



Sportswashing: universal call for human rights or orientalist slur?

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Human rights at sport mega-events

- Increased attention on human rights at mega-events, particularly since Beijing 2008
- IOC and supporters argued that hosting in illiberal nation would improve human rights
- Sport events lead to human rights issues, but also can become linked with other human rights issues



Human rights (Dembour 2010)



- Deliberative school: human rights are values adopted as laws by liberal societies
- Protest school: human rights are claims made by or on behalf of the marginalised
- Sportswashing as a discourse is associated with the protest school – but is it actually working to force deliberative processes to change?

Turn towards illiberal hosts

- Expansion of hosting mega-events away from traditional Western hosts in 2010s
 - 2008 financial crisis leading to pressures on budgets
 - Desire to broaden appeal of event
 - Emerging economies more involved (BRICS)
- Perceived failures of legacy agenda weakened democratic rationale for hosting



DIRIYAH

sky sports
box office



matchroom
boxing



DAZN

CLASH ON THE DUNES



LOVIC
INA
HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE

WHYTE
WACH

RUIZ
vs
JOSHUA
HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD

POVETKIN
HUNTER
WSA WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE ELIMINATOR

7 DECEMBER 2019
DIRIYAH, SAUDI ARABIA



TEAM SAUERLAND



CTD PROMOTIONS

VOX

Gulf states

- Events as part of gulf state strategies to develop tourism as part of transitioning away from oil-based economies
- Substantial investment in sport and events to drive new tourism industries
- F1 races, boxing bouts, star footballers

Weak power of soft power

- Positive images hampered by existing stereotypes at 1996 Cricket World Cup in South Asia (Dimeo and Kay 2004)
- Unwillingness for Western public and media to cede power at Beijing 2008 (Manzenreiter 2010)
- Criticisms of Sochi 2014 tended to come from external, Western sources (Alekseyeva 2014)
- Media narratives of events in Brazil and South Africa give prominence to poverty and crime (Hammett 2011; Gutierrez and Bettine 2022)
- Qatar's mega-event experience leading to 'soft disempowerment' (Brannagan and Giulianotti 2018)

Could 2022 be sportswashing's biggest year?

A year bookended by the Beijing Winter Olympics and the Fifa World Cup in Qatar could be a high point of authoritarian regimes looking to cover up their dismal human rights records



Security guards stand by as workers refuel the Olympic flame in the Olympic Tower in Beijing on Monday. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images



Sportswashing as discourse

- Term emerges from activist groups in Baku and is picked up by media and international human rights NGOs
- Why are we not calling United 2026 sportswashing?
- Paradox – if sportswashing is about calling attention to human rights issues, it only seems to work when countries are already well-known for having human rights issues

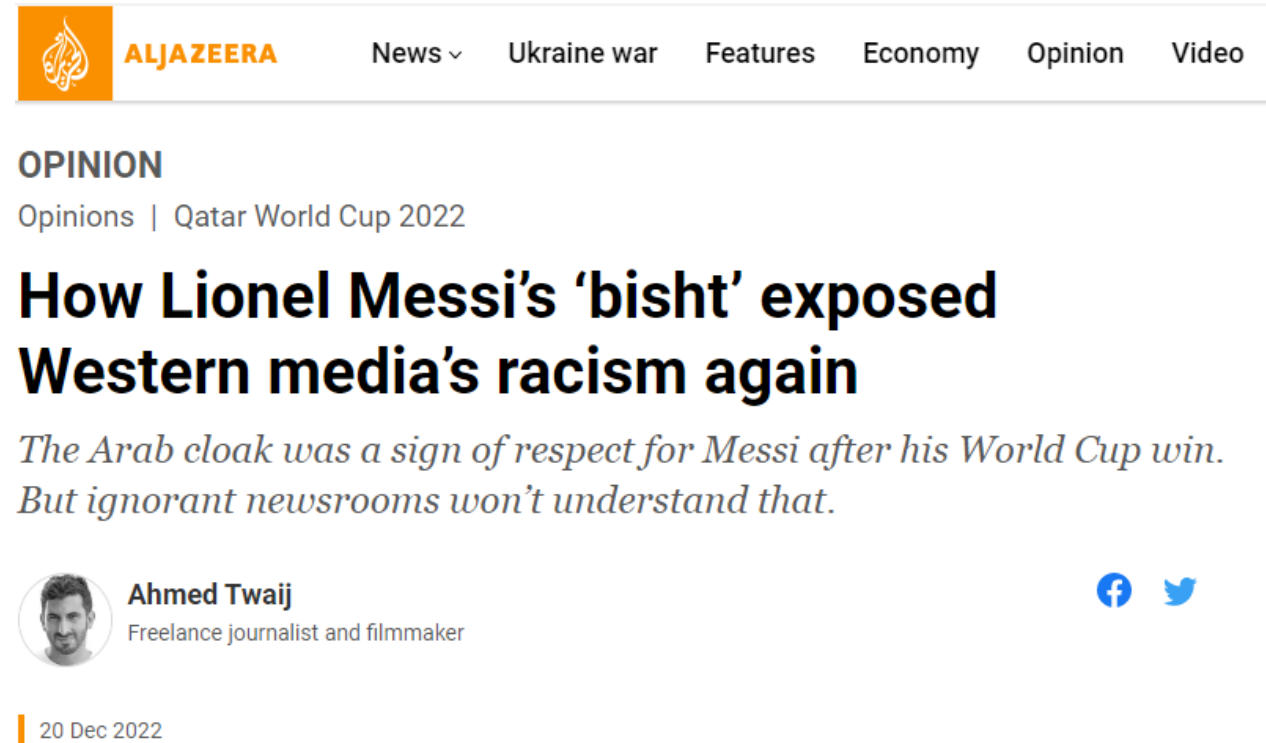
Orientalism (Said 1978)

- Term refers to art and literature produced of the Orient by those from the Occident
- Portrayal of non-Western (specifically Middle Eastern) cultures as static and undeveloped
- Depictions thereby serve to reinforce Western supremacy



Sportswashing as a racist label

- Charge that sportswashing claim is based on racism and a desire for the West to exclude other perspectives
- Is sportswashing applied more to the gulf states in particular?
- Why isn't it mentioned in Western, democratic contexts? (Boykoff 2022)




The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the Al Jazeera website. The Al Jazeera logo is in the top left, followed by navigation links for News, Ukraine war, Features, Economy, Opinion, and Video. The article is categorized as 'OPINION' and is part of a series on 'Qatar World Cup 2022'. The main headline is 'How Lionel Messi's 'bisht' exposed Western media's racism again'. Below the headline is a sub-headline: 'The Arab cloak was a sign of respect for Messi after his World Cup win. But ignorant newsrooms won't understand that.' The author is identified as Ahmed Twaij, a freelance journalist and filmmaker. The article was published on 20 Dec 2022. Social media sharing icons for Facebook and Twitter are visible on the right side.

ALJAZEERA News ▾ Ukraine war Features Economy Opinion Video

OPINION
Opinions | Qatar World Cup 2022

How Lionel Messi's 'bisht' exposed Western media's racism again

The Arab cloak was a sign of respect for Messi after his World Cup win. But ignorant newsrooms won't understand that.

 **Ahmed Twaij**
Freelance journalist and filmmaker

20 Dec 2022

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