



East-West Dichotomy

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Abstract: In 2022, Qatar made history by being the first Arab and Muslim country to host the FIFA world cup. During this prestigious soccer competition, Qatar and its organization was the topic of the media all over the world which resulted in many accusations from French, Denmark and Danish media about human right violations and some unusual restrictions. These accusations and comebacks from the Arab world revived the classical East-West dichotomy in real life and especially over the media. On the other hand, the Moroccan team was amongst the finalists which as well as Qatar grabbed the attention of the media. Moroccan team players showed many aspects that are deeply rooted in their culture like family bonds, belonging and their attachment to the Palestinian cause. This article will highlight the effect of the media coverage during the world cup and analyze the reaction of Western media to the controversies that were amplifying throughout that cup concerning Qatar's organization and the Moroccan team.

Keywords: Media coverage, Morocco, Qatar, culture, organization.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media and the array of discussions it has triggered has contributed towards bringing many different issues to lights in which they have never been seen. Feminism. Religious nuances. Racial biases. The gap between developing and developed countries. While all these are hot issues for contention on the internet, one of the most influential and prominent among them is the never-ending battle between the East and the West.

"More Made in America. Less Made in China."
– 26th January, 2023 [1].

"If the Iran Nuclear Deal is revived – our adversaries, Iran, Communist China, Russia,

and North Korea – will be emboldened." – 7th September, 2022 [2].

"Russia just announced new joint military drills with Communist China. Joe Biden must take this seriously. It's time for the U.S. to respond to the New Axis of Evil with strength and resolve." – 29th August, 2022 [3].

These are tweets from the official Twitter handle of Senator Marsha Blackburn, a Republican Senior United States Senator from Tennessee. The media digs go much further. Mike Pompeo, the former U.S. Secretary of State, tweeted via his official Twitter handle;

¹ <https://twitter.com/MarshaBlackburn/status/1618723190288830465?t=1lgc1bfahDTFDZlindIzA&s=19>

² <https://twitter.com/MarshaBlackburn/status/1567318359120699393?t=dfRTy22wjatF03HOdRx-Jw&s=19>

³ <https://twitter.com/MarshaBlackburn/status/1564305536207966208?t=UQ2GNuuQ3LEnfB4WIVov-A&s=19>

"The Chinese Communist Party has been, at the very least, engaging in an economic war with the United States for 40 years. Our military should be prepared to deter them." – **2nd February, 2023** [4].

This tweet elicited a reply from Chen Weihua, a China state-affiliated media handle, as follows;

"US exploits cheap labor and natural resources in developing world but likes to claim it is the victim. Typical of Pompeo's 'we lied we cheated and we stole' philosophy [5]".

The accusatorial tendencies and the tension accompanying the rivalries keep growing to greater heights. In fact, February 3rd 2023 saw a real scare that could metamorphose into a bigger conflict when a Chinese spy balloon the size of three buses was confirmed to have made its way into American airspace and collected intel for days [6]. However, there are three pertinent facts to be established, the first of which is that the scuffles and international clashes are in no way limited to China and the United States of America. As a matter of fact, one of the most cumbersome issues for determination in international politics has been identifying the true scope of the conflict. It is easy enough to place it between the East and the West, but much trickier to identify what territories are actually within each bloc. On this issue, Meštrovic and Stjepan (1994) pertinently observed that the boundaries are more cultural than geographical, which has seen Australia and New Zealand typically grouped in the West despite being geographically in the east, while Islamic nations are, regardless of location, grouped in the Eastern bloc [7]. They noted further that the culture line can be particularly difficult to place in regions of cultural diversity such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose citizens may themselves identify as East or West depending on ethnic or religious background. MacGilchrist and Felicitas further noted that some European scholars define Russia as East, but most agree that it is the West's second complementary part [8]. However, Russia's participation is still shrouded in much volatility, and 21st century tendencies make a case for its presence within the Eastern bloc.

The second essential fact is that the East-West dichotomy, although progressively getting tenser, is in no way a recent concept. The development started to gain speed as the world began to undergo paradigm shifts in the cultural,

technological, and political aspects that led up to where the world is today. However, the concept became a consistent consideration in literature and politics in the 20th century, especially post-WW1.

The third fact, and perhaps the most vital to this paper, is that the East-West dichotomy transcends political and military means. Practically every facet of life has become a potential parameter on the scorecard for both blocs, including trade, international relations, technological advancements, and even sports – which would form the main contention in this paper.

The FIFA World Cup in Qatar

Football statistically constitutes the most watched and loved sport in the world, with fans and leagues boasting major presences in Europe, Africa, the Americas, Australia, and Asia. While the sport has an array of popular and prestigious competitions and traditions, none comes close to the FIFA World Cup. The most watched sporting event on the planet, the FIFA World Cup is a quadrennial national competition that is often held in the summer period of the football calendar. Historically, the FIFA World Cup tournament often found its hosts in the predominantly Western world. Prior to 2022, the only FIFA World Cup hosts outside of the Americas and Europe were Japan/South Korea in 2002 and South Africa in 2010. It could easily be argued that these countries are either non-aligned, or tend towards the Western bloc in values.

Thus, it arguably came as a rude shock to the Western world when the hosting rights of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was awarded to a Qatari-sponsored bid in 2010. This move would have particularly stung the West for two reasons. The first was that the 2022 hosting rights went to the Eastern bloc in Qatar over bids from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and even the United States. The second reason was that the 2018 rights were simultaneously handed over to Russia, considered yet another Eastern rival by many in the West.

The sudden upturn in the FIFA World Cup hosting fortunes triggered a strong backlash from across the Western world. It was not seen as a battle that could have been fought through economic or militarized measures. However, the West sought to capitalize on the perceived moral, cultural, and ethical lapses associated with much of the Eastern

⁴<https://twitter.com/mikepompeo/status/1620923728954630146?t=CKWazMYN-jpEqV0wPoqW1A&s=19>

⁵ https://twitter.com/chenweihua/status/1620971279271739394?t=x6SkjWfHOET_0NxVwKwAgg&s=19

⁶ https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/1621518860196380674?t=Sb_DgSVbZ5lad5yddRruqg&s=19

⁷Meštrovic, Stjepan (1994). *Balkanization of the West: The Confluence of Postmodernism and Postcommunism*. Routledge. p. 61. ISBN 0-203-34464-2.

⁸ MacGilchrist, Felicitas. "Metaphorical politics: Is Russia western?". *Nation in Formation: Inclusion and Exclusion in Central ...*

alignment. And these would be coordinated by the highly efficient battle unit with which the impression was ignited and fanned in the first place – the Western Media.

Publicity Antics by the West

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar very much began immediately after the hosting rights were awarded on December 2, 2010. In the Middle East, it was a victory for their regional pedigree and the gateway for the rest of the world to welcome the Qatari state. As such, work began in earnest to make the World Cup a resounding sporting success.

In the West, conversely, a smear campaign was immediately launched on the host nation. This reaction was keenly observed by Dr. Waiel Awwad, *“The West declared a war on Qatar on December 2, 2010 when FIFA awarded Qatar the rights to host the 2022 World Cup. Since then, the West has spared no effort in tarnishing the image of the small and wealthy Gulf state. It has questioned its morality, practices concerning individual liberty, human rights record, and so on... [9]”*

Many allegations started flying subtly and expressly around Western media, chief of which was the linkage of large-scale corruption in FIFA to the Qatari World Cup bid. Several officials connected to the bid in some way were accused of having a hand in the corruption scandal that rocked the football governing body in 2011.

“In May 2011, allegations of corruption within the FIFA senior officials raised questions over the legitimacy of the World Cup being held in Qatar. According to then vice-president Jack Warner, an email has been publicized about the possibility that Qatar 'bought' the 2022 World Cup through bribery via Mohammed bin Hammam who was president of the Asian Football Confederation at the time.” – Wikipedia [10].

The story quickly gained much traction across Western media outlets, such as The Guardian and BBC News [11]. The then-President of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, rather suspiciously admitted to Swiss media that awarding the 2022 World Cup hosting rights to Qatar was a mistake [12]. He cited a variety of reasons,

including concerns over facilities, the country's size, and the climate; despite the fact that he had vehemently defended the decision and tried to allay these fears. Additionally, Theo Zwazinger, a FIFA Executive Committee member, was widely reported by Western media to have conceded that the world football governing body erred in awarding the hosting rights to Qatar. He was quoted by Swiss news outlet, RTE Sport, to have said,

“Changing the World Cup to the winter is going deep into the structures of European national federations and also amateur football in Germany... A change in playing schedules does not only affect the Bundesliga but continues affecting lower divisions due to the link with promotion and relegation. The game pyramid is in danger and so is the unity of German football [13].”

On the 14th of March, 2014, English news outlets extensively reported on the British Parliament's sentiments that Qatar be stripped of the hosting rights due to what was alleged to have been a highly corrupt bidding process. This chain of attacks was spearheaded by The Telegraph, with the news outlet being the first to report that “the former vice-president of FIFA, appears to have been personally paid \$1.2 million (£720,000) from a company controlled by a former Qatari football official shortly after the decision to award the country the tournament [14].” Other outlets, such as The Sunday Times, also claimed to have acquired damaging emails and documentation of corruption involving key figures in the bidding process [15].

The pressure mounted by the media and other personalities across the West led FIFA to appoint an Independent Ethics Investigator in the person of Michael Garcia, who submitted a 430-page report detailing the findings of his investigation of the entire bidding process involving Russia and Qatar – the two Eastern countries. A German judge, Hans Joachim Eckert, was then appointed to adjudicate on the findings of the report. He concluded that Russia and Qatar were absolved of the allegations of wrongdoing in winning the hosting rights, a decision that did not sit well with Garcia. The original report was fully published by FIFA in 2017, and the push for a reopening of the bidding process was effectively

⁹ https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/international/fifa-world-cup-2022-why-the-west-must-stop-hypocrisy-of-bashing-qatar-weekender_story-238750

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_2022_FIFA_World_Cup_controversies

¹¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/13592684.stm>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/may/16/sepp-blatter-qatar-2022-world-cup-mistake>

¹³ <https://www.rte.ie/sport/soccer/international/2013/0724/464396-qatar-world-cup-a-mistake-fifa-executive/>

¹⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/10706977/World-Cup-2022-investigation-demands-to-strip-Qatar-of-2020-World-Cup.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/27652181>

defeated as the report failed to definitively prove those allegations.

However, this did not deter the Western media from continuing with its crusade against the Eastern hosts. The 2018 FIFA World Cup had many negative projections in the media, regardless of the fact that it was hugely successful. Media campaigns against Qatar continued, but gathered an unprecedented intensity in 2022. Several news outlets, media personalities, and social media handles became increasingly critical of the circumstances surrounding the FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

One of the main points of Qatari criticism came in the form of human rights abuses in the Gulf state. Human Rights Watch, a media outlet based in the United States, had conducted several inquiries into human rights development in the country over a number of years [16]. They registered concerns over the alleged deplorable working conditions of migrants building infrastructure for the World Cup, as well as the lack of adequate compensation for them and their families. Additionally, there was no guarantee for LGBT rights in Qatar. This is ordinarily not a surprising fixture in Eastern culture, particularly in Muslim states. However, the Western world deemed it unacceptable and inconsistent with the changing times, particularly when millions of football fans would be attending the showpiece event. Women's rights were also called into question on the premises of prohibition of extramarital sex, male permission for access to some basic rights, and strictly marital access to sexual healthcare. Furthermore, concerns were also expressed on legal clampdowns on press freedom and overall freedom of expression in Qatar. These issues were widely reported on across Western social and news media, such as the Human Rights Watch's "Qatar: Rights Abuses Stain FIFA World Cup" article [17], Bleacher Report's "Qatar Accused of Human Rights Violations in Preparation for 2022 World Cup" piece [18], and Amnesty International's "Qatar: Six things you need to know about the hosts of the 2022 FIFA World Cup" report [19].

Issues also arose from concerns over Qatar's climate. The desert state's searing heat made it impractical for the World Cup to hold in the summer as customary, with the FIFA Executive Committee eventually deciding to move the tournament to

November 2022. This was widely greeted with criticism and opposition from European and American quarters, with concerns over the disruption of local leagues. Many opinionated media releases came from Western officials like Zwazinger in 2011 and news outlets, such as The Insider's December 2021 article titled, "Qatar 2022 Poses Problems for the Calendar" [20].

Qatar's supposed unwillingness to go carbon-neutral was also cited as a deficit. Being a major oil-producing state, Qatar's energy comes predominantly from fossil fuels. The country had been heavily criticized for having the highest per capita carbon emissions globally, and the number would skyrocket with the energy needed to construct and host the World Cup successfully.

These issues, and several others like the restrictions on alcohol consumption in the country, dragged on for months and years prior to the event-proper, with the media playing a leading role in the sponsoring and coverage of the Western antics. As a matter of fact, calls were spearheaded throughout Norwegian and German media for the showpiece event to be boycotted by teams and fans alike. Many cities in France, including Paris, boycotted the customary establishment of fan zones and the overall broadcasting of the World Cup. And with the much-opposed tournament arriving in November 2022, the role of the Western media was far from over.

Media Coverage of the Tournament

The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup was always going to be put under the microscope. Not only was it to the biggest sporting event ever put together, it was also undoubtedly the most controversial of its kind. The full media coverage thus began in earnest in November 2022, with a myriad of issues eliciting unsurprising criticism from the Western Media.

One Love Armbands

In the midst of all the other media battles before the tournament officially started, another significant fire was ignited by the West. The national team captains of 7 different World Cup countries – England, Wales, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark – had resolved to wear rainbow-colored captain armbands with a "One Love" inscription to show support for the LGBTQ Community. The Western media was agog

¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup>

¹⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup>

¹⁸ <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1854355-qatar-accused-of-human-rights-violations-in-preparation-for-2022-world-cup>

¹⁹<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/qatar-six-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-hosts-of-the-2022-fifa-world-cup/>

²⁰ <https://www.scribd.com/article/549358563/Qatar-2022-Poses-Problems-For-The-Calendar>

with reports and opinions celebrating the decision of the countries and their bravery to stand up to what is seen as Qatari oppression. The plan was eventually shelved on the eve of the tournament due to FIFA threatening to sanction the players [²¹]. A new uniform armband was launched by the football governing body which each captain was mandated to wear for the duration of the World Cup. It sparked an unsurprising outrage in the West as opposed to the cheers from the Middle East. French media outlet, Le Monde, released in an article titled “World Cup 2022: Sporting the armband of discord”,

“While it describes itself as ‘an inclusive organization and supports all legitimate causes, such as ‘One Love,’ FIFA has not caved to the requests made since September by the seven European nations for exceptions, nor to the pressure of public opinion, which has increased as this controversial World Cup approaches. In fact, its president, Gianni Infantino, is at odds with the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), which approved this armband for the League of Nations matches in September [22].”

This move by FIFA led to a number of other media incidents, with two particularly standing out. The first was the open protest by German players, who took their team photo in their match against with their mouths covered – a symbol campaigning against having their voices suppressed. Posting the picture on their official media handles, the national team accompanied it with a message;

“With our captain’s armband, we wanted to set an example for values that we live in the national team: diversity and mutual respect. Be loud together with other nations. This is not about a political message: human rights are non-negotiable. That should go without saying. But unfortunately it still isn’t. That is why this message is so important to us. Banning us from the bandage is like banning our mouths. Our stance stands [23].”

²¹ <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/seven-european-world-cup-captains-ditch-onelove-arm-band-following-fifa-pressure-2022-11-21/>

²² https://www.lemonde.fr/en/football/article/2022/11/22/world-cup-2022-sporting-the-armband-of-discord_6005228_130.html

²³ <https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/football/world-cup-germany-players-cover-mouths-in-team-photo-in-match-against-japan-8285794/>

²⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-soccer-journalist-grant-wahl-died-aortic-aneurysm-covering-world-cu-rcna61527>

²⁵ <https://www.marca.com/en/world-cup/2022/12/12/6396c427e2704ec46a8b457d.html>

This gesture was widely celebrated across the West, with the post garnering over 25,000 likes and 5,000 retweets on Twitter.

Grant Wahl’s Death and Press Intimidation

The second standout reaction to FIFA’s move was the decision of Grant Wahl, a renowned American soccer journalist and critic of the World Cup hosting decision, to seize the initiative and attend a match with a rainbow-colored shirt. He was detained for up to 25 minutes alongside another person and reportedly told to change his shirt. This event gained some attention in the media, but the outrage became much more pronounced when he sadly passed away a few days later. He was reported to have been died from an aortic aneurysm [²⁴], but many social and news media outlets theorized that he was murdered by Qatari officials. This theory gained so much traction that Wahl’s brother had to release a statement debunking the rumors [²⁵]. Subsequently, many other allegations of interference and intimidation by Qatari security agents against the press were reported and publicized all over the West [²⁶].

Opening Ceremony Backlash

The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup opening ceremony was marred by Western interference. Many celebrities and public figures, such as Dua Lipa and Rod Stewart, rejected Qatar’s advances to grace the ceremony. Those that did were heavily criticized and badgered by Western media, including David Beckham – who happened to be Qatari football’s ambassador. Nicki Minaj faced heavy backlash from social media, as well as news outlets like Metro [²⁷] and Vibe [²⁸]. Muluma – the Colombian artiste that recorded the World Cup anthem with Nicki Minaj and Myriam Fares – stormed out of an interview with KAN News, an Israeli media outlet, after being accused of whitewashing Qatar’s human rights abuses [²⁹]. Morgan Freeman was also heavily criticized by Western media for making an appearance at the opening ceremony.

²⁶ <https://www.news.com.au/sport/football/world-cup/qatar-officials-shut-down-tv-broadcast-as-presenter-interviews-disabled-fan-in-wheelchair/news-story/6eacd147160670c291d5e93da88dcc0b>

²⁷ <https://metro.co.uk/2022/11/16/nicki-minaj-faces-backlash-for-qatar-world-cup-song-17772339/>

²⁸ <https://www.vibe.com/music/music-news/nicki-minaj-qatar-world-cup-song-backlash-1234711455/>

²⁹ <https://www.nme.com/news/music/world-cup-anthem-singer-maluma-walks-out-of-interview-after-accusations-of-whitewashing-qatar-human-rights-abuses-3352775>

"What on earth is Morgan Freeman doing bigging up Qatar? Making a few dollars, probably (though no word on the exact size of the fee) and burnishing his own slightly challenged reputation (there were allegations of sexual harassment in 2018)." – The Independent [30].

Fan Controversies

Another campaign that gained widespread traction in the Western media was the supposed whitewashing of Qatar's image by hiring "professional fans". The New York Times reported on Qatar's fan sponsorship scheme, which promised to pay a wide range of expenses for selected fans. The catch was that the fans were required to sing and chant whenever they were asked to, and were to also be on the lookout for criticisms against the Qatari government [31]. Other allegations included hiring actors to fill up World Cup stadiums to improve the country's image [32], and paying fan groups to dress up and attend games as fans of the Qatari national team [33].

Reports also emerged days into the tournament of challenges faced by foreign fans attending the World Cup. Complaints involved below-par lodgings [34], substandard amenities [35], and exorbitantly-priced food and drink, among others; which the hosts acknowledged and offered refunds to affected parties [36]. Fans also reported an array of ticketing issues [37], a fault that was predominantly attributed to a malfunction of the FIFA ticketing app. Religious and ethnic tensions also came to a boil between Arab and Jewish fans, with the Arabs demonstrating their support for Palestine [38]. Israeli media reported cases of alleged discrimination against Jewish fans [39], with the Qatari government also being accused in Western media for reneging on its promises to ensure the safety and welfare of Israeli nationals [40].

³⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/morgan-freeman-fifa-world-cup-qatar-b2231954.html>

³¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/03/sports/soccer/qatar-fans-travel.html>

³² <https://www.express.co.uk/sport/football/1695808/Qatar-World-Cup-fans-paid-actors-England-Brazil-Doha-dancing-party>

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/28/sports/soccer/world-cup-fans-qatar-ultras.html>

³⁴ <https://mashable.com/article/world-cup-qatar-viral-disaster>

³⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/nov/18/world-cup-accommodation-site-unfinished-with-abandoned-trucks>

The Final Attack

The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup eventually came to a close with the Final, which was a breathtaking matchup between Argentina and France. The *Albiceleste* of Argentina came out on top in the fixture, winning 4-2 on penalties after a 3-3 tie at the end of 120 minutes of play. It was their third victory at the World Cup Finals, and it was perhaps the most symbolic as the missing piece in the legendary Lionel Messi's trophy cabinet. After the award of medals and honors, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, cloaked Messi in a *bisht*. This was very badly received in the Western media, with numerous journalists, news outlets, and observers believing it was merely a way for the hosts to make the historic moment all about themselves. Laurie Whitwell, a journalist with The Athletic, commented,

"Qatar obviously wanted to be present in the World Cup trophy pictures, hence putting that black bisht on Messi. But just made for a weird, unnecessary look amid a sea of blue + white sporting shirts. It should be a moment for the players, not the host. Grossly indulgent."

A popular Liverpool Football Club fan, James Pearce, also tweeted;

"Longest wait for a trophy lift ever and they did their best to ruin it. Why cover up Messi's shirt with that? Ridiculous. Glad he's now ditched it,"

Many more reactions trailed the gesture from Qatar's Emir, and the post-match incident involving a celebrity chef. Nusret Gokce, popularly known as Salt Bae, stirred much ire when he went on the pitch during Argentina's celebrations to take pictures with the players. He also took pictures with the medals, biting them and holding the World Cup trophy [41]. The hosts and FIFA President, Gianni Infantino were blamed for the intrusion, with allegations that he was allowed because he had a personal relationship with Infantino or he had paid

³⁶ <https://au.news.yahoo.com/world-cup-officials-offer-full-refunds-and-free-accommodation-to-disgruntled-fans-114119310.html>

³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/live/2022/dec/06/morocco-v-spain-world-cup-2022-last-16-live-score-updates?page=with:block-638f56ca8f08cb34a8f54573#block-638f56ca8f08cb34a8f54573>

³⁸ <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-724202>

³⁹ <https://www.foxnews.com/world/israel-urges-citizens-downplay-their-israeli-identity-qatar-world-cup-their-own-security>

⁴⁰ <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-722891>

⁴¹ <https://www.usanetwork.com/usa-insider/why-was-salt-bae-holding-world-cup-trophy-posing-with-messi>

off the organizers. Much was made of his conduct, despite Rihanna also taking pictures with the German players and holding the World Cup trophy after the Brazil 2014 World Cup Final. The publicity was extensive and predominantly negative – a consistent underlying theme of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup from the coffers of the Western Media.

Morocco's Story

Amidst all the controversy Qatar's hosting whipped up in the middle of the tournament, there was a silent but not-so-subtle media battle being fought against another Arab country situated in Africa. Prior to the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup, Morocco was far from being a global footballing powerhouse. Quite accurately, they were barely just finding their place among the more decent teams in Africa. The emergence of popular stars in Europe, such as Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech and Paris Saint Germain's Achraf Hakimi, gave the Moroccan national team some much-needed pedigree in their search for sporting glory. After national team captain Hakim Ziyech's public fallout with the coach, Vahid Halilodzic, the team suffered a rather underwhelming run of form. Subsequently, former right back for the national team, Walid Regragui, was appointed to lead Morocco to the World Cup.

Having been placed in what was tagged a most difficult group with two of the tournament's favorites, Morocco started the tournament with a goalless tie against the 2018 World Cup runners up, Croatia. They went ahead to record a surprisingly dominant victory over Belgium, before winning 2-1 against Canada, securing an automatic slot in the next round as the group leaders. They battled to a goalless draw against favorites Spain in the Round of 16, qualifying for the quarter-finals on penalties and becoming the first Arab nation to do so in the process. They then recorded a shocking victory over another of the tournament's favorites, becoming the first Arab and African country to ever make a World Cup semi-final by knocking out the legendary Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal team. Their advance was cut short when France defeated them 2-0 in the semi-final tie, and they lost the third-place play-off by two goals to one against Croatia. Morocco's fairytale World Cup run was celebrated across the African and Arab world as a testament to yet another step towards the pinnacle of sport. As phrased by Anadolu Agency,

"Morocco's success has united the African, Arab, and Muslim worlds. The country got support from as high up as the offices of the Senegalese and Nigerian presidents to the

streets of Jerusalem, Gaza, and Baghdad. In Türkiye, the Moroccan victory against Portugal was celebrated as a success against the "colonialists" with chants rising in the air for the North African side [42]."

These plaudits led Regragui to state at the pre-match conference of their match against France,

"We want to make history for Africa, for the Maghreb, as well as for our Algerian, Tunisian and Egyptian brothers."

However, many quarters of the Western media was less-than-enchanted by Morocco's headline-making traditions and performances at the tournament. Many European football pundits and journalists heavily criticized Morocco conservative style of play, as opposed to the flamboyant and possession-based style of Western football. The extensive question marks over Morocco's performances led Regragui to comment at an interview,

"We'll play the way we know how. How possession makes you dream so much! 70% possession to shoot twice on goal? I'm going to tell Infantino to give a point to teams with more than 60% possession... We are here to win, not to have possession. If they give it to us then fine, we'll see and we'll do whatever it takes not to get beat. I don't think they will let us have possession. Manchester City have 70%, but have you seen the players they have? With Kevin de Bruyne and Bernardo Silva you're going to have the ball... They talk about tiki-taka, when you have players who can do that it's fine. I know that the Europeans criticize our game. We have to win for Africa, for the countries that are evolving. There is not just one style. Look at France against England, less possession but they won [43]."

Yet another criticism that the Moroccan team faced in Western media was their apparent projection of the admiration they had for their mothers. Most of the players, including Regragui himself, were accompanied to the stadiums by their mothers. They also never hesitated to celebrate with their mothers, constantly going up into the stands to kiss their heads and bow to them [44]. This conduct did not go down well with sections of the Western media. Rosanne Hertzberger – a columnist with the Dutch news outlet, NRC – wrote an article in response to the Moroccan displays titled "Stop met het verheerlijken van moeders", or "Stop glorifying

⁴² <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/opinion-political-dimension-of-moroccos-success-in-world-cup/2771918#>

⁴³ <https://www.marca.com/en/world-cup/2022/12/13/6398742822601d0c178b4591.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.siasat.com/mothers-of-moroccan-players-steal-spotlight-in-world-cup-qatar-2022-2477169/>

mothers [45]". A Danish news outlet, TV 2 News, also made a direct comparison between the relationships the Moroccan players share with their mothers and monkeys' maternal ties [46]. In a live broadcast, the program host Soren Lippert displayed a picture of monkeys cuddling while discussing how the Moroccan national team players hugged their mothers.

Counter Attacks by the East

The Western coverage of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup reflected the bloc's sentiments against the East in many ways. Its criticisms of Qatar. The attacks on the Moroccan playing style and maternal relationships. The whiplashes at Russia for the Ukraine invasion. The thinly-veiled jibes at Iran. So many of these themes dominated the Western commentary. However, the Eastern media reciprocated in droves.

Dr. Waiel Waddad's column in the Outlook Weekender is a fine example of such. In his article titled "FIFA World Cup 2022: Why the West Must Stop Hypocrisy of Bashing Qatar" [47], he not only examines the criticisms, but also points out the corresponding deficiencies of the West. He commented,

"It is the same Western world, which rewarded Qatar for its role in the Arab Spring, which is now opposing its hosting of the World Cup, perhaps to deflect attention from its own misdeeds in the Middle East and North African region... Football history is full of cases where several so-called developed nations were guilty of corrupt practices, not just while bidding for tournaments but also in terms of match-fixing in their domestic leagues... Coming to the deaths of immigrant labourers and their harsh working conditions, well, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are more than 50 million people engaged in "modern slavery". Qatar at least amended their labour laws and extended help to workers... Where lack of personal freedoms and human rights abuse are concerned, many of the business partners of the West are guilty of them. Will the West stop doing business with them? No. The truth is that no nation's cupboard is empty of human skeletons... Drinking is banned in Qatar, but for the World Cup, Qatar allowed

alcohol consumption in designated areas. Though FIFA later banned the sale of alcohol. Same sex relationships are not allowed either but, here too, an accommodation has been made. LGBT couples cannot parade their affection in public and disrespect local traditions, but they are allowed to stay together in hotel rooms in Qatar."

Arab News also hit back at the Western media backlash with an article titled "Western media mocks Messi for wearing honorary Bisht, downplays Martinez's obscene Golden Glove gesture" [48]; which detailed the many attacks the host country suffered over the bisht gesture and pointed out the apparent vilification.

Hassan Al-Thawadi, the chief of the World Cup planning committee, also called out BBC's coverage of the tournament and some of its reporting on the controversies in the build-up. In an interview with TalkSPORT [49], he said;

"Unfortunately, I've seen some of the coverage that seems to be kind of pushing towards that stereotype of the Middle East. I'll give an example: the Iran-Wales game. Iran played very good – would you say so? They were the better team, up until the 95th or 96 minute, right? And, yet, the coverage that we saw, for example, on BBC, by Jurgen Klinsmann, talking about how it's part of their culture, and reflecting the players in a way that was – I hate using the word but I will use only once just because I don't ever want to give power to the word – very, very elitist, very orientalist, very racist to a certain extent. When you're sitting down looking at what was happening and you're saying, 'That's part of their culture', what do you mean by that? Was it misunderstood or was it was a reflection he was representing a culture in a very negative way?"

He also referred to pundits, Gary Lineker and Roy Keane, in his interview,

"When it comes to statements that come out, for example, from Roy or from Gary, or whoever else it is, there was no engagement. The sad part, for example, for me: Gary Lineker, as I was growing up, I looked up to him... it's very disappointing that Gary never

⁴⁵ <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/12/24/stop-met-het-verheerlijken-van-moeders-a4152496>

⁴⁶ <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2022/12/353091/danish-tv-2-apologizes-for-racist-remarks-against-moroccos-national-team>

⁴⁷ https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/international/fifa-world-cup-2022-why-the-west-must-stop-hypocrisy-of-bashing-qatar-weekender_story-238750

⁴⁸ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2218771/media>

⁴⁹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/qatari-world-cup-chief-accuses-the-bbc-of-very-racist-coverage-36kcwxxcl>

bothered to engage, and I say it openly. He never bothered to engage. We reached out. We reached out many times. In February, we reached out over three or four times, specifically requesting to engage with Gary, to sit down and say, 'We understand your position. Give us the opportunity to put our case in front. At least hear us out. If you don't agree then, that's fine, that's your decision, and that's your judgement. But we never got the chance. There was never the desire to listen to our part of the story. The reality is, a lot of the coverage that's come out there, the way the BBC covered the opening ceremony, the way Gary Lineker took three minutes, they never bothered to do that with any other tournament. They never bothered to listen to the other side, or at least present a balanced view to be able to sit down and move forward. So there are definitely agendas that are presented very clearly that are beyond football.'

In response to Al-Thawadi's statement, Gary Lineker and his team denied turning down a chance to hear from the organizers. However, The Telegraph was able to obtain emails that showed Al-Thawadi making efforts to put meetings in place.

The Daily Sabah also released a critical piece titled, "World Cup 2022: Massive hypocrisy of the West toward Qatar", in which it alleged that "the history of the World Cup reflects the imperialist perception of the West" and that the Western media was unduly critical of Qatar [50]. The article read;

"The Western media has also been criticizing Qatar for restricting human rights, such as the ban on the purchase of alcoholic beverages at the stadiums and the ban on the use of LGBT signs by players during the matches. Although the ban was limited to the stadiums, the Western media has shown that it was/is a general ban. The Western media and politicians have made many statements disrespecting the religious and cultural values of the Qatari state and its people. Many Western politicians and media outlets have been trying to impose their values on the Qataris... The Western reaction and criticism reflect double standards and an imperialist perspective... whenever a Western state takes action, it is considered rational and welcomes it. However, whenever a Muslim or Arab state takes an action, it is regarded as irrational

and criticized. Thus, they still claim the Orientalist perspective and continue to belittle non-Western peoples, i.e., Muslims and Arabs. Within this context, the criticism of German football players before a match and the action of the German minister breaking the rules set by Qatar and FIFA were childish and shallow reactions."

Victor and Vanquished

The media exchanges between the West and the East over the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup have been much explored. However, the million-dollar question here remains who exactly came out on top of everything. The truth is that there are no victors and no vanquished. As the media battle over the World Cup began over a decade before the event itself, it is of no doubt that the controversies and allegations will not die very easily.

But until when the raging war between the Eastern and Western Worlds will end, it is safe to say that Qatar has seen the biggest gains so far in this battle. According to the SSBM Geneva [51], financial analysts estimate Qatar's GDP to rise by 4.1% by the end of this 2022 thanks to the World Cup. And between 2022 and 2030, the GDP of the region will be at an average of 3.2%. Additionally, the publicity Qatar got from the World Cup is unprecedented. Viewership numbers soared compared to the 2018 World Cup in Russia, recording over 88 million views more for the final. On the cultural side of things, many fans testified to having a sublime experience at the World Cup, and Gianni Infantino described it as the best ever World Cup.

All in all, it could be said that the Western media coverage of the World Cup was merely a ploy to launch a scathing attack on the image of the East. It may have worked to an extent in its own way, but the overall sentiment is still appearing to be that Qatar – and the East by extension – has recorded a major win over the West.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the media gymnastics that remained a constant fixture at the Qatar 2022 World Cup, the tournament went on to deliver some of the best memories in the FIFA World Cup gallery. It will live long in the memory of not just the hosts or the eventual winners, but every stakeholder of the footballing world.

⁵⁰ <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/world-cup-2022-massive-hypocrisy-of-the-west-toward-qatar>

⁵¹ [https://www.ssbm.ch/blog/is-the-fifa-world-cup-2022-in-qatar-](https://www.ssbm.ch/blog/is-the-fifa-world-cup-2022-in-qatar-profitable/#:~:text=According%20to%20several%20reports%2C%20financial,at%20an%20average%20of%203.2%25)

profitable/#:~:text=According%20to%20several%20reports%2C%20financial,at%20an%20average%20of%203.2%25

However, the West was never going to let an opportunity slide. More eyes on Qatar meant a better opportunity to scrutinize their 'evils', and they did so without holding back. The Western coverage of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup reflected the bloc's sentiments against the East in many ways. Its criticisms of Qatar. The attacks on the Moroccan playing style and maternal relationships. The whiplashes at Russia for the Ukraine invasion. The thinly-veiled jibes at Iran. So many of these themes dominated the Western commentary. They may have been harsh, unjustified to an extent, and even downright hypocritical; but they worked in their own way. The East, especially the Middle East, was put in the spotlight like never before. They were forced to consider concessions that were once considered improbable, and it could well be argued that significant progress was made with respect to several pivotal social and political issues in the region.

Similarly, the Arabian world refused to cower before the destructive might of the Western media, and made strides in shedding more light on the more positive aspects to them – aspects that often get lost in all the rancor and propaganda in and around. The next FIFA World Cup in 2026 is to be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico – a reversion back to the core West. With that, it becomes certain that the East-West media exchanges at the World Cup level are only just beginning.

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