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## Three soccer discourses

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In this paper, I examine the dominant discourses surrounding the role of soccer in human societies and the international arena. Following Gearóid Ó Tuathail, I argue that there are three types of geopolitical discourses related to soccer: those diffused by intellectuals, states and popular manifestations of geopolitics in civil society. I highlight three prevalent discourses in relation to soccer propagated by intellectuals, states and within civil society, which I call the Soccer War discourse, the Nobel Prize discourse and the Gramscian discourse. I trace the importance of soccer by highlighting how it triggered a Soccer War between two poor central American nations; how it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; and demonstrate how it can both support dictators and the status quo, yet also engender movements for popular social transformation (the Gramscian discourse).

### Introduction

There is no sport rivalling soccer in terms of its global, cultural and political impact. Soccer is the world's most popular sport. The 2006 World Cup final attracted an estimated audience of 715.1 million people.<sup>1</sup> According to FIFA, the group stages of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil reached 'a record numbers of viewers across the world'.<sup>2</sup> Today, it is almost ritualistic to see presidents, prime ministers or monarchs at important international soccer matches. In most of Latin America, soccer is the king of all sports: 'People live for it. They kill for it. It is a source of hope and a reason for suicide. It is a way out of poverty and misery for a very few and an intangible escape for millions more'.<sup>3</sup>

Even the United States, which is supposedly 'exceptional' in opting for American football, baseball, or basketball as its dominant sports,<sup>4</sup> has since the 1994 World Cup in the USA jumped on the global soccer bandwagon. As more North American kids play soccer, the phrase 'soccer mom' is now part of popular culture. Alex Castellanos, a former senior media advisor to Bob Dole, suggested in 1996 that Bill Clinton was targeting a voting demographic called the 'soccer mom'.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, is soccer ultimately a force for good or ill? Does soccer exacerbate existing nationalistic tensions or engender cosmopolitanism? Does soccer support or subvert existing power relations? In this paper, I examine the dominant discourses<sup>6</sup> surrounding the role of soccer in human societies and the international arena. These discourses are circulated through states, the academic world and the mass media, but also among soccer officials and fans and non-fans in civil society. Gearóid Ó

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Tuathail argues that there are three types of geopolitical discourses related to intellectuals, practical aspects of statecraft and popular manifestations of geopolitics in civil society.<sup>7</sup> I highlight three prevalent discourses in relation to soccer propagated by intellectuals, states and within civil society, which I call the Soccer War discourse, the Nobel Prize discourse and the Gramscian discourse.<sup>8</sup> I trace the importance of soccer by highlighting how it triggered a Soccer War between two poor central American nations; how it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; and demonstrate how it can both support dictators and the status quo, yet also engender movements for popular social transformation (the Gramscian discourse).

### The Soccer War discourse

In his *Dios es redondo* (*God is round*), the Mexican intellectual Juan Villoro stressed the tribal nature of soccer and argued it was akin to a pagan religion.<sup>9</sup> Soccer stadiums and their ritual are like ‘sacred sites’ in the eyes of many fans, players and coaches. These ‘sacred sites’, as Desmond Morris points out, are really ‘temples’ that fulfil key human functions such as the need for belonging and the power of the group.<sup>10</sup> This tribalism can reproduce extreme nationalism, sexism, racism and anti-Semitism within and outside soccer stadiums. Bill Shankly, the legendary Scottish manager of Liverpool FC between 1959 and 1974, stated the following in a 1981 television interview: ‘Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that’.<sup>11</sup>

Villoro, Morris and Shankly are correct. Soccer is tribal, venerated in a quasi-religious manner,<sup>12</sup> and is ‘a matter of life and death’, but also ‘much, much more important than that’. Called ‘The Soccer War’, or ‘The War of 100 Hours’, it was fought between Honduras and El Salvador. It was precipitated by tense qualification matches for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. When the guns of war were silenced after less than one week, 6000 people tragically lost their lives, 12,000 more people were wounded, and 50,000 individuals lost their homes, fields or villages.<sup>13</sup>

As Ryszard Kapuściński and William Durham correctly maintain,<sup>14</sup> the real reasons for the Soccer War in 1969 had little to do with soccer. Why then do we continue to call it the Soccer War? International qualification matches for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico between El Salvador and Honduras were merely an instrument used to heighten existing nationalistic tensions.

At the matches in San Salvador and Tegucigalpa, the respective capital cities of El Salvador and Honduras, opposing national team players and officials were faced with hostile crowds and even feared for their lives. Concentrating on the soccer matches became nearly impossible as rival fans camped outside the hotel rooms of the opposing national team, ensuring that they would have a terrible sleep and not be fully alert for the key match. The El Salvadoran team was not allowed to sleep the night before their key match in Honduras because of the noise of Honduran fans outside their hotel and the local food that had made some players ill with diarrhoea.<sup>15</sup> The discourses of mass media outlets in the respective countries, or the ‘ideological state apparatus’,<sup>16</sup> contributed to the tense atmosphere between the two countries with crude, jingoistic nationalism – the stock and trade of Latin American military regimes. Both El Salvador and Honduras were ruled by right-wing military juntas, which were not shy about using the ‘repressive state apparatus’.<sup>17</sup>

The most significant events of the Soccer War took place off of the soccer field. It is often acknowledged that countries with bigger territories, larger populations and better demographic growth rates outperform smaller countries in terms of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>18</sup> Yet, this was not completely true for El Salvador and Honduras. El Salvador is much smaller than Honduras in terms of territory, but in 1969 at the outbreak of the Soccer War, El Salvador had a population that doubled that of Honduras. By 1969, more than 300,000 Salvadorans were living in Honduras, looking for a better life in a country that had lots of land and very few people. The Salvadorans made up a sizeable percentage of the peasant population of Honduras.

A land reform law was passed in Honduras in 1962 that was more forcefully enforced by 1967. It set the stage for class conflict and tensions between Honduras and El Salvador. The effect of the land reform law was that the Honduran government turned over land occupied legally or illegally by Salvadoran immigrants and redistributed this land to native-born Hondurans. Thousands of Salvadorans were left homeless.

The roots of the Soccer War lie in a deadly cocktail of authoritarian, military governments, nationalism, geopolitics, issues over land reform (including extreme poverty and class conflict), expulsion edicts, fears of communist revolt, and immigration and demographic problems. The Soccer War is a classic example of what David Sobek calls a 'diversionary war': a war instigated by a leader or leaders of country in order to distract the population from domestic problems at home.<sup>19</sup> In a 'diversionary war', national unity is engendered through extreme nationalism and a shared enemy, which focuses problems on the external conflict and the war rather than domestic problems. According to this 'diversionary war' theory, wars are manipulated in order to keep leaders in power that have a tenuous grip. Authoritarian regimes, which often have little support in civil society, can more easily engage in a 'diversionary war' because they do not face the scrutiny of the people in regular and democratic elections.

George Orwell noted the Soccer War discourse and saw soccer's international role in largely negative terms. Writing a piece called 'The Sporting Spirit' in the *Tribune* in 1945, Orwell wrote: 'Football has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting'.<sup>20</sup>

Hooliganism, racism, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism and neo-fascism in stadiums are problems throughout Europe. Before a 2012 'friendly' played in Budapest between Hungary and Israel, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (19 August 2012) reported that Hungarian fans chanted 'stinking Jews', 'Heil Benito Mussolini' and 'Palestine, Palestine' during the singing of *Hatikvah*, Israel's national anthem while displaying Hezbollah and Islamic Republic of Iran flags. Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic of Iran are united by a genocidal anti-Semitism and have both called for the elimination of the state of Israel. These racist Hungarian soccer fans were providing intellectuals, states and civil society with a Soccer War discourse (i.e., violent, ultra-nationalistic and racist) that could be used to de-legitimize international soccer at large.

For Terry Eagleton, soccer is a useful tool for conserving the class privileges of rich soccer clubs, their owners and maintaining the gross inequalities of the capitalist system. During the 2010 World Cup, Eagleton went so far as to suggest that the mass following associated with soccer is a real impediment to political change. Writing in *The Guardian* (15 June 2010), Eagleton called soccer 'a dear friend to

capitalism', insisting in a slavishly Marxist tone that soccer today 'is the opium of the people, not to speak of their crack cocaine'. He had especially harsh words for the recently retired English soccer star David Beckham, whom he called 'impeccably Tory' (referring to the ruling right-wing Conservative Party of Prime Minister David Cameron) and 'slavishly conformist'. Eagleton's positions on 'the beautiful game' are rather pessimistic and lead him to call for the game's abolition:

Nobody serious about political change can shirk the fact that the game has to be abolished. And any political outfit that tried it on would have about as much chance of power as the chief executive of BP has in taking over from Oprah Winfrey.

Eagleton is unambiguous that soccer is a tool of crass 'class warfare', thus preventing workers from seeing their authentic (that is, miserable) conditions. He insists the following about soccer: 'No finer way of resolving the problems of capitalism has been dreamed up, bar socialism'.

Eagleton hints that there might be a trace of rebellion left in the working classes with respect to soccer, or what he calls a 'supporters revolt against the corporate fat cats who muscle in on their clubs'. Yet he ends his piece with the same depressing tone that soccer is 'the opium of the people'. In short, Eagleton sees little redemption in soccer and is thus a proponent of the Soccer War discourse. That is, soccer is the 'crack cocaine' of the masses, as well as a defender of capitalism, big business, extreme nationalism, the status quo and authoritarianism.

In the United States, the Soccer War discourse is reinforced by soccer haters, who suggest that soccer is un-American, European, leftist, communitarian, pro-immigrant, and rife with violence and hooliganism. Disdain for soccer was captured by Tom Weir in a 1993 *USA Today* article, when he insisted that 'hating soccer is more American than apple pie, driving a pickup, or spending Saturday afternoons channel surfing with the remote control'.<sup>21</sup> Such rhetoric mirrors what I call the Soccer War discourse: ultra-nationalistic, exclusionary, anti-immigrant and xenophobic.

### **The Nobel Prize discourse**

Ignoring the Soccer War, one Swedish parliamentarian believes that soccer is a positive force for the international community. In 2001, soccer was nominated for the Nobel Peace prize by Swedish parliamentarian Lars Gustafsson. 'Soccer has and will continue to play an important role in the global arena, when it comes to creating understanding between people',<sup>22</sup> opined Gustafsson in his nomination letter to the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo. Furthermore, Gustafsson argued that soccer had survived two world wars and numerous ethnic and regional conflicts, while 'hostile nations' could meet on the pitch when other contact would be impossible.

Markovits and Rensmann could in part support Gustafsson's Nobel Prize discourse.<sup>23</sup> They insist that soccer increasingly acts as a cosmopolitan force for inclusiveness through the principle of merit at both club and country. They argue that 'people love good players' on the national team, no matter their origins'.<sup>24</sup> Multiethnic national teams such as France and the USA allegedly unite the nation across social boundaries and embody the ethnic and cultural diversity of those countries.<sup>25</sup> Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General, could state the following in 2006 when his native Ghana qualified for the World Cup in Germany:

For any country, playing in the World Cup is a matter of profound national pride. For countries qualifying for the first time, such as my native Ghana, it is a badge of honor.

For those who are doing so after years of adversity, such as Angola, it provides a sense of national renewal. And for those who are currently riven by conflict, like Côte d'Ivoire, but whose World Cup team is a unique and powerful symbol of national unity, it inspires nothing less than the hope of national rebirth.<sup>26</sup>

Soccer might also help to heal internal divisions within a state. As Laurent Dubois commented, 'the mass communion that took place in the streets in 1998' after France won the World Cup liberated 'many from the shackles of their own uncertainty about their place in French society' and 'should serve as a charter for a different way of being French.'<sup>27</sup> Soccer provides a venue to express inclusive conceptions of nationalism. When France won its only World Cup in 1998 under its talisman captain Zinedine Zidane, a Marseille-born superstar of Berber, Algerian roots, it was imagined that France could become a more multicultural, inclusive and egalitarian society. According to this logic, change in the soccer stadium could precipitate changes in values and practices in government, business, media and civil society in general.

### The Gramscian discourse

While the first two discourses in relation to soccer are unambiguous (that is, the extreme poles of the negative Soccer War discourse and the optimistic Nobel Prize discourse), the Gramscian discourse is more ambiguous about the possibilities for soccer as it straddles between defence of power and social change. Gramsci could see soccer as a tool to promote the dominant ideology, but also a mechanism to challenge hegemonic thought through counter-hegemonic initiatives in civil society.

Unlike orthodox Marxists who see culture as a direct reflection of dominant socio-economic relations, Gramscians view culture as a critical terrain of social struggle. Gramsci insisted that liberal capitalism is cemented as the ruling ideology in the West because of the 'common sense' support it receives from the masses in civil society, rather than the 'repressive state apparatus' (for example, the police and army).<sup>28</sup> One of the gravest errors that we make as human beings, argued Gramsci, 'is the belief about everything that exists, that it is "natural" that it should exist, that it could not do otherwise than exist'.<sup>29</sup> For Gramsci, 'common sense' is informed by 'everyday experience' and is the 'traditional popular conception of the world'.<sup>30</sup> In short, common sense is an uncritical and 'largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world' that has become 'common' in any historical epoch.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, common sense limits our mental horizons and thus stunts the creation of alternative political futures. Common sense is forged in relation to our ideas about the state, market, culture and even soccer matches.

Gramsci argued that while soccer was a reflection of competitive and individualistic values associated with capitalism, it was simultaneously wedded to the ethics of fair play, official rules and 'human loyalty'.<sup>32</sup> Writing in *Avanti!* on 27 August 1918, Gramsci noted that soccer is 'a model of individualistic society. It demands initiative, competition and conflict. But it is regulated by the unwritten rule of fair play'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, for Gramsci soccer can simultaneously support or subvert dictatorships, extreme nationalism or excessive commercialization.

Through Gramsci we might reflect on whether professional soccer, like other realms of culture, imbues us with what he called 'common sense', which privileges more powerful nations and classes above less powerful ones. Gramsci saw soccer as part of the struggle for ideological hegemony in any society, whether dominated by



socialist or liberal values. Gramsci pointed out that the course of history depends on the country, the constellation of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces in civil society, and the interaction of material interests, dominant ideas, and political, military and 'strategic' powers.<sup>34</sup>

Ideological hegemony, argues Gramsci, seeks to defend capitalism and liberalism through the support of the masses. For Gramsci, soccer is a reflection of the values of liberal capitalist societies. On the one hand, capitalism demands 'initiative, competition and conflict', as a few capitalists own the means of production and the vast majority of workers (including professional soccer players) worldwide must sell their labour in order to earn a wage and survive. On the other hand, there is the ideal of 'human loyalty' to club and country. In addition, laws are created by the liberal state to protect capitalism, the bourgeoisie and private property. These laws also ensure equal rights for all ('fair play') in the public sphere as a consequence of the legacies of the American and French revolutions in the late eighteenth century (for example, citizenship laws, periodic elections, equality before the law and later equality between the sexes and various ethnic groups).

Gerhard Vinnai, a German social psychologist, wrote *Fussballsport als Ideologie* (1970) about soccer as an ideology and its mass psychology.<sup>35</sup> In this work, Vinnai interprets soccer as a game in which the goals that are scored are scored 'against the dominant'. For cultural theorist Stuart Hall, culture (including soccer) is a 'critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled'.<sup>36</sup> Both of these thinkers echo the Gramscian discourse. Soccer is a site of contestation between different class interests, and on numerous occasions soccer goals have more often been scored on behalf of the dominant soccer continents, nations, clubs and social classes. Professional clubs and national teams advance the interests of capitalism and serve to legitimize and recreate the inequalities of their respective societies. Yet, soccer clubs, national teams and their fans might also, as Vinnai posited, score goals 'against the dominant'.

Let me highlight some examples of this Gramscian discourse. The first soccer clubs in England in the late nineteenth century were often built by factories and were arguably designed to stop the spread of worker unity and burgeoning socialist ideals. The British colonial authorities, as well as English gentlemen, soldiers, sailors and businessmen all played roles in spreading soccer worldwide. Yet, as Patrick Hutchison pointed out, soccer could also be used to organize and create resistance against empires through the erection of national teams.<sup>37</sup> For example, Algeria's National Liberal Front – FLN – organized national matches beginning in 1958 before the country's independence from France in 1962.

International soccer matches can also legitimize populists or dictators. As Markovits and Rensmann observe, 'Throughout the twentieth century dictatorships of various kinds utilized the charismatic power of sports for their own, often nefarious, causes'.<sup>38</sup> Italy won two World Cups in 1934 and 1938 during Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship and three-time Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is the owner of AC Milan, Italy's biggest 'media empire', and founded a political party, *Forza Italy*, which is named after a soccer chant meaning Go Italy! In a sardonic tone, in his *The Soccer War* Kapuściński quotes an exiled Brazilian colleague after Brazil's third World Cup victory in 1970: 'The military right-wing can be assured of at least five more years of peaceful rule'.<sup>39</sup> Kapuściński underscores the dual use of some Latin American soccer stadiums, particularly during the military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s: 'In peacetime they are sports venues; in

war they turn into concentration camps'.<sup>40</sup> Chile's national soccer stadium was used to imprison and torture opponents of Augusto Pinochet's military regime, while the regime also engaged in 'an era of terror' against amateur soccer clubs and neighbourhood and civic associations.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, Gramsci could see the power of civil society, including soccer, to challenge authoritarian regimes, or liberal capitalist society. Influenced by Gramsci, Del Burgo argues that soccer can be a vehicle for social change. He argues that soccer is a 'social phenomenon in its own right, which may in turn have implications for the world beyond the game'.<sup>42</sup> Soccer can be used as a tool to 'enter into a dialogue with society at large'<sup>43</sup>; heal divided societies; promote anti-racism; tackle neglected societal issues (for example, authoritarianism and militarism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, environmental problems, or ethnic and religious sectarianism); and conceivably transform the hearts and minds of millions of followers worldwide.<sup>44</sup>

In 2013, nation-wide Brazilian protests against government corruption, excessive World Cup and Olympic Games spending (for the public, this meant less government spending on education, welfare and poverty reduction) and high transportation prices during the Confederations Cup won the hearts of numerous Brazilian national team players and fans. In the same year, rival Turkish fans from Istanbul (Galatasaray SK, Fenerbahçe SK and Beşiktaş JK) put aside their differences to unite in street protests against the authoritarian tendencies of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. James Dorsey could write the following about Egyptian soccer during the 'Arab Spring': 'The newly-found solidarity among supporters of Al Ahly and its arch rival Al Zamalek SC' allowed them to forge 'a bridge across diametrically opposed political and social poles'.<sup>45</sup> Soccer fans, Dorsey argues, were 'emboldened by their role in protests that deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak after 30 years in office' and later sought to alter the politics of their country's 'beautiful game' and democratize Egyptian society.<sup>46</sup>

Following Del Burgo and Gramsci, the communist, anarchist and anti-capitalist identity of hardcore fans associated with German club FC St. Pauli or Italian team A.S. Livorno Calcio, as well as fan-owned clubs, challenge the ownership and capitalist logic of our society. Brenda Elsey points out that Chilean amateur soccer clubs connected the working class to political parties; served as venues for critique; and played a role in the turn away from the dictatorship and the democratization of the public sphere.<sup>47</sup> Based in England, the Hackney Laces are 'a community supported and run football club for girls who want to play football and learn new skills, on and off the pitch'.<sup>48</sup> The club's manifesto states that it is a 'football family' interested 'in enthusiasm not scorelines'.<sup>49</sup>

In *The World Through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, I offer support for the Gramscian discourse.<sup>50</sup> I use the examples of soccer clubs during the rise of the industrialized working class, the Soccer War, Silvio Berlusconi's (and Paolo Maldini's AC Milan and Italy) and Salvador Mariona's FC Alianza and El Salvador to demonstrate that, from a neo-Marxist perspective, the 'ideological state apparatus' engenders mass support in defence of capitalism and social control. Yet, I simultaneously advance the argument that world soccer is not merely a space for extreme nationalism, rampant commercialism and defence of dictatorial regimes. Rather soccer also enhances positive values and possibilities for social change.<sup>51</sup> Soccer can be the site for generosity, fair play, and initiatives for social change.

FIFA awards Fair Play prizes each year in order to promote positive values such as fair play. Soccer has also enhanced leadership skills. Soccer allowed



anti-apartheid activists to learn leadership skills in prison through the Makana Football Association from 1966–1973, a league created and run by anti-apartheid prisoners, including current South African President Joseph Zuma.

Soccer provided a venue for the dreams of countless boys and girls around the world, including the former US international Julie Foudy, who now runs her own leadership school for girls and young women.<sup>52</sup> Samuel Eto'o, a Chelsea star, Cameroonian international and the African Player of the Year winner a record four times, dreamed of being the new Roger Milla (a World Cup star for Cameroon in 1982, 1990 and 1994) as a child.<sup>53</sup>

Soccer is used by states to promote soft power.<sup>54</sup> For example, Uruguay won two World Cups as 'soccer pulled this tiny country out of the shadows of universal anonymity',<sup>55</sup> in the words of Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. Galeano also argues that Uruguay built many soccer fields and participated in international soccer tournaments as early as the 1920s as part of a positive nation-building scheme.<sup>56</sup> The strategy has paid off for Uruguay with greater international recognition as a result of its overachieving performances at major soccer tournaments. Uruguay is the smallest country in the world to have won a World Cup: it had less than two million people when it won the first World Cup in 1930. It won the 1950 World Cup in Brazil. In addition, Uruguay has won a record 15 *Copa América* titles. Already in the 1920s and 1930s, Uruguay fielded black players and thus engaged in anti-racism work long before it became mainstream.

Soccer supports anti-racism initiatives such as Kick It Out and Show Racism the Red Card. Soccer has been involved in efforts for social change such as the Homeless World Cup. In 2013, Los Angeles Galaxy star Robbie Rogers was widely supported by his team and fans when he came out as the first openly gay player in Major League Soccer. Soccer stars have challenged authoritarian regimes. Brazilian soccer legend Sócrates openly defied the military regime in the 1980s and attempted to democratize both his club Corinthians and the wider Brazilian society.

Discourses surrounding national teams can also be Gramscian. Joshua H. Nadel points to numerous narratives related to the Honduran national soccer team throughout history. When Honduras won matches, blacks were praised, but they were also blamed when the nation lost. 'Black Hondurans have remained barely visible in representations of the country over the past century, largely as a result of conscious decisions made by national political and intellectual leaders', writes Nadel.<sup>57</sup> Although black Hondurans make up merely 2% of the Honduran population and face serious racial discrimination, poverty and lower educational and social mobility rates compared to mestizos or whites, more than half of the players on the national team at the 2010 World Cup were of black African descent. Thus, soccer is one of the few domains in Honduras where national unity can be engendered and racism can be challenged through the racial composition of the national team. In 2011, black Honduran national team players led by defender Osman Chávez, including David Suazo, Maynor Figueroa, Hendry Thomas and Wilson Palacios, challenged racist discourses in the state, the stands, on Web postings, and in civil society.<sup>58</sup>

A national soccer team can unite or divide the nation, depending on whether you are a civic or ethnic nationalist, to borrow the distinction made by Hans Kohn.<sup>59</sup> National soccer teams can also exclude not merely because one needs to be a citizen of the country to play for it, but also as a result of societal pressures to field ethnically or religiously homogeneous squads. This latter perspective is known as *ethnic nationalism*, which stresses the predominance of tribal solidarity, an emotional and

mystical connection to an idealized past and national development.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, *civic nationalism* focuses on liberal universalism, rationality, individual rights and self-transcendence, and a community of numerous sovereign states living in harmony.<sup>61</sup> This type of nationalism is, in theory, more cosmopolitan and colourless than ethnic nationalism and based on shared republican values. Hence, civic nationalists would want players not just from the dominant ethnic group on the pitch, but all citizens of the state (irrespective of their ethnic or biological origins) united by merit and shared liberal values. Gianluigi Buffon, an Italian national goalkeeper with neo-fascist sympathies, is the teammate of Mario Balotelli, an Italian descended from an African father and raised by a Jewish mother. They inspire different nationalist visions of what it means to play for the Italian national team.

Soccer is, to use Robert Putnam's notion of 'bridging capital', an 'integrative force among different groups and their cultural boundaries'.<sup>62</sup> So, for example, there are a high number of Israeli Arabs in Israeli professional soccer.<sup>63</sup> Tamir Sorek points out the high number of Israeli Arabs playing professional soccer and even on the national soccer team, insisting that sport is 'the only public sphere in which Arab excellence is tolerated by the Jewish majority'. The Israeli Government posits a different discourse, namely that Israeli Arab citizens of Israel have equal opportunities and the proof is that they are populated in the world beyond the soccer pitch as parliamentarians, mayors, judges, diplomats, university professors and business owners. Israeli Arabs challenge this official discourse and argue that they are 'second-class citizens'.

Yet, a team of ethnically diverse players does not completely undermine what Putnam calls 'bonding capital', or 'a hardening of boundaries among different constituencies and their cultures'.<sup>64</sup> Ukrainian soccer fans in Lviv held up banners of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. On 22 January 2010, the outgoing President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko awarded Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine (posthumously), but was roundly condemned by Russian, Polish, Jewish and other international community groups, as well as the European Parliament.

## Conclusion

This paper has traced three prevalent discourses related to soccer: the Soccer War, the Nobel Prize and the Gramscian. The Soccer War discourse cautions us to the dangers of soccer's manipulation by extreme nationalists and authoritarian regimes. The Nobel Prize nomination for soccer demonstrates that soccer can contribute towards building more diverse societies, as well as promote values such as fair play and anti-racism. The Gramscian discourse highlights the way soccer is used to maintain existing power relations, but how soccer can also be a vehicle for social change.

I do not claim that soccer officials, fans, the media and states do not disseminate other discourses related to soccer. Soccer discourses can also include the use of soccer fans' discourses in daily life in order to challenge established state discourses to soccer clubs in Corsica as sites of national identity.<sup>65</sup> Yet, to what extent might we be able to fit these discourses under the ambit of the three main discourses highlighted in this paper?

How can we promote soccer as a positive rather than negative force around the world? It is clear that soccer is a reflection of society, both its ugliness and possibilities for change.

Contemporary soccer can increase negative tendencies in human societies: extreme nationalism, sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and hooliganism. Professional soccer includes other serious problems: a win-at-all-costs philosophy (including game-fixing rings)<sup>66</sup>; corruption scandals such as Qatar's 2022 World Cup bid; turning a blind eye to dictators that host World Cups (Argentina in 1978 and more recently Russia in 2018 and Qatar in 2022); and non-recognition as with the refusal of Arab and most Muslim states to play soccer competitions against Israel.

FIFA has also been accused of 'opportunistic nationalism'.<sup>67</sup> FIFA recognizes 209 national federations, whereas there are only 193 member states of the United Nations. FIFA receives fees for every international match, even from 'nations' that are not sovereign states such as Kosovo and Gibraltar. FIFA thus contributes to enhancing nationalistic tensions between existing states and national federations. FIFA cares little about Kosovo or Gibraltar, but is interested in the marketing potential and revenue base associated with structuring soccer along nationalistic lines. In short, Scotland vs. England, Serbia vs. Croatia, Iran vs. the United States or perhaps one day Israel vs. Palestine sells for FIFA.

Yet, soccer can also be an educational tool and a mechanism for social transformation. In response to a banana thrown on the field in a Spanish league match in 2014, Dani Alves ate the banana before taking a corner kick. The incident went viral and led to widespread support by soccer players, coaches and fans around the world. Cesare Prandelli, the former manager of the Italian national team, took a photo eating a banana and it was distributed through social media. The racist offender against Alves was banned from the stadium in Villareal for life, although Alves called for leniency on the fan and stressed the importance of education in the struggle against racism.

In general, professional soccer has been far too light on racists, anti-Semites and hooligans in stadiums, particularly in Europe. As Gavin Jones noted in relation to Italian soccer, 'Repeated promises by politicians to crack down on soccer violence have proven ineffective, often resisted by the clubs themselves as well as their organized supporters'.<sup>68</sup>

The former French international captain Lilian Thuram, who won the 1998 World Cup and is at the forefront of anti-racist education struggles, has suggested that we are not born with racism but rather learn it; soccer is a useful terrain for anti-racist struggle because it reaches millions of people; and soccer authorities need to ban racists from soccer stadiums.<sup>69</sup> I agree with Thuram. By ostracizing and shaming racists, we send a powerful message that racism will not be tolerated in the twenty-first century. Education in civil society is fundamental in fighting racism in the stadiums. It will not be easy, particularly in Europe, where anti-immigrant, extreme right-wing political parties are now mainstream and have participated in numerous coalition governments in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>70</sup> In 2012, Sarah L. de Lange pointed out that radical right-wing populist parties participated in five different national governments in western Europe in the new millennium (Austria – 2000/2003, Denmark – 2001/2005/2007, Italy – 2001/2005/2008, the Netherlands – 2002, and Norway – 2001) and four different national governments in eastern Europe in the 1990s and new millennium (Estonia – 1992/1994, Poland – 2006, Romania – 1993, and Slovakia – 1992/1994/2006).<sup>71</sup>

To the extent that soccer is played by people of all genders, colours, nations and faiths, it is talent and merit that ultimately matter. Or, the joy or passion of the game, particularly for amateurs, as highlighted by the example of the Hackney Laces. Kuper and Szymanski are correct to point out that English soccer clubs largely

abandoned their racism once they realized that black players could help teams attain success.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps no player had greater talent and merit in soccer history than Pelé. Pelé's popularity in his native Brazil was so breathtaking that in 1995 Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso dubbed him 'Extraordinary Minister for Sport'. World leaders longed to be photographed with Pelé; the former Shah of Iran waited for three hours at an international airport to speak with him, and Nigeria declared a two-day truce in its war with Biafra to allow the combatants to see him play.<sup>73</sup>

In 2014, Pelé released his third book, *Why Soccer Matters*,<sup>74</sup> further cementing his role as the greatest ambassador of the game worldwide. Like his first book published in the late 1970s, *Why Soccer Matters* advances a discourse that I have called the Nobel Prize discourse. Soccer is the 'beautiful game', filled with passion, creativity and joy; it engenders unity across classes, nations, ethnic groups and religions; and it can humanize national 'enemies' through matches. In *Why Soccer Matters*, Brazil's defeat to Uruguay in the 1950 World Cup final is interpreted by Pelé in positive terms as promoting national unity through shared experiences:

Standing around the radio, and suffering together on July 16, 1950, gave Brazilians a shared experience. For the first time, rich and poor alike had something in common, something they could discuss with anybody on the street corner, whether they were in Rio, Bauru, or deep in the Amazon.

We take this sort of thing for granted now; but it was very important back then, in creating a common story of what it meant to be Brazilian. We weren't strangers anymore. And I don't think we ever really were again.<sup>75</sup>

Yet, even Pelé could be criticized within his own country as a 'traitor' when in 2013 during protests being held in Brazil during the Confederations Cup he told his compatriots to 'forget all the commotion and remember how the Brazilian squad is our country and our blood'.<sup>76</sup> Some things such as democracy and dissent are much more important than soccer. Yet, soccer might ironically be that mass appeal vehicle that gets the soccer community and other authorities listening to the concerns of people around the world. The debates and criticisms of Russia and Qatar hosting the 2018 and 2022 World Cups will hopefully make us more sensitive to the nature of World Cup bids, corruption, kickbacks and the lack of transparency in FIFA. If soccer is to be a force for social change, FIFA will need to be on board. In 2006, it was estimated that FIFA would have been the 19th largest economy in the world if it was a sovereign state.<sup>77</sup> Issues surrounding worker rights also need to be tackled by FIFA. Many foreign labourers have died in building projects for Qatar's World Cup, while forced labour has been widely reported.

We might also ask questions about whether authoritarian regimes should ultimately host World Cups. While I am in general against boycotts in sports (with the exception of the most heinous regimes such as apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany), having such debates highlights the power of global sports and enhances democratic accountability. Yaya Touré, the Manchester City star and Ivory Coast international, suggested that black players boycott the World Cup in Russia because of the anti-black racism in Russian stadiums. I profoundly respect his position, but slightly disagree. We should attempt to ban racists from stadiums and Yaya Touré should lead the Ivory Coast to a World Cup victory. Both scenarios would silence the racists, in the stadiums at least. Thus, the slogan of the 2012 Homeless World Cup, 'One ball can change the world',<sup>78</sup> will become a reality.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes

1. Bryla, 'FIFA World Cup History'.
2. FIFA.com, 'FIFA World Cup Group Stages Break New Ground in TV Viewing'.
3. Nadel, *Fútbol!: Why Soccer Matters in Latin America*, 1.
4. See Markovits and Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*.
5. Dionne Jr., 'Clinton Swipes the GOP's Lyrics; The Democrat as Liberal Republican'.
6. A discourse is: 'A formal discussion of a topic in speech or writing,' or 'Written or spoken communication or debate.' See Oxford Dictionaries, 'discourse'.
7. Tuathail, 'Thinking Critically About Geopolitics', 1–12.
8. In reference to the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937).
9. For soccer as a pagan religion, see Villoro, *Dios es redondo*. For the relationship between soccer and tribalism, see Villoro, *Los once de la tribu*.
10. Desmond Morris, *The Soccer Tribe*.
11. Shankly, 'Own Words'.
12. For soccer as a pagan religion in Mexico, see Bar-On, 'El Tri: A Pagan Religion for All'.
13. Kapuściński, *The Soccer War*, 182.
14. Ibid. and Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Football War*.
15. Cuscatla, 'LA GUERRA DEL FÚTBOL 1969'.
16. The French Marxist Louis Althusser (1918–1990) made a distinction between the 'repressive state apparatus' and the 'ideological state apparatus,' both of which serve the ruling economic class. The 'repressive state apparatus' is based on violence and the logic of obey and command: the heads of state, government, police, courts and the army. The 'ideological state apparatus,' on the other hand, includes all of civil society outside the ambit of the state: the family, the media, religious organizations, the education system, culture and sporting contests. From this perspective, soccer clubs and national teams are also part of the 'ideological state apparatus.' According to Althusser, the 'repressive state apparatus' acts in favour of the ruling class through covert and overt forms of violence. The 1969 Soccer War between Honduras and El Salvador is as an example of the use of the 'repressive state apparatus.' Yet the 'repressive state apparatus,' insisted Althusser, also functions through ideology and it heavily favours dominant social classes. The 'ideological state apparatus' functions principally through a dominant ideology and the intimation of symbolic violence as it can call for the support of the 'repressive state apparatus.' Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', In *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*, 121–176.
17. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.
18. Friedman, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*.
19. Sobek, 'Rallying Around the Podesta: Testing Diversionary Theory Across Time', 29–45.
20. Orwell, 'The Sporting Spirit'.
21. Quoted in Fisher, 'The American Spectator and Soccer's Vaudevillian Culture'.
22. ABC News, 'Game of Soccer Gets Nobel Peace Nomination'.
23. Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*.
24. Ibid., 12, 31.
25. On the French national team after it won the 1998 World Cup, see Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France*.
26. Annan, 'How We Envy the World Cup'.
27. Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France*, 169.
28. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
29. Ibid., 367.
30. Ibid., 433.

31. Hoare and Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 625.
32. Bell, 'Philosophy Football'.
33. Quoted in Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, 34.
34. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
35. Vinnai, *El fútbol como ideología*. The book was translated into English as *Football Mania* (1973), while the Spanish translation's title stayed true to the original German.
36. Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 2.
37. Hutchison, 'Breaking Boundaries: Football and Colonialism in the British Empire'.
38. Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*, 8.
39. Kapuściński, *The Soccer War*.
40. *Ibid.*, 159.
41. Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century*, 242–3.
42. Del Burgo, 'Don't Stop the Carnival: Football in the Societies of Latin America', 69.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Bar-On, *The World through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, particularly Chapter 4 entitled 'One Ball Can Change the World', 61–82.
45. Dorsey, 'Emboldened Fans Rewrite the Politics of Egyptian Soccer'.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century*.
48. Hackney Laces, 'About'.
49. Hackney Laces, 'Manifesto'.
50. Bar-On, *The World Through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, in particular Chapter 3 entitled 'Winning Hearts and Minds: Soccer, Ideological Hegemony, and Class Warfare', 39–59.
51. On possibilities for social change, see Bar-On, *The World Through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, 61–82.
52. Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy.
53. Nexdim Empire, 'Samuel Eto's's Letter to Roger Milla'.
54. By soft power, Joseph S. Nye means neither the use of money, nor force to achieve state foreign policy goals. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.
55. Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, 45.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Nadel, *Fútbol!: Why Soccer Matters in Latin America*, 153.
58. *Ibid.*, 155–6.
59. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*.
60. *Ibid.*, 574.
61. *Ibid.*
62. Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*, 2.
63. Sorek, 'Arab Football in Israel as an "Integrative Enclave"', 431; and Sorek, *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave*.
64. Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*, 3.
65. Levin, 'Soccer Discourses and the Daily Life of Adolescents in a Small Israeli Town', 83–96; and Györi Szabó, 'Identity and Soccer in Corsica', 36–55.
66. See, for example, Hill, *Juego sucio: Fútbol y crimen organizado*.
67. Gameros, 'Las goles de la FIFA', 127.
68. Jones, 'Italy Arrests Man Over Cup Final Shootings, Bemoans Football Violence'.
69. See Lilian Thuram's *Fondation*, <http://www.thuram.org/>.
70. Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to Modernity*, 8–9.
71. De Lange, 'Radical Right-Wing Parties in Office', in *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives*, 173, 192.
72. Kuper and Szymanski, *Soccernomics*, 95–110.
73. Pelé (with Fish), *My Life and the Beautiful Game: The Autobiography of Pelé*, 12.
74. Pelé (with Winter), *Why Soccer Matters*.
75. *Ibid.*
76. Rainbow, 'Pele Defends Himself after Being Branded "Traitor of the Century"'



77. Bar-On, *The World through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, 127–8. Also see Gameros, ‘Las goles de la FIFA’, 126.
78. Bar-On, *The World through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport*, 61–82.

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