

ORIENTALISM IN SPORT: ANALYZING THE WESTERN REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM AT FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR 2022

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Abstract

This article aims to critically read orientalism as a tool to represent the East and Islam at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The article argues that sport, in this case football, which is often considered neutral from interests as it has been used by the United Nations (UN) as a means to campaign for growth and peace in 2013, now faces several challenges in the form of biased Western interests towards the Eastern world, and what happened at the 2022 Qatar World Cup is a clear illustration of this conflict of interest. By utilizing virtual ethnography, and case study methods, this article finds that: first, the narrative of orientalism is still strong and even spreads to all realms of life, including sports. Second: more than a conflict of political interests, what happened in the Qatar World Cup was actually a clash of values that had been going on for a long time. Thirdly, Western media plays an important role in representing the image of the East and Islam in a biased way in covering what happened at the Qatar 2022 World Cup.

Keywords: *Orientalism, Sport, Representation, World Cup Qatar 2022*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membaca secara kritis orientalisme sebagai alat untuk merepresentasikan Timur dan Islam pada Piala Dunia 2022 di Qatar. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa olahraga, dalam hal ini sepak bola, yang sering dianggap netral dari kepentingan karena telah digunakan oleh Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa (PBB) sebagai sarana untuk mengampanyekan pertumbuhan dan perdamaian pada tahun 2013, kini menghadapi berbagai tantangan berupa bias kepentingan Barat terhadap dunia Timur. Apa yang terjadi pada Piala Dunia 2022 di Qatar merupakan ilustrasi yang jelas dari konflik kepentingan ini. Dengan menggunakan etnografi virtual dan metode studi kasus, artikel ini menemukan bahwa: pertama, narasi orientalisme masih kuat dan bahkan menyebar ke seluruh ranah kehidupan, termasuk olahraga. Kedua, lebih dari sekadar konflik kepentingan politik, apa yang terjadi pada Piala Dunia Qatar sebenarnya adalah benturan nilai yang telah berlangsung lama. Ketiga, media Barat memainkan peran penting dalam merepresentasikan citra Timur dan Islam secara bias dalam peliputan peristiwa di Piala Dunia Qatar 2022.

Kata Kunci: Orientalisme, Olahraga, Representasi, Piala Dunia Qatar 2022

Introduction

Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, questions and discussions about the relationship between Islam and the West have suddenly sprung up everywhere. The West, as the subject, has suddenly paid excessive attention through its research centers to study phenomena such as "Islamism", "terrorism", and "radicalism", as the military operations of the United States and its allies have changed the political map of the Middle East so that biases against these interests continue to have an impact on various things including the world of sports.

Mahfud Amara, in his post-9/11 study *Sport and Muslims or Muslims in Sport* (2017), was perhaps among the first to note this peculiar phenomenon. His years of observation show that Islamic expressions in European sport, such as the hijab and fasting, in Western media raise suspicions of a covert Islamization project, as well as propaganda aimed at protecting Western democratic values and pluralism. No doubt, athletes are often portrayed as other, strange and incompetent¹.

What the Western media do is the very essence of orientalism, when it tends to cover the dominant in a normal, neutral manner, but when it comes to the language, norms, culture, and even the dress of the minority group on the sports field their portrayal seems strange, odd, and different. As Edward Said explained, orientalism is an ontological and epistemological distinction between "East and West"² with the West as the subject and Islam, an essential part of Eastern identity, as the other.

The bias is increasingly realized and has begun to be challenged occasionally by campaigning for sports to become a medium for civilizational dialogue, cultural exchange, and peace campaigns. One can find this in the role of the United Nations General Assembly in passing a resolution in 2003 to support the use of sport as a tool for development and peacebuilding (SDP) until 2017 when the official office was officially opened³.

¹ Mahfud Amara, "Sport and Muslims or Muslims in Sport, Post-9/11," in *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Race and Ethnicity*, ed. John Nauright and David K. Wiggins (London: Routledge, 2016). 244-245.

² Patrick Ferrucci and Gregory Perreault, "God and Sport: Orientalism in Sports Illustrated Coverage of Religion," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2018): 371-86, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.7.2.371_1.

³ United Nations (UN), "General Assembly of the United Nations," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/62/plenary/sport/bkg.shtml>.

Likewise, FIFA, as the umbrella of the world football organization, since December 2022, has made the hashtag "no discrimination" its primary campaign. As the principle is recorded in article 4 of the FIFA regulations, "Discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of persons because of race, ethnicity, national or social origin, gender, disability, religion, political opinion or property, birth or sexual orientation is strictly prohibited"⁴.

But regardless of the strength of the resolution or the campaign, the Qatar 2022 World Cup, as the first Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim-majority country to host it, has shown just how difficult sports neutrality can be. Ever since the Ukraine war, with Western countries, in this case, the United States and its allies, openly protesting on the pitch against Russia, and FIFA even joining in by sanctioning Russia by excluding it from the World Cup, football has been questionably politically neutral.

Previous research by Carola Richter and Abdulrahman M. Al-Shami, argued that Qatari media during the 2022 FIFA World Cup aimed to construct an Arab, Global Southern, and Islamic 'us' against the 'West', while also deconstructing western hypocrisy, with different strategies depending on the target audience⁵. In contrast, this research will analyze the extent to which orientalism took its role in the Qatar 2022 World Cup. Therefore, this research will focus on the Western perspective, not Qatar's, as the previous study has already addressed it.

Sport, particularly football, has often been regarded as a neutral and unifying medium, exemplified by its use by the United Nations (UN) in 2013 to promote global growth and peace. However, this idealized perception of neutrality is increasingly challenged by the infusion of geopolitical biases, especially from Western nations toward the Eastern world. The events surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar highlight a significant tension where sport becomes a battleground for cultural and political narratives, raising questions about the underlying interests shaping its global representation.

⁴ Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), "No Discrimination," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.fifa.com/social-impact/campaigns/no-discrimination>.

⁵ C. Richter and A. Al-Shami, "Qatar vs. Germany: An Analysis of Qatari Reactions to Western Discursive Othering During the 2022 FIFA World Cup," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr_00086_1.

This research argues that the 2022 Qatar World Cup serves as a prominent example of how football, rather than remaining neutral, becomes a site of conflict reflecting broader geopolitical divides. Specifically, the event exposes biased Western perspectives toward the Eastern world, manifesting in criticism that extends beyond sports and delves into cultural and political domains. By analyzing this case, the study seeks to reveal the power dynamics and competing interests that challenge the notion of sport as a universal medium of peace and unity.

Research Method

What most people interpret as orientalism is often too simplistic due to sources that, when talking about orientalism, talk about Western scientists, who, when studying the East - especially Islam - come with oddities, confusion, and even abuse. As a result, the reading of Orientalism is sometimes more with emotion than with a calm and clear mind, which can reveal the things hidden behind the narrative of Orientalism. Orientalism refers to a collection of discursive practices employed by the West to construct an imagined representation of the East. These practices shape how the East is perceived and portrayed across various domains, embedding specific narratives and stereotypes. This process is deeply political and social, influencing the way Eastern societies are organized and understood within a Western-centric framework⁶.

The influence of Orientalism extends beyond politics and society, infiltrating military strategies, ideological constructs, scientific endeavors, and artistic expressions. Through these lenses, the West establishes a framework that both defines and confines the East, reinforcing power imbalances and justifying a dominant global hierarchy. This constructed narrative often undermines the complexities and realities of Eastern cultures by reducing them to oversimplified and exoticized tropes⁷.

As part of the Eastern world, it is unsurprising that relations between Islam and the West often face conflict. Especially after 9/11, the debate on Islam and Muslims narrowed, dominated by simplistic frames such as "Islam is monolithic, uniquely sexist, irrational, inherently violent, while the West promotes democracy, and Islam breeds

⁶ M. Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 79 (2006): 463–482, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ANQ.2006.0032>.

⁷ M. Buchowski, *op. cit.* 463–482.

terrorism"⁸. This is also part of how Islam is represented, which subsequently triggers various Western societal responses to Islam, reflected in the form of Islamophobia.

Following the tragic World Trade Center attacks in 2001, the United States launched a "war on terror," a campaign that profoundly shaped global and domestic perceptions of Islam. This declaration not only influenced international policies but also had a significant impact on societal attitudes within Western countries. The framing of Islam as closely associated with terrorism fueled negative stereotypes, leading to widespread prejudice against Muslims. Consequently, many Muslims living in Western societies have experienced increased discrimination, ranging from verbal abuse to systemic exclusion. Acts of violence targeting Muslim individuals and communities have also escalated, reflecting the deeply entrenched Islamophobia that emerged in the aftermath of the attacks⁹.

It seems that this Western framing of Islam has been continuously perpetuated, culminating in the narrative surrounding the 2022 Qatar World Cup. The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar serves as compelling evidence of the enduring presence of Orientalism in modern discourse. As an Arab and Muslim nation, Qatar became the focal point of an intense Western campaign that perpetuated colonial-era stereotypes about the Orient. It was portrayed as a land characterized by desert corruption, ignorance, and uncivilized behavior, deemed incompatible with Western ideals of democracy and human rights. This narrative underscores the persistent bias in how Eastern societies are represented and judged through a Western-centric lens¹⁰.

Therefore, in the course of this comprehensive exploration, the author embarks on a rigorous analysis of orientalism's role as a potent tool in shaping representations of the East, with a specific focus on Islam, within the broader narrative of the highly anticipated 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The methodological approach here, integrates a virtual ethnography framework and a meticulously structured critique of orientalism, both of which are underscored by a qualitative research design that positions the Qatar World Cup as the central case study.

⁸ D. Kumar, "Framing Islam: The Resurgence of Orientalism During the Bush II Era," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 34. (2010): 254–277, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859910363174>.

⁹ M. Bennis and L. Aammari, "Colonial/Orientalist Discourse in Western Campaign Against Qatar 2022 World Cup," *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i3.1352>.

¹⁰ M. Bennis and L. Aammari, *op. cit.*

The crux of this investigation lies in dissecting the intricate layers of orientalism woven into the fabric of the Qatar World Cup discourse. The commitment to a virtual ethnography approach involves immersing the author in the virtual spaces where representations unfold—online platforms, social media, and digital content. Through active engagement with online communities, forums, and discussions related to the event, the author aims to capture and analyzes the multifaceted perspectives that contribute to the construction of orientalist narratives.

A key facet of this research involves the application of a structured framework for the critique of orientalism. This analytical tool is employed to systematically deconstruct and scrutinize the orientalist elements prevalent in media narratives surrounding the Qatar World Cup. By identifying and examining stereotypical representations, biases, and power dynamics inherent in the coverage, author seeks to unravel the underlying motives and implications of such portrayals.

The methodological rigor extends to the data collection phase, The author undertakes a meticulous examination of biased media reports, such as those from Vogue, The Guardian, Agence France-Presse, and the BBC. These diverse sources are scrutinized to identify instances where the narrative appears to prioritize Western interests. Through this critical lens, the author documents patterns of orientalist language, imagery, and narratives that may subtly influence public perception of the event.

Furthermore, the research incorporates a holistic perspective by including a comprehensive review of related scientific research. A thorough exploration of academic literature, books, and journals dedicated to the study of orientalism in the context of sports events contributes invaluable insights. This extensive review not only enriches the analysis of media representations but also provides a scholarly backdrop against which to contextualize the orientalist discourse surrounding the Qatar World Cup.

In summary, this article represents a dedicated endeavor to unravel the intricate web of orientalism within the discourse of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Through a nuanced integration of virtual ethnography, a critique framework for orientalism, and a qualitative research approach anchored in the Qatar World Cup as a compelling case study, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the East,

particularly Islam, is portrayed in the media narrative surrounding this global sporting event.

Discussion

1. Orientalism in Sport

What most people interpret as orientalism is often too simplistic due to sources that, when talking about orientalism, talk about Western scientists, who, when studying the East - especially Islam - come with oddities, confusion, and even abuse. As a result, the reading of Orientalism is sometimes more with emotion than with a calm and clear mind, which can reveal the things hidden behind the narrative of Orientalism.

Hence, it is no wonder that Malek Bennabi, who criticized orientalism long before Edward Said, believes that Orientalists who praise are more dangerous than those who criticize. People never know, or often don't know, what lies behind the orientalist's praise, for example in describing the glories of Islam's past, or in their lush literary works depicting the wonders of the Orient - such as the story of the thousand and one nights that make the mind sleepy¹¹. Therefore, Bennabi emphasizes the importance of reading the hidden intentions of orientalist, and the breadth of their narratives in all realms of life.

Edward W. Said, therefore, emphasizes the importance of Orientalism not only as an identification of Western bias against the East. Orientalism is not only a political topic or an object of study that reflects the horror of various cultures, research, or institutions but also the distribution of consciousness about geography to aesthetic, scientific, economic, social, and linguistic texts. One thing that needs to be underlined and is essential to notice is sport as a distribution of consciousness towards a particular geography, a place in the Eastern world.

Therefore, one of the essential topics in the study of orientalism, even its core - as Edward Said said at the end of his book - is the representation of the East and Islam¹², and sports competitions in the Eastern world, how Muslim athletes spread, dress, how an Eastern country or institution organizes them, are never separated from these

¹¹ Rabi Laur, "The Dangers of Orientalism in the Thought of Professor Malik Bennabi," *Aldebal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018): 1-30.

¹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalisme: Menggugat Hegemoni Barat dan Menundukkan Timur sebagai Subjek* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010). 477 & 503.

representation efforts in the sense that they - the West - describe “how it should be” instead of “what it is”.

This also leads to the phenomenon of Eurocentrism, which is an integral part of Orientalism. One cannot talk about Orientalism without a motive driving it: a sense of superiority, a sense of being the centre, a sense of Europe's dominance over anyone it considers "other". In historical studies, Bennabi describes this phenomenon with the tendency of Western historians, especially between the 19th and 20th centuries, to think that human history began in Greece and Rome, stopped or stagnated, and then reappeared in Paris and London¹³. In other words, the West created a narrative of decline.

The decline narrative is also confirmed by various studies, for example, Malcolm, Baimar and Curry's survey in 2010, which used the framework of orientalism to show that in the 2007 Cricket World Cup, British media portrayed Muslims and Islam as pre-modern, violent, fundamentalist, while asserting 'absolute narratives and systematic differences between East and West'. Similarly, in 2005, Hong's book "Sport, Nationalism, and Orientalism: The Asian Games" concluded that the Asian Games served to affirm Orientalist knowledge about the differences and gaps between Asia and the Western world¹⁴.

From this explanation, orientalism uses various instruments to spread awareness about specific geographies, including sports. The 2022 World Cup, which has been well organized in Qatar, is suspected to be able to damage this awareness that the West has long built, the imagination of decline, backwardness, uncivilization, as Napoleon Bonaparte did when he first invaded Egypt with the aim of enlightening "bad Muslims"¹⁵, the relationship between the West and the East is what the West is trying to maintain.

¹³ Badran Benalhasan, *Al-Khoshais al-Amah Li al-Hadharah al-Gharbiyyah Inda Malek Bennabi*, (Malaysia: Al-Jami'ah Al-Alamiyyah Maliziyya, 1998).

¹⁴ Simon Darnell, “Orientalism Through Sport: Towards a Said-Ian Analysis of Imperialism and ‘Sport for Development and Peace,’” *Sport in Society*, Vol. 17, No. 8 (2013): 1000–1014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.838349>.

¹⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1984). 721.

2. Clash of Values at Qatar 2022 World Cup

It was Samuel P. Huntington who, through his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996), made people aware of the nature of the conflict that has shifted no longer just a battle of ideology, politics or economics but also civilization. So if what clashes is civilization, society itself is formed by specific distinctive values that become its identity. The clash of civilizations with one another is a clash of values itself.

The clash often occurs when each civilization has its construction of some values considered universal but not universal. According to Masfar bin Ali al- Qahtani, the clash of values is actually about the conflict of values considered universal among all world nations¹⁶. As a result, they impose values such as freedom, social equality, honour and other values that they form according to their understanding. And that is what the author assumes happened in the Qatar World Cup—namely, a conflict over the interpretation of values that are contested as being universal.

Well before the Qatar World Cup happened, the clash of values had historically occurred clearly in the past, starting in 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations inaugurated as a formal humanitarian standard agreed upon by many countries supporting humanism - an ideology that almost equals religion in modern times - faced a lot of criticism by various groups because it was considered to fail to include cultural and religious considerations from non-Western countries. As a result, 45 foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries - including Qatar - issued a counter-declaration called the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), which uses Islamic Sharia as its inspiration¹⁷.

Such a clash can be seen directly in the case of the LGBTQ in Qatar, which is illegal, so that in the process until the World Cup takes place, there is controversy. England, Wales, Germany, and Denmark consider LGBTQ as an expression of freedom, acceptance as a form of tolerance¹⁸, and even defence of it as a human right. Not

¹⁶ Masfar bin Ali al-Qahtani, *Shidham Al-Qiyam: Qira'ah Ma Ba'da al-Tahawwulāt al-Hadhariyyah*, (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2015). 145.

¹⁷ Akhmad Muamar, "Kebebasan Beragama dan Problematika HAM Universal," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013): 56–81, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v11i1.484>.

¹⁸ Sandriansyah, "Islam dan Internet: Toleransi Beragama di Dunia Maya," *FOKUS: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v5i2.1938>.

surprisingly, before the match, as reported by various media, the captains of these pro-LGBTQ countries insisted on wearing rainbow-patterned armbands as a form of protest. Qatar was in a dilemma between protecting the public from the values it believes in and between the demands of European countries with other beliefs regarding these values, which also sponsored the World Cup then. As a result, on November 30, 2022, Qatar allowed the LGBTQ community to watch on the condition that they do not display their behaviour in public places¹⁹.

Just as Western pressure to make room for LGBTQ individuals is a clear example of Orientalism, Bennabi sees that Orientalism tends to direct thoughts, discourses, and local values to suit Western political interests²⁰. So, not only LGBTQ, the liquor controversy, or the dress code in the stadium that is busy in Western media is a form of encouragement to dwarf Qatar's efforts to become relevant as a third country, an Arab country, or a Muslim country that can adequately organize international-level sports events.

From this clash of values, it can also be concluded that no matter how far FIFA tries to campaign for football, in the end, ideological interests, value interests, gender, and politics are almost impossible to set aside. There is always a motive that makes football a means for something. Because all who come to the stadium must be with their heads, not just empty heads. The Iranian national team is an excellent example of this phenomenon where they did not sing the national anthem during the match, nor did their female supporters remove their hijab to protest the Mahsa Amini tragedy.

The neutrality of sports projects for peace campaigns has indeed been challenged; Simon C. Darnell is the one who tried to raise his voice about Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), a UN program, which, according to him, tends to follow and strengthen the chains and structures of global power and plays a role in perpetuating universal Western values at the expense of local guidance. However, at the Qatar 2022 World Cup, one can find FIFA's neutrality, which people can also call a picture of ambiguity when it expelled Russia due to Western demands; at the same time, Gianni

¹⁹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), "Dinamika Perizinan LGBT dalam Piala Dunia di Qatar – Ilmu Komunikasi," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://ik.umy.ac.id/dinamika-perizinan-lgbt-dalam-piala-dunia-di-qatar/>.

²⁰ Rabi Laur, "The Dangers of Orientalism in the Thought of Professor Malik Bennabi," *Aldebal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018): 1–30.

Infantino was quite vocal about the hypocrisy of the West that had colonized thousands of years, to defend Qatar²¹.

3. Western Media's Representation on World Cup Qatar 2022

Criticisms and objections from Western media outlets are the most prevalent in the Qatar 2022 World Cup. Instead of telling it like it is, the attempt to represent Islam and the East is very strong for anyone who follows the news. Through its slanted news, the West also confirms another thesis of Orientalism that it is Orientalists who have the right to write reality. In contrast, "Easterners" can only be written about²².

This is easily deduced from the fact that since winning the World Cup host draw in 2010, Western media have been competing to form public opinion that the Qatar World Cup is indeed an odd phenomenon compared to previous world cups. The Guardian, The Times, Daily Express, The Sun, Daily Mail, The Telegraph, and Metro UK have used Qatar as headlines 1,735 times, with no more than five topics related to it: labour and human rights, sports, the 2017 Gulf crisis, corruption and bribery, and aviation²³.

The biases of the Western media also seem to justify the role of the West in the framework of orientalism, which has the right to interpret; Islam, in this case, as stated, is often considered as an object of *ta'wīl* (intrepetation)²⁴ which is always interpreted, analyzed, studied almost always badly. As Edward Said also emphasized when explaining the representation of Islam, what happens is the West's effort to produce myths so that the area that is used as a Western object is finally in the path of the West²⁵.

The tendency to represent Qatar has indeed been done by Western media long before the World Cup was held. In his research, Mahmud Amara describes how Qatar's investment in the sports market has drawn many negative accusations. In 2012, Qatar bought shares, making it the sole owner of the French football club Paris Saint- Germain

²¹ ESPN, "World Cup: FIFA President Infantino Slams Europe's Hypocrisy in Speech," accessed January 12, 2024, https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/37634014/world-cup-fifa-president-infantino-slams-europe-hypocrisy-astonishing-speech.

²² Edward W. Said, *op. cit.* 482.

²³ Marc Owen Jones, "UK Press Coverage of Qatar 2022: Hypocrisy and Orientalism," *The New Arab*, accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/uk-press-coverage-qatar-2022-hypocrisy-and-orientalism>.

²⁴ Edward W. Said, *Ta'qibat Ala al-Istisraq*, (Beirut: al-Muassasah al-Arabiyyah lil Dirāsāt wa al-Nasyr, 1996). 37-38.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *op. cit.* 479.

(PSG). Besides Aljazeera (now Bein Sport), it also bought broadcasting rights to the French and European Champions League. From there, the French media alleged that behind these large investments, there was an Islamization agenda²⁶.

Thus, Western media narratives surrounding the Qatar 2022 World Cup can be summarized as efforts to represent the East and Islam through biased lenses. Through its news coverage, Western media sought to emphasize that Qatar, a Muslim-majority country, is intolerant of cultural differences by restricting behaviors and symbols that contradict Arab and Islamic culture, such as LGBTQ expressions and drinking alcohol in stadiums²⁷. This double standard becomes evident when one considers the restrictions imposed by some European countries on wearing the hijab, France's allowance for caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, or Sweden's recent instances of Qur'an burning. Are these not also examples of intolerance toward differences?

Additionally, Western media portrayed Qatar, as an Arab and Muslim-majority country, as incapable or unworthy of hosting a major event like the World Cup. Topics unrelated to soccer were disproportionately exposed, such as the treatment of immigrant workers, boycotts by world celebrities, and allegations of falsifying spectator numbers²⁸. These narratives align with Eurocentric tendencies, characterized by a sense of Western superiority. As Bernard Lewis described, Islam and Muslims are seen as static and unchanging. Such representations underscore a perception that Arab and Muslim achievements remain insignificant, reinforcing stereotypes of inferiority²⁹.

This downplaying of Qatar's achievements was further exemplified by comments from English football legend Gary Lineker. Invited by the BBC to comment on the Qatar World Cup, Lineker stated, "Since FIFA chose Qatar in 2010, the smallest country ever to host football's biggest competition has raised many questions"³⁰.

²⁶ Mahfoud Amara, "Sport and Muslims or Muslims in Sport, Post-9/11," in *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Race and Ethnicity*, ed. John Nauright and David K. Wiggins (London: Routledge, 2016). 247.

²⁷ *Vogue*, "The Agony and the Hypocrisy of This Year's World Cup," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.vogue.com/article/2022-world-cup-qatar-david-beckham>.

²⁸ *The Guardian*, "Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers Have Died in Qatar Since World Cup Awarded," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>.

²⁹ Edward W. Said, *op. cit.* 457.

³⁰ *The Guardian*, "BBC Ignores World Cup Opening Ceremony in Favour of Qatar Criticism," accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/nov/20/bbc-ignores-world-cup-opening-ceremony-in-favour-of-qatar-criticism>.

According to Recep Senturk, orientalism is closely tied to narratives of backwardness³¹. Orientalists often use terms like "backward" and "fundamentalist" to depict the West as the opposite of such traits. When Lineker highlighted Qatar's small size, he implicitly invited his audience to compare it to the "biggest," perpetuating a hierarchical worldview.

Furthermore, Qatar was depicted as inhumane through unrelated stories, such as The Guardian's report that 29 dogs were shot dead while the country prepared for the World Cup³². The connection between this incident and the World Cup is tenuous, and such reporting contrasts sharply with the absence of similar narratives when the UK culled 6 million cattle due to hoof and mouth disease in 2002, a time that coincided with the UK's bid to host the World Cup³³. These examples reveal a selective bias in how Western media represents Qatar.

Ultimately, these representations of Qatar during the 2022 World Cup reflect an orientalist effort to create a geographical imagination, collective memory, and public discourse that aligns with Western interests. However, despite these narratives, Qatar succeeded in presenting itself as a Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim-majority country capable of hosting a globally significant event.

Contrary to the narratives produced by Western media, several activists and social media influencers shared on-the-ground accounts showcasing tolerance and intercultural diversity at the Qatar World Cup. One striking example was the presence of Asians and Indians from non-participating countries who enthusiastically attended the event³⁴. Heartwarming moments also emerged, such as when an Argentine fan who had run out of money was offered a place to stay by a young Qatari instead of returning

³¹ Recep Şentürk, "The Decline of the Decline Paradigm: Revisiting the Periodization of Islamic History," in *Niedergangsthesen Auf Dem Prüfstand / Narratives of Decline Revisited*, ed. Stefan Reichmuth et al. (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), 213–217.

³² The Guardian, "Outrage in Qatar over shooting of 29 dogs as it prepares for World Cup," accessed July 21, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/21/gunmen-kill-29-dogs-and-puppies-in-qatar>

³³ Marc Owen Jones, "UK Press Coverage of Qatar 2022: Hypocrisy and Orientalism," *The New Arab*, accessed January 12, 2024. <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/uk-press-coverage-qatar-2022-hypocrisy-and-orientalism>.

³⁴ Financial Times. "'It's Absolutely Fantastic': Visiting World Cup Fans Shrug off Qatar Negativity." Accessed January 12, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/a2b1e4bf-da06-42dc-8f81-764d1a0233c5>.

home³⁵. These instances underscore the bias in Western media coverage and highlight the vibrant and inclusive reality of the Qatar 2022 World Cup.

Conclusion

Since the events of September 11, 2001, it can be concluded that sports are no longer just entertainment, especially for Muslims; sports have been infiltrated by the bias of Western interests, especially in attacking them. Suddenly, the expression of Islam in the field became the spotlight of Western media that launched accusations such as Islamization, extremism, and terrorism. Under these political conditions, orientalism is suddenly relevant again for the West to represent Islam through sports.

Orientalism, therefore, needs to be interpreted carefully so that the invisible can be revealed as part of it. Orientalism is the distribution of consciousness about a particular geography through many instruments, including sports. The Qatar World Cup, where there was a clash of values between the West and the East, represented by Qatar as an Arab country which upholds Islamic culture, is a clear example of how Orientalism was used as a means to corner Qatar.

Representation is central to the framework of Orientalism, in which the West constantly reimagines the Other to suit its interests. The Western media's efforts in covering the Qatar 2022 World Cup in an unbalanced manner, with its narratives of decline attached to Qatar, its Eurocentrism that makes it seem more entitled and more worthy to host, to its slanted news that is completely far from the context of the World Cup, the West insists on representing the East and Islam through Qatar.

However, the facts on the ground are no less interesting to study, whereas Western claims about intolerance are very far from the reality that occurred during the Qatar World Cup. This should be an evaluation for the West in order to objectify the East and Islam because Edward Said's goal in writing "Orientalism" is none other than for the West to do self-criticism, so that the West's relationship with the East and Islam becomes like the relationship between Morgan Freeman and Ghonem al- Muftah who embrace each other as depicted in the opening of the Qatar 2022 world cup.

³⁵ Insider News, "Qatar Man Offers Argentina Fan to Stay in His Home for Free," accessed January 13, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlqiH0XKAro>

This study contributes to the academic discourse on orientalism by tracing its trajectory within the context of international sporting events, particularly the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. By employing a virtual ethnographic approach and critically analyzing media narratives, the author has expanded the understanding of how sport becomes a medium for ideological and cultural representation. The research underscores the enduring relevance of orientalism as a framework through which the West continues to interpret and construct images of the East—images that carry deep political and cultural implications. This work thus offers a nuanced perspective that connects sports, media representation, and global power dynamics.

However, this research also has its limitations. The focus on selected Western media sources may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the West itself. Additionally, the use of virtual ethnography, while offering valuable insights, may not account for offline dynamics and audience receptions in different socio-political contexts. Future research could benefit from comparative analyses involving non-Western media or audience studies that investigate how representations are interpreted across cultural boundaries. Researchers may also explore other global sporting events to see if similar orientalist patterns persist or evolve in different geopolitical contexts.

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