



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

وحدة دراسات الخليج والجزيرة العربية
Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit

The Discourse on the Qatar 2022 World Cup

Power, Politics, and Aspiration

16 March 2023

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About the Symposium

The symposium aims to provide a critical analysis of the prominent discourse on the FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar in November-December 2022. It will adopt an approach that deepens the understanding of sport and its intersection with politics, culture, and society. The event represented a fascinating vehicle for the flow of symbols, values, and meanings, in turn, revealing existing power balances in the realm of sport. It also unearthed a rich discourse centred on hopes and aspirations related to the tournament, showing that this World Cup was as much a cultural and intellectual game as it was a sporting one.

There is plenty of rich literature on the study of sport offering theoretical frameworks dedicated to understanding these issues from a range of perspectives, many of which are supported by empirical data. Accordingly, this symposium seeks to continue researching these theoretical frameworks and add to them by examining a new empirical case that is of significance not only because of its unique technical and organizational aspects and unprecedented attendance rates, but also because of the debates it provoked. These debates surrounding the Qatar World Cup are associated with broader political, intellectual, and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the symposium deals with sport as a "revelatory tool" that can be used to acknowledge many complex social issues.

The symposium will explore official and unofficial texts, materials, media, and interactions that preceded and accompanied the tournament that reflected or rejected various types of discourse. These involve the symbolic practices that experts in the field of International Relations read as manifestations of "soft power" and "national branding", two fundamental frameworks that are used to understand the behaviour of a country that is categorized as a "small state" and its objective in organizing such an event. Despite the importance of acknowledging the symbolic and discursive behaviour that reflected these two frameworks, the actual event of the Qatar World Cup and the exchange of ideas surrounding it reveals that the scope of this subject is far broader.

As such, the symposium will go beyond the current literature to explore new dimensions related to the discourse on the World Cup. These dimensions include identity, North-South relationships, eurocentrism and ways to confront it, the post-colonial world, multiculturalism, globalization, small states, and so on.

Outcomes of the Symposium

The ACRPS intends to publish the papers submitted for participation in the symposium in an e-book in Arabic on ACRPS's website.

About the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit

The Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit is a specialized unit dedicated to producing objective knowledge about the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula and the societies therein. The unit holds an annual Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum that provides scholars and policymakers a free and open academic environment to discuss the most pressing issues facing the Arab Peninsula and its societies. The unit also welcomes research and holds symposiums and panels addressing pressing issues in the area from an academic perspective.

Timetable

Thursday, 16 March 2023

9:00-10:00	Registration
10:00-10:15	Opening Remarks
10:15-11:30	Panel One 2022 Qatar World Cup and Questions of Cultural Relativism Moderator: Reem Al-Ansari Richard Giulianotti & Hans Hognestad: Qatar 2022: Fan Ontologies, Soft Power, and Questions of Cultural Relativism Joel Rookwood: Building Soft Power and Avoiding Soft Disempowerment Through Football Mega-Events: Addressing Multiculturalism and Global Culture in Qatar
11:30-11:45	Break
11:45-13:00	Panel Two 2022 Qatar World Cup in the Critical Discourse Moderator: Aicha Elbasri Marc Owen Jones: Reductionism and Orientalism: Ten Years of Media Representation of Qatar's World Cup in the British Press Hichem Akoubache & Mohammed El-Fatih Hamdi: The Campaign against the Qatar World Cup: An Analysis of the French Media Discourse
13:00-14:00	Lunch Break

<p>14:00-15:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Three 2022 Qatar World Cup from Various Positionalities</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Maryam Al-Kuwari</p> <p>Laurent Bonnefoy: Qatar 2022: Competing Narratives in Europe and in the Arab World</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abdulrahman Helali: Qatar 2022 in Religious Discourse</p> <p>Bouchra Zagagh: Qatar 2022 from the Perspective of Arab Digital Networkers</p>
<p>15:30-15:45</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Break</p>
<p>15:45-17:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Four 2022 Qatar World Cup and International Relations Revisited</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Aisha Al-Ammari</p> <p>Simon Chadwick: Discourse on the Qatar World Cup: Sport's New Geopolitical Economy</p> <p>Jan Busse: Regional Power Play: Shifting Political Dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa in the Context of Qatar's World Cup</p>

Participants

Abstracts



Abdulrahman Helali

Associate Professor for the Quran and Sunnah program in the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University. He is a former faculty member of the College of Sharia at Damascus University (2004-2006) and University of Aleppo (2006-2013). He later worked as a Fellow and Visiting Researcher at Freie Universität Berlin and Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (2013-2016), and a Fellow at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (2016-2017). He also served as an Associate Researcher and Lecturer in the department of Islamic Studies at Frankfurt University (2017-2021). He has published several books and articles on Quranic and Islamic studies.

Qatar 2022 in Religious Discourse

This paper traces and analyses the religious discourse that accompanied the World Cup events in Qatar. The 2022 World Cup in Qatar was accompanied by extensive and varied religious activity and discourse, some attempting to invest in the opportunity for *da'wah* (proselytization) and advocacy, and some hailing the Qatari organizational success as an example of religious-Islamist victories that can be rebranded in populist wrapping. These discourses, religious, political, and sporting, were fused together and confined to the religious – whether as evidence of religious victories or defeats. This discourse was reinforced by both mass media and social networks seeking attention and views, exaggerating the reality and even spreading fake news of events that either did not happen at all or were actually scenes from different tournaments. Conversely, alternative voices rejected this religious instrumentalization, seeing the event as merely an opportunity to perform *da'wah*. Others rejected this instrumentalization because populism does not serve religious discourse and others still rejected it for both reasons.



Bouchra Zagagh

Professor of Pedagogical Sociology at the Centre Régional des Métiers de l'Education et de la Formation. She obtained a PhD in Sociology with a dissertation titled "The Youth, the Internet, and the Socio-Political Sphere in Morocco". She is a member of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and the Scientific Committee for the *Digital Links* series at Mohammed V University in Rabat. She has participated in numerous Arab and international academic conferences and has published articles on digital sociology and internet studies.

Qatar 2022 from the Perspective of Arab Digital Networkers

Using the netnography method, this study examines how Arab digital networkers interacted with the Qatar 2022 World Cup and the accompanying forms of the art of presence, whether in the digital space, on-site (at the stadiums), or the hybrid independent space, especially through the presence of influencers, journalists, and administrators of social media groups and pages. This investigation approaches social interactions and the meanings with which networkers imbued them using photos, video clips, livestream events, tweets, blog posts, trends, and other fluid relationships the network provides, serving as a model of what Asef Bayat terms "the art of presence" beginning with the opening ceremony, in reference to the bravery and creativity in affirming the peaceful, civil will of the people and celebrating life. The results of the study show that the events of the World Cup, by merging with digital networks and practices of the collective self, transformed the Cup from a traditional global event ruled by fixed relationships into an online celebration that proposed a different narrative on the Arab self and its humanitarian and religious values.



Hans Hognestad

Social anthropologist and Professor of Sociology of Sport at University of South-Eastern Norway. He is the manager of the research project "Football and Religion in the Middle East" (2021-2026), funded by the Norwegian Research Council. His field of research and publication include studies of football supporter cultures, transnational identities, globalization, stadium architecture, gender and sport, and development and peace.

Qatar 2022: Fan Ontologies, Soft Power, and Questions of Cultural Relativism

This paper explores some of the main political and cultural discourses and debates surrounding the hosting of the 2022 Men's Football World Cup finals by Qatar. Key issues relate to: "fake" and wider transnational fandom at the event, and the potential emergence of new "fan ontologies" (or "ways of being" fans); the North European protest and boycott movements; and, the role of the tournament in promoting Qatar's soft power (notably vis-a-vis latter debates on "sportswashing"). We discuss these issues with reference to theories of (neo-) Orientalism, cultural relativism, and constructivism in international relations. The paper draws on fieldwork and interviews undertaken in Qatar and elsewhere as part of a major Norwegian Research Council-funded project on football and religion; and, on wider analyses of diverse international discourses and debates surrounding the event.



Hichem Akoubache

Professor at the Department of Mass Communication at Qatar University. He has lectured in multiple universities and formerly held the position of Vice President of the Department of Media at an Algerian university. He was also a member of the scientific committee in the same department for several years. He is an editorial assistant for the *Journal of Al-Hikma for Media Studies*, and a member of several academic journals on media. He has published several academic contributions in the field of media and mass communication, most recently a chapter in the collective book *Methods of Research in Mass Communication and Media* [Arabic].

The Campaign against the Qatar World Cup: An Analysis of the French Media Discourse

Before the 2022 World Cup began in Qatar, some French media outlets launched a campaign against the host state. In its attempts to defame the host state, the discourse of this campaign focused on specific issues such as: the environment, Qatar's lack of adherence to certain international norms, worker exploitation in construction projects, freedoms and human rights, and Qatar's refusal to showcase any LGBT symbols. In view of this historic event and the rhetoric of the French media surrounding it, this paper conducts a discourse analysis of samples of relevant French media output. It searches for the motives behind such propagandistic and hostile discourse against Qatar and seeks to understand why the French media spread doubts about the ability of Qatar to organize this international spectacle. The paper also examines the values and ideologies that motivate this discourse, and the cultural and political backgrounds that generated such a fierce campaign against Qatar in the lead up to the event.



Jan Busse

Senior Researcher at the Institute of Political Science of the University of the Bundeswehr Munich, Germany. His research focuses on theories of global political order, as well as on societal and political dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa. He is also interested in the interplay of football and politics. Besides several book publications on these topics, his research appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as *Mediterranean Politics*, *the Journal of International Relations and Development*, *Siyasat Arabiya*, *Global Affairs*, *Middle East Critique*, and *International Political Sociology*.

Regional Power Play: Shifting Political Dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa in the Context of Qatar's World Cup

Proceeding from the premise that football and politics are inevitably interrelated, I argue that the 2022 Qatar World Cup is closely linked to multiple regional political dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Most notably, the tensions between Qatar and neighbouring Arab Gulf monarchies that culminated in the blockade of 2017-2021 have a clear football-related dimension. Equally important, the so-called Abraham Accords which led to the normalization of diplomatic relations between several Arab states and Israel also had repercussions on the football field in multiple respects. Accordingly, based on a practice-theoretical understanding of diplomacy which has gained prominence within International Relations, I address the intricacies of regional power politics and how they played out in the context of the world cup.



Joel Rookwood

Lecturer in Sport Management at University College Dublin, Ireland, and a visiting fellow in Sport Marketing at the University of Vic – Central Catalunya, Spain. He has worked at 15 sports mega-events in various capacities, including at the last six FIFA men's World Cups. He was a global columnist on a Japanese football website for a decade and has written for several media publications. He has produced numerous films amassing a combined 250,000 online views. His research interests include sports mega-events, international development, the football industry, and sports governance, areas in which he has published widely.

Building Soft Power and Avoiding Soft Disempowerment Through Football Mega-Events: Addressing Multiculturalism and Global Culture in Qatar

Qatar has built on its impressive portfolio of mega-event hosting by staging the pinnacle of international sports tournaments: the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup. Many frame such engagements as attempts to influence international audiences and build soft power. The at times divisive world of global sport and international relations can also draw criticism towards host nations. Such critiques have been conceptualised as soft disempowerment. This research adopts a longitudinal approach and examines the perceived lessons learned from hosting two previous competitions – the 2011 Asian Cup and 2019 FIFA Club World Cup – and how these experiences were applied to the staging of the 2022 World Cup. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with international fans and tournament volunteers at each event. The findings address perceptions of Qatar's cultural identity and mega-event hosting, framed through notions of global culture and multiculturalism, revealing key challenges faced and lessons learned through the staging of these events.



Laurent Bonnefoy

Researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) at the Center for International Studies (CERI) at SciencesPo, Paris. Between 2018 and 2021, he was an invited scholar at Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat. He is the editor in chief in *Arabian Humanities*, an open-access multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal focusing on the Arabian Peninsula. He is also a member of the editorial board of *Orient XXI*, an online media which publishes daily articles on the Arab and Muslim worlds in six languages. He mainly focuses on contemporary Yemen in its regional environment. His publications include *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (Hurst, 2012) and *Yemen and the World: Beyond Insecurity* (Hurst, 2018).

Qatar 2022: Competing Narratives in Europe and in the Arab World

The FIFA 2022 World Cup is a fascinating political case study. Before and after it was held in Qatar, it generated antagonistic debates and narratives in the media and among decision makers. This presentation analyses how these debates cannot simply be understood as an opposition between the North and South. Focusing on Europe and the Arab world, the paper highlights how multiple, even competing, narratives have also emerged within each area. Interestingly, these stress a number of internal fault-lines that have rarely been made explicit, linked to multiculturalism, Islam, and gender.



Marc Owen Jones

Associate Professor of Middle East Studies at Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar, where he lectures and researches on digital repression and informational control strategies. He is a non-resident fellow at Democracy for the Arab World Now and the Middle East Council for Global Affairs. He completed his PhD in Government and International Affairs at Durham University, which won the 2016 best thesis award from AGAPS (MESA). His recent work has focused on social media disinformation and harassment in the Middle East, but he has written on media and informational controls, revolutionary cultural production, digital misogyny, and digital propaganda. Among his various publications are two monographs: *Political Repression in Bahrain* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and *Disinformation and Deception in the Middle East* (Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2022).

Reductionism and Orientalism: Ten Years of Media Representation of Qatar's World Cup in the British Press

By analysing thousands of newspaper headlines mentioning Qatar and Russia since 2010, this paper creates a typology of themes and agenda-setting related to Qatar 2022 and attempts to determine how it has been "framed" through the UK media. It finds that Qatar's relevance in the British press is largely framed according to football, and that the tropes are largely negative and grouped around four distinct themes that reflect an un-nuanced and distinctly limited representation of the first Arab World Cup. Conversely, Russia, while attracting negative coverage, did not receive it to the same degree as Qatar. These differences are explained through concepts of news values, Orientalism, and small state politics.



Mohammed El-Fatih Hamdi

Assistant Professor at Qatar University since 2019 and a specialist in Media and Mass Communication. He is the Editor-in-Chief of several international scientific journals specialized in Media and Mass Communication. He has supervised courses on Mass Communication, presented training courses in communication skills and media content-analysis, and supervises programs on social media platforms. He holds a PhD from the University of Algeria. His research interests focus on youth, new media, communication technology, and children and education on the media. He is the (co)author of ten books about media and mass communication and has published extensive research in Arab and international academic journals.

The Campaign against the Qatar World Cup: An Analysis of the French Media Discourse

Before the 2022 World Cup began in Qatar, some French media outlets launched a campaign against the host state. In its attempts to defame the host state, the discourse of this campaign focused on specific issues such as: the environment, Qatar's lack of adherence to certain international norms, worker exploitation in construction projects, freedoms and human rights, and Qatar's refusal to showcase any LGBT symbols. In view of this historic event and the rhetoric of the French media surrounding it, this paper conducts a discourse analysis of samples of relevant French media output. It searches for the motives behind such propagandistic and hostile discourse against Qatar and seeks to understand why the French media spread doubts about the ability of Qatar to organize this international spectacle. The paper also examines the values and ideologies that motivate this discourse, and the cultural and political backgrounds that generated such a fierce campaign against Qatar in the lead up to the event.



Richard Giulianotti

UNESCO Chair in Sport, Physical Activity, and Education for Development, and Professor of Sociology at Loughborough University, UK. He is also Professor II at the University of South-Eastern Norway. He is co-founder and joint Field Chief Editor of the journal *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. He has researched and published widely on sport, development and peace, globalization, mega-events, policing and security, youth, crime and deviance, and migration. He has published over 20 books, and his books and articles have been translated into 15 languages.

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Simon Chadwick

Professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy at Skema Business School in Paris, where he is also a think tank, Publika. He has been a regular visitor to the Gulf for fifteen years and worked with the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy during Qatar's preparations for the World Cup. He undertakes research, writing, consultancy, and advisory work in diverse fields, ranging from marketing and commercial strategy to soft power and diplomacy. His latest book *The Geopolitical Economy of Sport: Power, Politics, Money, and the State* will be published shortly by Routledge.

Discourse on the Qatar World Cup: Sport's New Geopolitical Economy

The 2022 FIFA World Cup epitomized the emergence of a new paradigm: sport as geopolitical economy, which was reflected in the ways in which the tournament was framed across the world. One characteristic of geopolitical economy is the multipolar nature of 21st century sport; hence, for example, as North European nations coalesced ahead of the tournament around their "One Love" armband campaign, the Arab world responded by adopting alternative armbands as a display of support for Palestine. Furthermore, as Qatar sought to project soft power and engage in diplomacy through its hosting of the competition, observers in the Global North alternatively framed Qatari policy and strategy as nothing more than sportswashing. Exploring the narratives of World Cup 2022, this presentation analyses the nature of sport as geopolitical economy, highlighting its key features, and identifying its implications for tournament hosting, sport, and the Gulf region in general.

Moderators

Aicha Elbasri

Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. She earned a PhD in French literature from Savoy University in France and in 2015 received a Ridenhour Prize for Truth-Telling for reporting on UN violations in Darfur. She is a former United Nations diplomat and held several media positions at the UN Department of Global Communications in New York, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Sudan, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) for Arab states. Her research interests include United Nations peacekeeping operations and African studies.

Aisha Al-Ammari

Assistant Professor of Law at Qatar University, College of Law, where she has served in many committees in the same College and participated in many conferences specialized in Law. She majors in Criminal Law and has taught various Criminal Law courses. In 2012, she graduated with an LLB degree from Qatar University, College of Law, and in 2014, she graduated with her LLM degree from George Washington University Law School. In 2019, she received her SJD degree from Case Western Reserve University Law School in Ohio. Her thesis was titled "Anti-Corruption in Qatar: A General Understanding of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption and Its Impacts". She is currently the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at the College of Law, Qatar University. In addition to her published research, .

Maryam Al-Kuwari

Assistant Professor of International Relations at International Affairs Department, Qatar University. She holds a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Exeter and a Master's degree in Middle East Politics from SOAS, University of London. She works as the International Affairs department coordinator and also lectures on Gulf Studies, Culture and Politics, and other subjects. Her research interests are political sociology, state building, and non-state actors in the MENA and the Gulf.

Reem Al-Ansari

Law Professor at Qatar University and certified Lawyer. She received her LLM specialized in international project finance from the University of Michigan and a doctorate in Criminal law from Georgetown Law Center with a focus on anti-money laundry and terrorism financing. She has held several positions including Director of Studies and Research at the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center, where she founded an international peer-reviewed journal, in addition to serving as Director of Research, Development and Innovation Policies at the Qatar Research, Development and Innovation Council at Qatar Foundation. She has published many articles and books on combating corruption and economic crimes.