

Victory for Africa or the Arab world? Moroccan nationalism, Arab exceptionalism, pan-African solidarity and digital fandom during the 2022 FIFA World Cup

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Abstract

Football serves as a fetish for war, replaying past conflicts and sometimes setting off new ones. Deploying social identities theory and dramaturgy theory, we follow up on this assertion to explore how the historic 2022 FIFA World Cup semi-final qualification by Morocco's senior men football team exposed historical and contemporary conflicts framing Morocco today. Celebrating greatness, Moroccan winger Sofiane Boufal dedicated the victory to Moroccans, Arab and Muslim people. The disavowal of sub-Saharan Africa and the negation of pan-African solidarity triggered social media debates which spilled into quotidian lives of Africans. Critical discourse analysis was employed to analyse purposively sampled conversations on X (formerly Twitter), relating to Boufal's remarks. We demonstrate how Morocco's success [re]ignited identity wars and brought into stark relief attendant ontological, philosophical and metaphysical dynamics. We advance scholarly discourses about consumption of mega global sporting events and their symbiosis with politics of belonging in the global South.