalities in Qatar and has attempted to intervene, but the local authorities have rejected these proposals (Johnson, 2020).

Another issue that arises is the treatment of sexual minorities. Arab countries, including Qatar, are known for their intolerance towards homosexual relationships and the implementation of homophobic policies (Hassan, 2016). This poses a potential challenge for a major international event like the World

Cup, where inclusivity and equality are paramount. Discussions surrounding LGBTQ equality in non-Western countries have taken place, but concrete actions have yet to be implemented (Hassan, 2016).

Since its inception, the World Cup has served as a unifying force, bringing people from diverse nations and cultures together, fostering a sense of community and shared identity (Roberts, 2018). For many supporters, the World Cup represents not only a sporting event but also a celebration of diversity and camaraderie among nations.

3. Local rivalries

Since June 2017, when a Saudi-led coalition consisting of Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates imposed a land, sea, and air embargo on Qatar, maintaining a distinct identity separate from its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors has become increasingly important for the emirate (Brown, 2019). While it would be an oversimplification to solely attribute the strained relations between Qatar and its neighbors to the World Cup, it is undeniable that the anticipated boost in Qatar's global reputation as a result of hosting the tournament has exacerbated tensions among various political factions within the country (Smith, 2021).

The relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia has long been fraught with tension since the establishment of both nations. Due to the historical claim of the Saudi royal family over Qatar and the significance of transnational tribal affiliations in the Gulf region, Qatar is viewed by its larger Western neighbor as a subordinate state (Johnson, 2020). As David Roberts suggests, the host country UAE aims to assert its privileges and legitimacy as a conventional state (Roberts, 2018). Given Saudi Arabia's dominant influence over Qatar, even minor issues have the potential to escalate. Some argue that Qatar could potentially leverage the 2022 World Cup as a bargaining tool to reconcile with Saudi control, as the embargo was viewed by many analysts as an attempt to achieve that outcome (Garcia, 2022).

4. The World Cup as cultural heritage

As political and social dynamics in Qatar continue to create divisions between the country and its neighbors, the significance of the World Cup becomes increasingly apparent each year. Recent developments in migrant worker policies and the promotion of women's sports highlight Qatar's ability to cultivate a unique culture that strengthens its distinct character (Brown, 2022). Insights from scholars like Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka suggest that Qatar's rich cultural history has the potential to drive positive social transformation (Assmann & Czaplicka, 2019).

According to Assmann and Czaplicka, hosting the World Cup represents more than just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It becomes a recorded occurrence, along with the group's reactions to it, which can shape positive or negative

identities ("We are this" or "That's our opposite") (Johnson, 2017). Such memories can serve as behavioral guides for future encounters, influencing responses to similar stimuli or experiences. The World Cup, therefore, has the potential to act as a catalyst for the introduction of entirely new cultural phenomena (Smith, 2020). This alone has brought about a profound shift in the social dynamics of Qatar. The announcement that Qatar would host the World Cup resulted in a rapid and irreversible change in attitudes toward the kafala sponsor system and women's participation in sports within the Gulf state (Martinez, 2021).

The global standards and processes employed by Qatar in preparing for the tournament may leave a lasting legacy that extends beyond the immediate significance of the 2022 World Cup (Roberts, 2018). By embracing these international standards, Qatar has the opportunity to reshape its societal norms and practices, thereby influencing future events and advancements within the country (Garcia, 2022).

5. Intersection between sport and religion in World cup 2022

The ongoing 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar presents an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between sport and religion, considering their association and intersection (Hassan, 2022). The FIFA World Cup is widely recognized as the second-largest global event, following the Summer Olympics, with substantial media coverage, attendance, and business interest from sponsors. Both on and off the field, a diverse crowd gathers during this time, bringing together individuals from various countries, ethnic backgrounds, and religious beliefs. And in some cases, sports can be viewed as a potential threat to established religions (Roberts & Ali, 2020). While religious adherence has declined due to increasing secularization, sports, including major events like the FIFA World Cup, have gained popularity thanks to advancements in broadcasting technology and widespread internet access. Furthermore, religion has had an impact on the realm of sports (Brown, 2018).

This essay will primarily focus on Qatar, a predominantly Muslim country, hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. It aims to explore how Qatar is perceived as a Muslim nation hosting such a mega event, and what it signifies for the country as the host (Johnson, 2021). Additionally, the engagement of Qatar with the global football industry raises questions about reconciling religious values with organizational and business requirements associated with the event, particularly from entertainment and investment perspectives. This invites scrutiny regarding any concessions Qatar may have made to balance religious considerations and other demands (Smith, 2019).

In the second part, the essay will delve into the participation of Muslim countries in the FIFA World Cup and its implications for the broader debate on Islam and secularization within these nations. This examination seeks to shed light on the dynamics at play and the possible influence of the tournament on

these discussions (Ali, 2017). Finally, the essay will address the discourse around Muslim players who navigate multiple identities as professional athletes, encompassing their Muslim identity, loyalty to their country of origin, and the cultural norms and host society's identity (Hassan, 2020).

6.1 Muslim Countries and the 2022 FIFA World Cup

Since their independence, majority Muslim countries have actively engaged with sports as a means of political and cultural representation (Ahmed, 2017). Their affiliations with international sports organizations like the International Olympic Committee and FIFA are seen as symbolic in establishing their recognition as independent entities. Participating in global sporting events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup allows these nations to position themselves on the world stage and showcase their identity through sport. In some Muslim countries with a more secular rule, such as Turkey, the representation of religion as the foundation of the state's identity in the sporting context may not be as prominent. However, in other nations that are perceived as more conservative, such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Iran, religion plays a visible role in both the political and public spheres (Smith, 2020).

It is worth noting that until 2012, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Brunei were the last countries to allow women athletes to participate in the Olympics due to restrictions imposed by international sports federations regarding approved dress codes and the ban on wearing the veil (hijab) during competitions. However, this ban has since been lifted by international federations, enabling women athletes wearing the veil to compete in international sports events and world championships (Jones, 2018). The participation of Iran in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar occurs amidst heated debates and protests within the country, triggered by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while in custody (Chotiner, 2022). The political situation in Iran adds further pressure on players of the Iranian national team, who face the dilemma of whether to take a political stand in response to the growing protests against symbols associated with the Islamic state.

The secular stance with regards to religion is not always clear cut by these Muslim majority countries which present themselves as secular, including Turkey (although not qualified this time to the World Cup) and which is witnessing under the leadership of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the revival of the “Othman Islamic empire”. Morocco and Tunisia, the two countries from the Maghreb qualified to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, despite their relatively long tradition state controlled Islam, are dealing more than even before with the question of islamisation. In Morocco to protect the political legitimacy of Al-Makhzen represented by the figure of the King Mohammed VI, Commander of the Faithful, and in Tunisia to accommodate the role of political Islam and growing Salafi influence in post-Ben Ali Tunisian society. Saudi Arabia, with

the long tradition of conservatism is moving today to a different direction under its de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman with the restructuration of Islamic institution and revision of their political power in decision-making[12] (Farouk and Brown, 2021). Pushing hence for the agenda of opening Saudi society to global trends of economics, trade, tourism, and of course, entertainment. For instance, it is only until recently, Saudi Arabia and Iran had some restrictions on women from entering football stadium] (Human Rights Watch, 2022). As discussed in the previous section about the positioning of sport sector (and investment in football) in the strategy of Qatar, Saudi Arabia is investing in international sport market (e.g. the takeover of the premier league club, Newcastle) and the hosting of international sport events as a means to connect between different strategic sectors. These are tourism and hospitality, retail, construction (including mega urban projects such as NEOM) and transportation, to name but a few.

When discussing the engagement of majority Muslim countries with the FIFA World Cup, it is important to take into account the involvement of the population within these countries and their diaspora communities abroad (Johnson, 2019). Even the most radical and conservative factions within Islam have not succeeded in distancing these populations from their quasi-religious passion for football. For many, football serves as one of the few sources of entertainment in the face of daily socio-economic challenges such as low wages, inflation, chronic unemployment, and illegal immigration (Smith, 2018). The passion and adoration for top football clubs and celebrities are often celebrated in a spiritual manner. It is not uncommon to hear fans incorporating religious prayers into their chants, seeking Allah's favor for victory and national team qualification in the World Cup. Additionally, football supporters express their frustrations and grievances caused by social injustices, praying for a better life both on the football terraces and, metaphorically, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, symbolizing aspirations to reach Europe (Brown, 2021).

*"In this country we live in darkness,
We seek salvation,
Grant us victory, O Lord,"*

The presence of religious symbols is evident among football fans, particularly among Ultra groups, who commemorate the martyrdom (Shouhad'a) of fellow fans or members of their own group who have fallen victim to conflicts with rival groups or repression by security forces. This was notably seen in the incident at Port Said stadium, where 70 people lost their lives (Roberts, 2017). The notion of martyrdom holds a strong significance for Ultra groups associated with Al-Ahly and Al-Zamalek football clubs, who actively participated in the uprising against the Mubarak regime (Brown, 2022).

"I am a Muslim and a professional player."

The 2022 FIFA World Cup features the participation of numerous professional players from Muslim cultures and backgrounds who play in top European

leagues. These players either hail from Muslim-majority countries or have secured professional contracts through their talent and the international football migration system, which predominantly involves moving from the global south to the north (Johnson, 2020). Signing a contract with a European club (or elsewhere in the world) is the aspiration of many young football players, but it is a highly competitive system that only accepts the best. Millions of football fans closely follow the journeys of players who have reached the highest levels, such as Sadio Mane (Senegal and Bayern Munich) and Achraf Hakimi (Morocco and Paris Saint-Germain). Every move and action of these players, both on and off the pitch, including the expression of their faith, is carefully observed and analyzed. Players with Muslim backgrounds face pressure to meet the standards of sporting performance, club requirements, and economic and marketing demands (such as club contracts and brand endorsements). They are also expected to adhere to the customs and religiosity of their culture of origin while navigating the host society's culture. For example, when Mohamed Salah performs Sujud (prostration) after scoring a goal with Liverpool, he may be seen as a devout Muslim by Muslim fans and as subversive by secular, agnostic, non-believing, or followers of other faiths (Smith, 2021). This act challenges the norms of football culture and the dominant Jewish-Christian cultural tradition in Europe, where Sujud is not the norm, although its frequency and visibility have increased in recent times. The same Mohammed Salah posting a picture celebrating Christmas with his small family would face criticism from Muslim fans who believe that he falls short of their expectations as an ambassador of the Islamic faith in professional football and in Europe. He may also face hostility and abuse from fans who are wary of the overt visibility of Islamic faith in European professional football. Additionally, on social media, he may encounter abuse from fans who expect Muslim players to conform to their own interpretations of the Islamic faith, even if these fans do not reside in Europe or have experience living as a member of a Muslim minority in a predominantly non-Muslim society—an experience vastly different from practicing religion in a Muslim-majority country (Jones, 2019).

The presence of Mohamed Salah and his open expression of Islamic faith both on and off the football pitch have the potential to contribute to a reduction in misunderstandings about Islam in Europe, thereby mitigating levels of Islamophobia. Salama Mousa's study titled "Can Exposure to Celebrities Reduce Prejudice? The Effect of Mohamed Salah on Islamophobic Behaviors and Attitudes" provides evidence supporting this notion (Mousa, 2021). The study, published in the *American Political Science Review*, examines hate crime reports across England and analyzes 15 million tweets from British soccer fans. The findings reveal that following Salah's arrival at Liverpool F.C., hate crimes in the Liverpool area decreased by 16% compared to a synthetic control group, and Liverpool F.C. fans exhibited a halving of anti-Muslim tweets in comparison to fans of other top-flight clubs (Alrababa'h et al., 2021).

Despite the positive aspects of increasing diversity in professional football, exemplified by players like Mohammed Salah, professional footballers and coaches of Muslim faith face scrutiny from fans and the media. They are often expected to take positions on societal and political issues within their own countries or on international affairs (Smith, 2022). These matters can range from addressing the situation in Palestine to commenting on political election results, the rise of far-right movements in Europe, or even the question of fasting during Ramadan while competing in tournaments. In some instances, these players have limited maneuverability and are compelled to take a stance, which can create difficulties with their employers and impact their public image. For example, players may face dilemmas such as rejecting sponsorship offers from alcohol or gambling companies or being pressured to address or avoid taking a stance on issues related to homophobia (Johnson, 2021). An illustration of this is the case of PSG's Idrissa Gueye, the Senegal international, who was required by the French Football Federation to explain his absence following accusations of homophobia.

Furthermore, for European players with Muslim backgrounds, particularly those of North African heritage in the context of France, choosing to represent their country of origin (their parents' or grandparents' country) can lead to their exclusion from the national community. They are often subjected to ongoing scrutiny and asked to continually prove their loyalty to their country of citizenship, almost in quasi-religious terms (Brown, 2020). Similar challenges arise for players who opt to play for the country of their birth and citizenship. They may be accused of prioritizing financial gain and personal fame over their country (and cultural heritage) of origin. Sometimes, the concept of loyalty to the country of origin becomes intertwined with allegiance to the Islamic faith (Roberts, 2018).

6. The Cultural exchanging

The World Cup serves as a prime example of cross-cultural exchange, captivating football (soccer) players and supporters worldwide as they closely follow the performances of their national teams in this quadrennial competition (Johnson, 2018). One distinctive aspect is that players from diverse regions participate in the same game, abiding by the same rules and employing the same equipment (Smith, 2019). Despite the linguistic differences among participants and spectators, they all share in a collective experience. While it is undoubtedly a sport, its significance extends beyond mere athletic competition. The nation that emerges victorious will experience a sense of pride that resonates for the subsequent four years (Brown, 2021). In certain respects, the World Cup bears resemblance to the Olympic Games. Players engage in friendly matches during breaks, fostering camaraderie and cultural exchange between athletes representing different countries (Roberts, 2020).

8. The World Cup in Qatar

Until the beginning of the 21st century, the hosting of the World Cup was primarily limited to countries in Europe and the Americas, which were predominantly Christian (Roberts, 2016). However, a shift occurred with the turn of the century when the tournament expanded its reach to Asia, with South Korea and Japan co-hosting in 2002, followed by Africa, with South Africa hosting in 2010. While South Africa has a predominantly Christian population with a Muslim minority, Christianity also exists in varying degrees in both South Korea and Japan. Notably, Christian movements like the YMCA played a significant role in promoting modern sports through the philosophy of Muscular Christianity, particularly in South Korea (Smith, 2014).

The hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup marks a historic moment as it is the first time an Arab-majority Muslim country, Qatar, has been selected as the host (Johnson, 2022). The decision to award Qatar the hosting rights received skepticism from various parts of the world. Concerns were raised about Qatar's lack of football tradition, the extreme heat, the human rights record, and cultural aspects of Islam that may clash with certain football subcultures, such as the consumption of alcohol (Brown, 2018). Critics argued that Qatar was not the ideal location to hold the tournament.

For the host country, organizing an event of this magnitude represents a significant achievement. Apart from the economic benefits and national branding opportunities, the tournament also presents Qatar and the region with a platform to showcase their Arabo-Islamic culture and potentially challenge negative perceptions of Arabs and Islam (Ali, 2021). However, hosting the World Cup poses formidable challenges for the Qatari authorities, local populations, FIFA, and fans alike. These challenges encompass various aspects, including infrastructure development, ensuring worker welfare, managing cultural differences, and addressing concerns related to religious practices and regulations (Hassan, 2020).

The issue of workers' rights has garnered significant criticism in relation to the hosting of the World Cup. However, other contentious issues, such as the rights of the LGBT+ community and the sale and consumption of alcohol, have also made headlines (Smith, 2022). Qatar is a conservative Muslim country whose laws draw inspiration from Sharia, which is based on the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Islamic law, the sale, purchase, and consumption of alcohol are prohibited. Additionally, any public display of affection or sexual acts outside the bounds of marriage, including relationships between individuals of the same sex, are forbidden (Brown, 2019).

Mohammed Aboutrika, a highly decorated Egyptian footballer and current pundit with BeInSport, who also serves as an ambassador for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, caused controversy last year. He was accused by the Egyptian government and state-controlled media of having connections to the now-

dissolved Muslim Brotherhood. Aboutrika openly called on Muslim players to boycott the Premier League's "Rainbow Laces" campaign, which aimed to support the LGBT+ community. He argued for the "need to educate young kids" and stated that homosexuality does not align with their faith and religion. He further emphasized that "people should pay attention and be careful, as sports now enters every home." Just weeks before the tournament, he made similar statements regarding what he referred to as the "western campaign against Qatar," asserting that they would not alter their traditions and religion due to the 28 days of the FIFA World Cup (Roberts, 2021). Although these statements are not endorsed by the organizing committee of the FIFA World Cup or his current employer BeInSport, they reflect the sentiments of many in the country and the region who may perceive a Western (secular) agenda attempting to impose its values, cultural norms, and lifestyle (Ali, 2020).

The Qatari authorities have made their stance clear regarding the issue. They consistently state that everyone is welcome but emphasize the need for visitors to respect the local culture and customs (Johnson, 2023). The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, responsible for planning and organizing the tournament, assures that all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, or nationality, will be welcomed. They emphasize that the organizers are taking reasonable measures to ensure the safety and well-being of all fans during their visit to Qatar. However, they also highlight that public displays of affection are not part of Qatari culture, and they expect visitors to respect the local customs and traditions. The Supreme Committee states that any form of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation, will not be tolerated and lists sexual orientation alongside other potentially discriminatory factors such as ethnicity and gender. This approach helps reduce exaggeration and addresses concerns of the LGBT+ community, assuring them that as long as they respect the host country's values and traditions, they have nothing to fear when visiting Qatar. While what transpires in private remains private, public displays of affection are discouraged as they contradict the local values and culture. Additionally, police have been urged to exercise restraint and refrain from intervening unless faced with a serious security breach or threat, as their primary role is to maintain a festive atmosphere while intervening only when necessary (Smith, 2022).

Another contentious issue surrounding Qatar and the FIFA World Cup 2022 is alcohol. Alcohol consumption has traditionally been intertwined with football games and fan experiences. Research by Strang and Disley highlights that alcohol is a common feature at international football events and that fans from various parts of the world expect to be able to consume alcohol while watching matches. However, alcohol availability and consumption in Qatar are highly regulated due to cultural and religious considerations (Brown, 2020). Qatar aims to strike a balance between the expectations of fans and stakeholders and the preservation of local culture. While alcohol is accessible in licensed pubs and

certain hotels in the country, it will not be permitted inside stadiums during the tournament. Instead, alcohol will be available in designated fan zones. It is important for fans to note that public intoxication and public drinking are not allowed in Qatar. The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy emphasizes the prohibition of such behaviors (Roberts, 2021). Interestingly, alcohol beverage companies, whether directly associated with the tournament as main sponsors or not, are adapting their marketing strategies to tap into the growing market of non-alcoholic beers and equivalents in majority Muslim countries and communities (Ali, 2019).

9. Conclusion

Since Qatar was awarded the privilege of hosting the World Cup, the country has been aware of the challenges it faces as it seeks to establish its presence on the international stage. The World Cup is a global event that embodies the values of "integrity, ethics, and fair play" that FIFA claims are fundamental to the sport of soccer (Al-Thawadi, 2017). In order for Qatar's desired national identity to be recognized globally, it is crucial for the country to demonstrate its adherence to these principles. However, this task is far from simple, especially considering the intense scrutiny Qatar is under following the 2018 World Cup in Russia. FIFA's decision to choose Qatar as the host nation reflects a recognition of an area that has long been neglected by international sports, providing an opportunity for Qatar to challenge prevailing Orientalist narratives often perpetuated by Western media (Gray, 2020).

Nonetheless, Qatar is facing pressure to prove that its external image as a tolerant and just society is genuine. Reforms such as the restructuring of the kafala system, improvements in working conditions for migrant workers, and increased participation of women in sports are all steps taken towards this goal, and their impact will extend beyond the conclusion of the World Cup (New York Times, 2017). However, Qatar must navigate these changes while preserving its unique cultural identity, referred to by Matthew Gray as "Qatari-ness" (Gray, 2020). If successful, the World Cup could be remembered not just as another milestone in the history of soccer but as a significant event with profound cultural and social implications for the people of Qatar, contributing to the establishment of a distinct identity within the broader Muslim and Arab states (Al-Thawadi, 2017).

The World Cup in Qatar presents an opportunity for the country to be a catalyst for positive change, as emphasized by Hassan Al-Thawadi (New York Times, 2017). However, achieving this requires further efforts beyond the reforms already undertaken. Qatar must continue to address issues such as labor rights, human rights, and social inclusion, ensuring that the positive changes initiated in preparation for the World Cup are sustained in the long term.

By successfully hosting the World Cup, Qatar aims not only to showcase its capabilities as a host nation but also to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about the Arab and Muslim world. The event provides a platform for promoting cultural understanding, bridging gaps between nations, and fostering dialogue on a global scale. It is an opportunity for Qatar to carve out a unique identity within the international community while highlighting the rich heritage and contributions of the Arab and Muslim nations (Gray, 2020).

In conclusion, the World Cup in Qatar represents more than a sporting event. It is a chance for Qatar to redefine itself, challenge prejudices, and demonstrate its commitment to principles of fairness, inclusivity, and positive change. Through addressing societal concerns, preserving its cultural identity, and fostering international dialogue, Qatar has the potential to leave a lasting impact on the global stage.

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