

A Postdigital Story of Football Fandom: Argentina and Bangladesh Between Cosmopolitan Fraternity and Narratives of Resistance

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Abstract *It was an ordinary individual from Bangladesh whose tweet served to highlight on a global stage the significant fandom in Bangladesh for the Argentina national football team. This article delves into the underlying causes for this fandom and the football-related narratives that surround it. It is argued that there are differences and similarities in the history of the two countries, which have led to shared narratives of being underprivileged in the face of global colonial power structures and stimulated narratives of resistance. These narratives have been further intensified by the mediatization of sport, which has existed long before social media, but which has gained an additional dimension through the accessibility and reach of platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. This cross-country fandom can be understood as an example of a banal and solidarity-based cosmopolitanism that emerges from below and can be considered an expression of digital cosmopolitanism.*

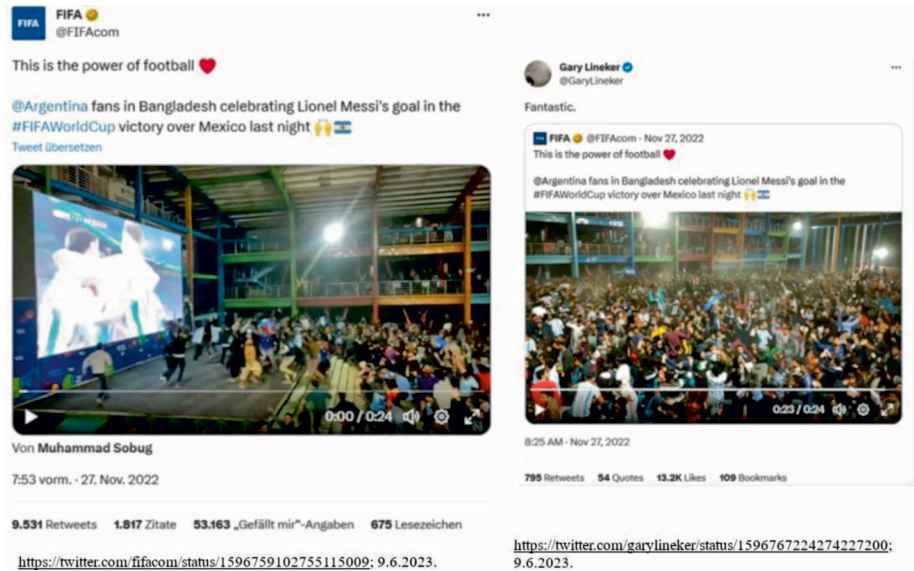
Building on this, the empirical part of this chapter uses qualitative methods to examine a corpus of 12,907 social media comments (YouTube, Twitter, Instagram) documenting the unexpected fraternity between Bangladesh and Argentina. Four categories are derived that can be used to illustrate and explain this bond: (1) narratives of resistance to the coloniality of power, (2) narratives of fraternity, (3) cosmopolitan solidarity across borders and (4) national symbolisms. These are interwoven with the historical and theoretical background. The article thus deconstructs narrative dynamics that arise from seemingly banal tweets, which in turn reflect the momentum of sport events providing connections far beyond borders

1. Introduction

The 2022 FIFA World Cup held in Qatar witnessed an interesting phenomenon that surprised many: A large number of people in Bangladesh turned out to be dedicated supporters of the Argentine football team. And it is worth noting – not just after Argentina had won the trophy, but right from the beginning. In fact, this fandom was not spontaneous, but had been manifesting in Bangladesh for decades and had

not been noticed by the world at large. In an increasingly digitally mediated world (and sport), in which a 'product' as universal and staged as football is a subject of massive interest, this surprising postcolonial and postdigital¹ football story of an Argentine-Bangladeshi fraternization could easily spread around the world.

Fig. 1: Original Tweet retweeted by FIFA and Gary Lineker.



The story started in a way that stories usually do these days: on social media. It was early in the World Cup, the second matchday of the group stage. Argentina desperately needed a win against Mexico, after losing their first game against Saudi Arabia. When the match kicked off at 22:00 Qatari time on 26 November, it was 1:00 am in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. By the time Lionel Messi scored the relieving 1–0 in minute 64, it was already around 2:20 am. Nevertheless, an ordinary man from Dhaka, Mohammad Sobug, grabbed his mobile phone and documented a huge crowd of celebrating football fans. In fact, it is estimated that tens of thousands of Bengalis stayed awake until then. Being socialized technologically in our times, it is no surprise that Muhammad Sobug shared his video on Twitter (today X). And his 24 seconds made it around the world, being retweeted by the official FIFA account (and

1 "Postdigitality" means, among other things, the intertwining of material (analogue) and virtual (digital) processes and phenomena, such as the living out and development of a fanbase that takes place reciprocally and simultaneously in social media and 'on the street'. See the volume's editorial for a conceptualization of the term.

minutes later also by celebrities, such as English ex-player and now well-known presenter Gary Lineker who has circa 9 million followers), generating 9,531 “retweets”, 1,817 “quotes”, 675 “bookmarks” and 53,163 “likes” (Fig. 1).

Since then, the decades-long support of people in Bangladesh for the Argentine Football team has become better known, also in Argentina, which actually led to the re-opening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka a few months later. This fraternization, at first glance surprising, is rooted in colonial history and resistance, the mediatization of sport and cosmopolitan expressions.

2. Argentinian – Bangladeshipan Relations

How can football fans from two countries separated by more than 16,000 kilometres, by different languages and religions, have such a bond? Bilateral political and economic relations between Argentina and Bangladesh have never been of great importance. Bangladesh is Argentina’s twenty-first most important foreign trade partner in terms of exports (Trading Economics, 2023a) and only seventy-first in terms of imports (Trading Economics, 2023b). Conversely, Argentina is the seventieth most important foreign trading partner for Bangladesh in terms of exports, even behind other South American countries such as Brazil, Chile, Peru and Colombia (Trading Economics, 2023c), and eighteenth in terms of imports, contributing not more than 1.8 % of total imports (Trading Economics, 2023d).

The main link between Argentina and Bangladesh lies in history, more specifically in a world history that is marked by coloniality, economic imperialism and subalternity, and in the individual history of two remarkable and revered personalities: In 1924, when what is now Bangladesh was still part of the colonial British Raj, the iconic Bengal philosopher, poet and supporter of independence from Britain, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), visited South America. En route, he fell severely ill with influenza and had to spend two months recuperating near Buenos Aires. He was a guest of the Ocampo family, where Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979), among the most famous Argentinian writers, poets and feminists, befriended him (Chowdhury, 2016).

Almost 50 years later, Victoria Ocampo, meanwhile an important and influential Argentine intellectual, campaigned on behalf of the Bengalis when the people of East-Bengal fought a war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. She raised awareness that the refugee crisis in East Bengal was not just a local issue, but a global issue as the fate of the refugees exemplified hegemonic power imbalances (Chowdhury, 2016). Months later, once independence had been successfully gained, Argentina was one of the first countries to open an embassy in independent Bangladesh. Six years later, during Argentina’s last military dictatorship it was, however, quickly closed again (Rahma, 2022: 3). But a cautious devotion had developed that blossomed when

Diego Maradona took the stage in the Football World Cup of 1986, as well as adding a perspective on sport as an expression of resistance.

3. Football and Coloniality

The colonial histories of Argentina and Bangladesh followed distinct trajectories: Bangladesh was part of the British Raj from 1858 to 1947, while Argentina was under the Spanish Empire's Viceroyalty of Peru (later on Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata) from 1542 to 1816. Despite these different trajectories, their destinies are connected. One of the central axes of the new model of power that emerged from the colonization of America is the codification of the differences between conquerors and the conquered through the concept of race. The conquerors assumed a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others, as the founding element of the relations of domination (Quijano, 2008: 182). The following hegemonic world order has proven to be more durable and stable than colonialism itself and it is this living legacy that Quijano (2008) termed "coloniality of power": Even after colonies have disappeared as political entities, the system of oppression and exploitation and the mechanisms of domination that emerged with colonialism continue to operate until today.

Argentina provides an illustrative example in this regard: At the end of the 19th century, post-independence Argentina's nation-building involved not only creating a constitution and governance structure but also establishing sovereignty through the suppression and assimilation of indigenous populations (Taylor, 2020: 3), which can be understood as the implementation of the domination mechanism of the former colonial power. This process included constructing an idealized "White Argentina" through symbolic nation-building and encouraging mass European immigration. Between 1880 and 1910, approximately 3.5 million European migrants, primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe, significantly contributed to the "whitening" of the population, reinforcing the imagined racial identity of the new state (Taylor, 2020: 3–4).

For Bangladesh, although the British were latecomers to overseas expansion compared to the Portuguese and Spanish, who had already established extensive colonies and trade networks (Kohli, 2020: 21), they benefited from their global hegemonic position which facilitated the control of culture and knowledge (Quijano, 2008: 189). This hegemony extended to sport, which, after its formalization by the British bourgeoisie, became "an effective and productive neocolonial instrument" (De la Vega, 2010: 43) for controlling the established material relations and intersubjectivities initiated with the conquest of America (Quijano, 2008: 195).

It is evident that the manner in which sport was employed by imperial powers varies considerably across the globe, with Portuguese colonies providing distinct ex-

amples. For instance, in Mozambique, group sports were less encouraged than in British colonies (Domingos, 2010: 233). In Luanda, Angola, as described by Marzano (2019: 3) during the 19th century, “if colonial expansion was still described as a heavy burden to be carried by the white man, destined to fulfilling the historic mission of bringing civilization to the primitive people of Africa and Asia, sports were displayed as evidence of the superiority of the old continent”. In São Tomé and Príncipe, sport, particularly football, was utilized during the 1960s as a tool for training productive bodies and supporting imperial policy. Promoted by government agencies, sport symbolized modernity and progress while conveying nationalist messages and upholding the colonial regime. Football served as a safe platform to represent social and political divisions without threatening colonial institutions and helped consolidate Portuguese dominion, emphasizing cultural and affective ties over political power sharing (Nascimento, 2019: 342).

It is widely accepted among scholars specializing in sport sociology (Coleman, 1973; Mangan, 1996; Stoddart, 1998) that from its earliest days, football was conceived not only as a leisure and physical activity, but also as a means of instilling desired values. In a study of late Victorian England and the “Era of the New Imperialism”, Mangan (1996: 12) reveals the glorification of war and the formation of an imperial masculinity aligned with empire-building through the “indoctrination into martial, moralistic manhood with eventually serendipitous global ramifications”. Mangan (1996: 22), furthermore, demonstrates how cricket, football, and other English team sports were regarded as modern substitutes for the hard exercises of medieval knights and lauded for their moral training (through physical exertion and chivalry), which was deemed the most essential component of genuine education.

“By playing team sports, participants were taught to learn teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules” (Stoddart, 1998: 653). This emphasis on learning teamwork, authority, courage, loyalty, and respect for rules through team sports aligns seamlessly with the colonial power needs, as recognized by Nascimento (2019: 342): “The focus on obedience to the rules of the game, an essential element in modern sporting codes, appealed to colonial authorities [from the Portuguese Empire] who sought to stress adherence to authorities of legal codes to counter revolutionary ideologies and social disorder.”

As we have shown, the colonial utilization of sport was, despite the existence of certain variations, characteristic of colonial powers. However, whereas the Portuguese Empire permitted the formation of multi-racial teams to forestall insurrection against it, the British Empire pursued a markedly different course of action. In India, as part of the imperial agenda team sports – including football, cricket, hockey, and rugby – were not only utilized by British colonial institutions such as schools and social and sports clubs as a means to instill desired moral values such as “conformity and solidarity” (Dimeo, 2010: 63); they were also employed in accor-

dance with a pattern of racial segregation, whereby the British conveyed the notion of physical and moral inferiority to the Bengali elites (Dimeo, 2010: 71).

But while encouraging them to learn to play football and organize teams, those with some European ancestry were privileged and Bengali students were often excluded from competing on the same level as mixed-race students. In fact, “Indian clubs were also excluded from major competitions until the 1930s” (Dimeo, 2010: 66). While in British India, sport was used as a means of reinforcing colonial hierarchies and excluding local populations from equal competition, the arrival and development of football in Argentina followed a different trajectory.

The relationship between Argentina and the United Kingdom has been one of constant ambivalence over the decades: In the early 19th century, as part of their expansionist policy, British leadership came to recognize that military occupation of Argentina would be both costly and unwise, particularly in light of the failed invasions of 1806–1807 (Kohli, 2020: 80). The resistance of the people in Argentina (at that time still the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata) against this invasion – and the lack of support they got from the Spanish crown – encouraged them only four years later to the ‘May Revolution’ of 1810, resulting in the independence of Argentina from Spain.

Nevertheless, in the following decades Britain pursued a strategy regarded by Kohli (2020: 69) as a form of informal imperialism, that is extending significant political influence without formal territorial control (Kohli, 2020: 69), also coined as “economic imperialism” or the “railway imperialism” of the British Empire (Lewis, 2020: 1). This perspective continues to be a source of contention in political science and historiography. Rock (2019: xiii) asserts that “Argentines never become passive, inanimate victims of British domination”. Instead, as Argentina developed into a significant British overseas investment, the resulting material gains were distributed. This led, the author argues, to Argentina becoming the richest and most egalitarian country in Latin America.

Furthermore, following the declaration of independence in the early 19th century as a means for the formation of the nation state, Argentine political and military elites initiated a campaign aimed at the annihilation of the country’s native populations, followed by an extensive “repopulation” of the country with European settlers. These actions demonstrate the appropriation of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, “developed and promoted by Anglophone settler colonies and the British Empire which made it a badge of geopolitical powerfulness” (Taylor, 2020: 9). The identification and adoption of culture and convictions of the British Empire by the Argentinian elites meant to “claim for higher status for the nation, both within Latin America and on the world stage.” (Taylor, 2020: 9).

The pioneering period of Argentinian football is inseparably linked to the building of the railways by British companies. This began in the 1860s in Buenos Aires and reached, in the course of forty years, the rest of Argentina (Archetti, 1999: 48),

with Argentines embracing the pastime of their British employers associated with the railway industry (De la Vega, 2010: 41). “Via sport the British saw themselves as both gentlemen and players, and considered such activities as vital in achieving a – what they thought – very important cultural task: transferring the ethic of fair play” (see Coleman 1973; Mangan 1989 as referred in Archetti, 1999: 49). Indeed:

“In Latin America, and following the oft-cited teachings of the Argentine politician and educator Domingo F. Sarmiento, that the only way for any country of Latin America to progress was through a major acceptance of European behaviour, leaders in different parts of the hemisphere began to embrace European sports and physical education, along with other cultural forms, as a viable means of developing their own national societies, displacing – at times by force – the cultural and recreations practices of Latin America’s ‘folk’ communities” (Arbena, 1996: 222).

4. Narratives of Resistance to the Coloniality of Power

While the nineteenth century in British India and Argentina witnessed emulation and compliance with the moral values associated with football, the 20th century saw a shift in this dynamic: Football became a space of contestation. In India, football served to mobilize discontent against imperial power and as a symbolic space for independence. In Argentina, which at the beginning of the century was going through an identity crisis, due largely to the relative youth of the nation-state and the influx of immigrants, it provided a dramatic space for the constitution of strong identities (Alabarces, 1999: 78).

In British India, the “apparent contradiction in colonial policy, between using sport as a means of establishing Indian ‘separateness’ or inferiority and of offering British-style strategies for improvement on the one hand and dismissing equal competition in the leagues on the other, is important in understanding the ways in which football became more than simply a game” (Dimeo, 2001: 66, 67). Therefore,

“[...] the 1911 victory of Mohun Bagan Athletic Club over a team formed by English soldiers was a moment of nationalist resistance when the ideological underpinnings of colonialism, the belief in innate British superiority and in Indian physical frailty, were dramatically and publicly undone.” (Dimeo, 2001: 69)

This triumph showed the local population that they could effectively challenge oppressive forces. Years later, in postcolonial Southeast Asia, the recognition of their own agency led to the discourses on “subalternity”. This term, introduced by Antonio Gramsci, was contextualized by, among others, Marxist theorist Ranajit Guha (1982) and further differentiated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988). With “subal-

ternity”, Guha refers to marginalized population groups who are virtually invisible or inaudible in the face of overpowering (colonial) systems. Guha, Spivak and others described history and discourses from precisely these *subaltern* perspectives, especially making Southeast Asian views and conclusions visible and enabling a stronger sense of self-confidence (Chatterjee, 2006).

In the Argentine discourse a narrative approach of resistance is displayed. As argued by Archetti (1999), a detailed examination of journalist media and local football historians reveals that Argentina’s national football identity was, in fact, constructed in the early 20th century in contrast to the English style. Within this narrative: “The real Argentinian football, the creole way, was made by Italians, Spaniards and the male native population” (Archetti, 1999: 52). Indeed, the narrative of the ‘criollo’ style recognized the mixing of sons of Latin Europeans with the local population in the teams and excluded, explicitly, the sons of the British. In this way, this narrative contributed to define, in the field of sport, “Britishness” as the relevant “other” for the Argentinians (Archetti, 1999: 65). It is important to clarify, at this point, that as we will see later in the empirical section often “for Argentinians Englishness is the essence of Britishness, and both terms are used interchangeably” (Archetti, 1999: 52).

The creation of this unique football style is not only criollo, Archetti (1999) argues, but, more concretely, is the product of the *pibes criollos*, of the young “boys” (in Rioplatense Spanish) playing football:

“In the first place, the pibe criollo realized, when he saw how the English played, that this style of play left no room for improvisation, for ‘imagination’. Secondly, the pibes played football spontaneously in the potreros – the empty and uneven urban spaces – without any teachers, unlike in England.” (Archetti, 1999: 180)

The privileged image of the ideal Argentinian player is the *pibe*, because the authentic Argentinian player will never stop being a child. This imaginary world of football reflects the power of freedom and creativity in the face of discipline, order and hierarchy (Archetti, 1999: 181), and serves to underpin the emerging views of football as a space for resistance against narratives of coloniality that we are analyzing here.

An important role in this imaginary construction of Argentine identity in football in opposition to the ‘English’ and of football as a space for resistance was the Falklands War (Malvinas War) following the Argentinian Invasion of the Falkland Islands (1982). This war was from the beginning a matter of national identity, and as such, it was incorporated into the national soccer liturgy in its symbolic “warrior” character: Until today, the chants to cheer up the national football team include lyrics dedicated to “those young soldiers that I will never forget” (Llorens, 2023).

As previously demonstrated, football was initially conceived as a modern training exercise for warfare (Mangan, 1996). But also symbolically, football echoes war. It evokes the imagery and themes associated with war. Billig (1995: 124) elaborates on

this notion, explaining that while political crises can swiftly lead to war, the willingness to sacrifice requires constant preparation and reinforcement. On a daily basis, the banal activities of following sports results serve as rehearsals for these behaviours. As men scan for the results of their favoured team, they read of the deeds of other men engaged in combat, in the cause of that larger body, the team; and identify with their nation's struggle for honour against foreign adversaries. This daily engagement reinforces a sense of collective honour and readiness, akin to preparation for war. In the Argentine context, the symbolic association between football and war reached its pinnacle in the World Cup match between Argentina and England on June 22, 1986.

The construction of “Malvinas” as a national cause is multifaceted. Guber (2009: 21) notes that the war was a unique event in Argentine history. It was the only 20th century war in which Argentina was the primary combatant, involved civilian conscripts, and created a rare civil-military consensus rooted in national belonging. Grimson et al. (2007: 437) further argue that the dictatorship successfully monopolized national sentiment, aligning it with the regime by equating the Malvinas War to the defense of the homeland in the *May Revolution* of 1810. This issue transcended political and ideological lines, uniting the national population. Furthermore, the Malvinas cause reinforced national football identity, as evidenced by Ciccone (2016, 2022), who demonstrates how the press, particularly *Crónica* during the 1966 and the 1986 World Cups, linked national football to the “sovereignty dispute” by portraying English referees and players as “pirates”.

The emotional associations between Argentine football and the Falklands conflict demonstrate a constructed narrative that intertwines national identity with sports. This symbolic connection is bolstered by three main elements: firstly, the symbolic identification between football and the war, secondly, the narrative construction of a football identity built in opposition to the ‘British style’, and finally, the role of the Malvinas ex-combatants in the shaping of a sense of national identity.

This narrative is particularly evident in the portrayal of the 1986 World Cup match between Argentina and England as a symbolic act of revenge (Ciccone, 2016). The match, held just four years after the Falklands War, represented a quest for national redemption on the football field:

“The two notable goals that Maradona scored in the game against England on June 22, 1986, during a quarterfinal game in the Mexico World Cup, cast him as a redeemer. This image rapidly crossed national borders and made Maradona a global symbol of anti-colonial struggle, of courage and resistance against imperial powers.” (Brescia & Paz, 2023: 3)

The match, broadcast across the globe, had a significant impact on international audiences, including those in Bangladesh, who, due to their colonial history with

Britain, perceived Argentina's victory as a shared triumph. Maradona's image was that of an unconventional footballer from a humble background, who retained a strong connection to his roots (Alabarces, 2006: 212) and played for the working-class teams of Boca Juniors and Napoli (Fuentes, 2021: 29). He served as a projection surface for symbolic resistance against an unspecified form of injustice and oppression, with him being perceived as an avenger.

This fictive emotional affiliation serves to illustrate the powerful role of narrative in shaping national identity and collective memory. It demonstrates how narratives can transcend geographical and historical boundaries to unite disparate groups in shared symbolic victories. The victory against England meant "defeat over the old colonial empire – for Maradona, for Argentina and for many millions across the Global South" (Fuentes, 2021: 29). Whenever Maradona won with his "rebellious style of play that made the impossible seem normal [...] it felt like the side of the poor was striking a blow against the seemingly invincible rich" (Fuentes, 2021: 31). Being asked about his second goal, the legendary eleven second solo run, Maradona replied: "I thought that I had fallen to two Englishmen, but was lifting a country" (Signorini et al., 2021: 125).

Some of Maradona's "political connections put him close to non-democratic leaders with questionable human rights records, something at odds with his image of a tireless fighter for freedom and equality" (Brescia & Paz, 2023: 2). However, the permanent exhibition of his plebeian roots, his proudly exhibited excessive subalternity, as evidenced by Alabarces (2021: 6) enabled him to transcend the limitations of nationalism. His transformation into a myth during the 1986 World Cup, four years after the Malvinas War, was not contingent on a militaristic and patriotic narrative. In fact, Diego Maradona himself explicitly stated that it was not a patriotic gesture, but a gesture of revenge for the pain of the dead soldiers, who were, to add insult to injury, of his own age and class. The mythology in question is that of the humble, rather than the pantheon (Alabarces, 2021: 6). We argue that there is an 'underdog' relationship, which has its roots in the resistance against a world order set in motion with colonialism. Furthermore, as argued by Alabarces (1999), following Portelli (1993: 85):

"In the football universe, the axis of the hegemonic subordinate opposition (or 'workers versus capitalist') is displaced by 'rich versus poor', and in the space of representation that this generates, 'the occasional victory of the weak over the strong has a powerful mythic appeal, going back to cosmological mythologies' (Alabarces, 1999: 83).

5. Mediatization and Iconization of Sport / Football

As previously stated, the 1986 FIFA World Cup quarter-final between Argentina and England constituted a pivotal moment in this story of fraternization, made possible by the transformative power of the mass media, particularly television. Diego Maradona is, indeed, the first global figure of football entertainment, crossed by the new television conditions of football production from the 1990s onwards (Alabarcas, 2006: 214). The historical entanglement between football and the mass media reveals a narrative of evolving communication modalities, initially witnessed by the catalytic role of newspapers over the first half of the 20th century. Newspapers “attracted new practitioners at the same time as it attracted audiences willing to pay the entrance fees” (Frandsen, 2014: 531).

Following the key role of newspapers in mobilizing stadium attendance, this development led to an era dominated by radio, whose live broadcasts captivated audiences and embedded memorable moments such as the iconic 1954 radio phrase “Aus dem Hintergrund müsste Rahn schießen!” (engl.: “Rahn would have to shoot from the background!”) in the collective memory of West Germany. Subsequently, television emerged as a powerful mass medium, exerting considerable influence until the present era. Today, as Skey et al. (2018: 595) highlight, different types of media seem to struggle for dominance in football coverage. Based on data from England they work out that different target groups (e.g. male vs. female) have different media preferences for following football, in which television, radio and social media compete for dominance.

In any case, it is clear that digital media have quickened and multiplied the amount of communication regarding sport events and in particular with regard to sports celebrities, and thus have created a vortex of uncontrollable and unpredictable content around big, televised sports events (Whannel 2002 as referred to in Frandsen, 2014: 541). In the age of social media, the users are no longer just media consumers, but also content producers and thus, arguably, more competent in manipulating and intervening in the communication process than past generations. The evolution of the internet and associated technologies has built-in already in the early 21st century the ability of the individual to engage on a one-to-one or one-to-many or many-to-many basis, short-circuiting the top-down, hierarchical model of industrial media production (Boyle & Haynes, 2004: 140). This paradigm shift challenges the established dominance of television in the sport-media relationship, as noted by Frandsen (2014: 526).

The dynamic interplay between football and media technologies, not only shapes the sport's dissemination but also generates transnational social relations. As Giulianotti and Robertson (2007: 166–167) note: Communication technologies combined with the importance given to football by media and society create “world memoirs of heavily mediatized international fixtures [...] like the World Cup finals,

[which] provide a substantive lingua franca that sets international peoples talking” (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007: 167). In fact, as early as the turn of the century, it was noted that the accelerated “spectacularization” and commercialization that characterize the process of football’s globalization offer elements that suggest a weakening of the links between football and nationalism (Villena Fiengo, 2002: 157); while “devoid of a common language, individuals [here meaning football spectators] have established forms of friendship and interpersonal trust” (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007: 166).

While television remains a primary and highly influential medium for watching football and even interacting with other fans – see the introductory example of midnight public viewing in Dhaka – it now goes hand in hand with social media. In fact, social media communication is no longer something undertaken by a minority of fans on fan forums; it is the nominal way that fans interact with each other through a variety of media (Lawrence & Crawford, 2019: 7). As argued by McGillivray and McLaughlin (2019: 44): “Digital media platforms play an important role in enabling and strengthening transnational fandom experiences for fans following their favourite teams.” In addition, social media provides an opportunity for fans to appropriate the sport, enriching it with their own narratives and to fill it out in a cosmopolitan way.

6. Cosmopolitanism

Philosophical Cosmopolitanism

A transcontinental connection such as that between football fans in Argentina and Bangladesh is associated with a cosmopolitan view of people and their relationships. To place this momentum of fraternity within the cosmopolitan ideal, we first present different readings of cosmopolitanism.

According to Nussbaum (2019: 78), a basic assumption of early cosmopolitan philosophy (2nd century BC) is to see in an affection not only to the self, the family and the neighbours, but also in an affection – indeed – an interest and responsibility also to the cosmos, to humanity as a whole. Thus, human beings are to be considered as “Citizens of the World”, as it was stated by Diogenes (4th century BC). Being citizens of the world, the cosmopolitans’ task is to consider all people as “members of one human brotherhood” (Inglis, 2019: 45, 48). That would mean striving towards a world without restraints and borders. Of course this had been a mere theoretical abstraction and was considered more in a philosophical sense and did not mean the factual dissolution of borders in a physical sense, but, at least, the early cosmopolitans offered a reflection that the place where someone is coincidentally born is just that: a coincidence (Inglis, 2019: 42–43; Nussbaum, 2019: 66–80).

Banal and Critical Cosmopolitanism

Approximately two millennia later, with the advent of modernity, the concept of relating oneself to the world order underwent – at least in Europe (Inglis, 2019: 43) – a certain renewal. Modernity marked not only the birth of nationalism, but also the resurgence of cosmopolitan ideas. The French Revolution (1789–1799) brought Fraternity (Fraternité) into the lexicon. Fraternité went beyond a familial (lat. *frater* = brother) meaning to also imply the solidarity-driven unity of the oppressed classes (Fine, 2019: 362), which is a link to the narrative of the subalternity of the so-called Global South in resistance towards a post-colonial world-order. This brings notions of solidarity as a crucial term of cosmopolitanism into play (Fine, 2019). Solidarity in a cosmopolitan sense can be understood as a rather mundane attitude and opens up space for a “banal cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2011: 1348) and a “cosmopolitanism from below” (Kurasawa, 2004: 233–236), that is, a cosmopolitanism that comes from ordinary people rather than from the ruling classes. Cosmopolitanism concerns entities of different size, from organizations, movements and collectives to individual actors; and it goes beyond mere transnationalism, but is a way of referring or engaging with others over issues of (their and global) significance (Delanty 2008: 218); for example about the football World Cup. In this respect – and especially in connection to the football fandom online comments – a link to Delanty’s (2008: 218) suggestion of a critical stance of cosmopolitanism can be made: The philosophical-theoretical ideas of cosmopolitanism “such as the negotiation and crossing of borders, a concern with over-lapping allegiances, a concern with global equality and the suffering of others” are still in play, but are given “a more concrete form” and are taken as “expressions of cosmopolitanism” (Delanty, 2008: 218).

Acknowledging that “sub- and supra-national solidaristic ties have existed in various forms and to different extents over time”, Kurasawa (2004, 233–234) sees them becoming widespread in the era of overcoming physical distances through globalization and – we are convinced – the internet. This banal idea of cosmopolitanism is more applicable than the philosophical “dissolution of all borders”, since it is concretely attached to the concern for other people on the same planet, creating a mutual commitment, and – sometimes – also an expectation of reciprocity.

Digital Cosmopolitanism

In our time, ideas of responsive thinking, reciprocal action, an authentic attitude and concern for issues that affect unnamed global citizens are crucial in social media – for some, at least – and convert the cosmopolitans of our days into *digital cosmopolitans*, which are empirically observable (Lietz & Lenehan, 2023). At a time when the virtual and the analogue are increasingly merging, and since the phenomenon

observed here is inherently rooted in the internet, it is worth taking a look at cosmopolitanism in the age of digitalization, as for example undertaken by Hall (2019).

Today, (ordinary) people worldwide build “bonds of mutual commitment and reciprocity across borders through public discourse [...]” (Kurasawa, 2004: 234). Of course, digital cosmopolitanism does not replace traditional and recent ideas of the very same concepts, but applies them onto the internet and/or onto postdigital spheres (Lenehan, 2022). Mainly, a cosmopolitan attitude tightens the links with the “like-minded”. People share “symbolically-constituted experiences” and have “the desire to pursue a sense of belonging” (Delanty, 2010: 153) and create not only an identity but also a socially cohesive community (Lietz, 2024).

According to Ponzanesi (2020: 4), “digital communications have [...] greatly enhanced the possibilities for cosmopolitan interconnectivity, making it possible to have a deeper cultural engagement with the other.” Therefore: “Digital cosmopolitanism is [... related to] the power of the internet to engage with the other and shape new networks of solidarity, contributing to intercultural exchanges, global justice, and new types of subpolitical activities/counterpublics.” (Ponzanesi, 2020: 4) The fact that digital cosmopolitanism is another banal form of cosmopolitanism inscribed in mundane practices, such as the media consumption of international sports tournaments, should not prevent us from analyzing this type of expression. On the contrary, it should encourage us, since, as Ponzanesi points out (2020: 8): “It is, in particular, on the practice and analysis of the everyday, mundane, ordinary, and banal ways that the engagement with the digital and the cosmopolitan should focus in order to emphasize locality and rootedness with connectivity and encounters.”

(Rooted) Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

The dissolution of physical borders due to globalization and digitalization does not mean the dissolution of nationalism (Delanty, 2008: 220). Even in statements with a specific cosmopolitan tone – as we will see later – ideas of nationalism still perpetuate. One’s origins play a role even in cosmopolitanism, to which Appiah (2005: 213–277), Kymlicka and Walker (2012) and others refer to as rooted cosmopolitanism. There can still be nationalism embedded in a cosmopolitan conception of society. The challenge therefore is, according to Beck and Sznaider (2010: 388), to take nationalism and cosmopolitanism not as contradictory moral orders but to see them “as living side by side in the global world”, as “cosmopolitanism and nationalism are not mutually exclusive, neither methodologically nor normatively” and of course also not empirically – as we will show in the following section.

Empirical Study

In the context of the described affinity of a large number of Bangladeshis for the Argentine football team, countless social media posts can be collected and examined. In order to have a more systematic view of the contents and nature of these expressions we analyzed posts on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We focused on the period between 26 November 2022, the beginning of the FIFA World Cup 2022, and 27 February 2023, the day after the (re)opening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka. By searching for the key phrase “Argentina” + “Bangladesh” on the aforementioned platforms, we selected a set of 24 related Twitter threads, 6 related Instagram posts and 5 related YouTube video comments sections, taking all posts and replies into account. Thus, we assembled a number of 12,907 comments (more than 146,000 words), which we transcribed with the help of the web data extractor exportcomments.com. All unrelated comments were eliminated, and content-wise related comments were subjected to a qualitative content analysis, organizing them in relation to codes and subsequently to categories. Thus, we deduced a number of four categories that shed light on the content and nature of expressions related to the football story under consideration.

Category A) Narratives of Resistance to the Coloniality of Power

In the viewed comments, we observed a dominant discourse that echoed the introduced narrative concerning a resistance towards the coloniality of power. It suggests that the newfound friendship of Bangladesh and Argentina stemmed mainly from a collective antipathy towards the United Kingdom or England – again not making a distinction between these two entities. This sentiment is encapsulated in phrases such as “Always against England, no matter what” or “Who would have thought that dislike of England would unite us with another country on the other side of the world!”, suggesting a deep-seated animosity rooted in a hegemonic world order that was initiated by colonialism. One commentator even suggested that the Bengalis’ “crush on the Argentinian team” began in 1986, when, as mentioned above, thanks to television coverage, “Bangladesh people saw the English crying” (see figure 2).

Fig. 2: Anti-imperialist tweets and sympathies.²



Moreover, the celebration of Argentina's football victory is presented as a triumph of the marginalized, symbolizing the resistance of the oppressed. By attributing the success to the "humble, suffering people" who appreciate the pure essence of football, the discourse elevates the significance of sport as a form of empowerment. Furthermore, the invocation of "the best football in the world, South America" reflects a reclaiming of agency and pride in local manners, challenging the narratives

2 The comments in Spanish, in order of appearance, translate to: "Always against England, no matter what", "Who would have thought that dislike of England would unite us with another country on the other side of the world", "It is the victory of all the humble, suffering people who recognise the essence of football, spectacle, fantasy, joy from the children in the street. The best football in the world, South America! Thank you Argentina!" and "Brotherly united in the struggle for the sovereignty of the peoples and against imperialism and slavery". All translations of non-English tweets into English have been undertaken by the authors of this chapter.

of superiority established by the coloniality of power and underpinning the vision of Latin American football as a specific variant that is constituted in contrast to and opposed to a European style of playing, as we have argued in the theory section before. Finally, the comments articulate a narrative of solidarity “in the struggle for sovereignty and liberation from imperialism and slavery”, embodying the enduring legacy of resistance to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2008). Also Diego Maradona is appealed to in a longer Instagram post by a person from Bangladesh (Fig. 3) highlighting his “humble background”, his “defeating the mighty English” and clarifying how this resonates with people in the South Asian Country:

Fig 3: Maradona and Bangladesh. Excerpt taken from https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cl_qejXNoJS/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading; 17. May 2023.

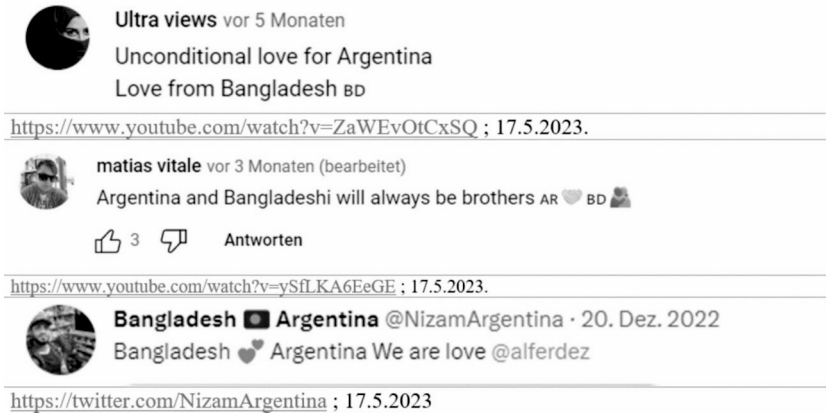
(...) Diego Maradona's story from the slums of Argentina and his heroics struck a chord with the common people of Bangladesh. A poor man with humble backgrounds defeating the mighty English and conquering the world with his never say die attitude was extremely relatable to Bangladeshis, rich or poor because we were a young emerging nation who spent hundreds of years under brutal colonial rulers first with UK and then with Pakistan. Diego Maradona represented all of us. (...)

The intersection of football, honour and war, echoed in martial words such as “lucha”, which can be translated as “struggle” or “fight”, highlights the profound role of football as a battleground for ideological contestation and the construction of national identity. Through the lens of colonial narratives, the discourse surrounding football illuminates a narrative of solidarity and resilience that serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of resistance to a world order built on colonial and imperial structures. At its core, the formation of national identity within these narratives is deeply rooted in principles of anti-imperialism. When football fans from different nations unite in their shared antipathy towards a global hegemonic model of power that presupposes an element of coloniality; and celebrate victories on the pitch, they reaffirm their collective commitment to asserting their autonomy and sovereignty as subalterns in the post-colonial world.

Category B) Narratives of Fraternity

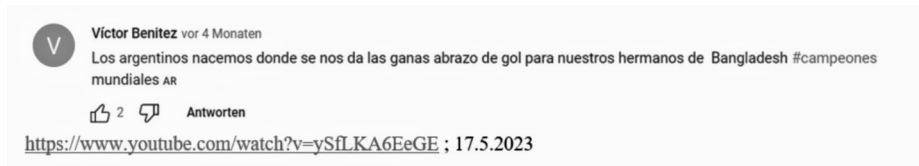
So far, the theoretical section and empirical demonstration have brought to light the attachment to narratives of resistance, that is shared in a kind of struggle. The social media agents construct a narrative of solidarity, a narrative of *brothers in arms*. Indeed, a momentum of *brotherhood* is displayed in the referred social media comments, building a bridge to the aforementioned idea of cosmopolitan solidarity or, more precisely, to the French revolutionary idea of *fraternité* (= brotherhood). This establishes the second category we would like to introduce (fig. 4):

Fig. 4: Fraternity, collection of comments.



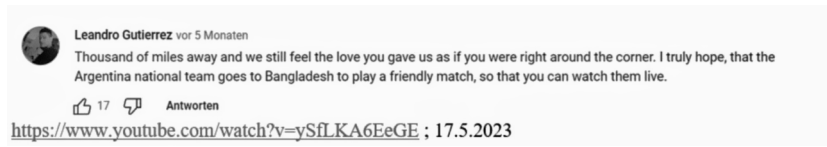
It cannot be overlooked the passionate pathos that lies in expressions like “unconditionality of love” and in the constant repetition of “all people becoming brothers”. However, following twenty-five centuries since the cosmopolitan ancient Greeks, the “simple idea of universal brotherhood” has somehow survived, has been perpetuated (Sugimoto 2019: 538) and permeates the 21st century (digital) communication between people who would not have been in contact if there had not been digital media and a worldwide mediatization of sports. Remarkably, the fraternization is illustrated in a form that is common and appropriate to the chosen medium (YouTube), through (no less passionate) emojis and emoticons, establishing narrations of social embeddedness and cohesion (see Lietz, 2024).

The fourth example in the figure above, brings a political level into play: Seemingly unmotivated, the tweeter tags the – at that time – Argentinian president Alberto Fernández (@alferdez), in an attempt to persuade him to direct Argentinian policy towards this new-found friendship. This makes tangible how fraternal cosmopolitan statements can smoothly drift into political statements, and how cosmopolitanism is often not separated from politics. Digging deeper into the cosmopolitan posts, we discover a comment that truly follows an ancient Greek baseline of cosmopolitanism that was introduced in the theoretical section: The assumption that place of birth is accidental and irrelevant and that you literally could have been born everywhere in the world, which makes insisting on physical boundaries obsolete (Fig. 5). Written in Spanish, it translates: “We Argentinians are born wherever we want to be born [that means including in Bangladesh, R.L./C.P.]. Immense hugs for our brothers in Bangladesh.”

Fig. 5: Coincidence of Birth Place.

Category C) Cosmopolitan Solidarity Beyond Borders

As we have seen in the theory section, the idea of solidarity across borders is immanent in a banal cosmopolitan idea. It creates a spirit of conceiving the “other” as being “right around the corner” (Fig. 6):

Fig. 6: Solidarity Beyond Borders.

The Bangladeshi support seems to evoke the desire to respond with reciprocal actions. This reciprocal cosmopolitanism is triggered ‘from below’ and was not explicitly expected by the commenter, nor was it promoted by any authorities, but by the open-hearted “unconditional” (see above) Bangladeshi support. As a result, we can see very ordinary and concrete communicative actions that clearly go beyond a mere philosophical approach to cosmopolitan attitudes. To name just a few, Argentinian fans are proposing to support the Bangladesh national cricket team, given that cricket is the national sport of the South Asian country and, in line with the anti-imperial struggle (see above), the English team is one of Bangladesh’s major opponents in that sport. (Fig. 7; translation: “In a while, the cricket team of Bangladesh will face ... England. I believe that we will celebrate each run as if it were a Di Maria goal. Let’s go Tigers of Bengal!”). Other supportive comments include a suggestion which is argued on reciprocity and reads that the Argentinian Football Association (AFA) should send coaches and managers to Bangladesh to help develop the country’s football and eventually qualify for the World Cup.

Fig. 7: *Banal Cosmopolitan Reciprocity.*

En un rato, la selección de cricket de Bangladesh se enfrenta a...¡La de Inglaterra!

Supongo estaremos festejando cada run como si fuera un gol de Di María, eh: ¡Vamos los tigres de Bengala, carajo!

Post Übersetzen



<https://twitter.com/periodistan/status/1630741362286141440> ; 17.5.2023



carlos ramirez vor 4 Monaten

Por la pasión y apoyo a la selección argentina, deberíamos devolver la gentileza, que la AFA mande técnico y ayudantes a Bangladesh y les asesore a los jugadores de ese país para que su selección sea más competitiva en la liga de Asia.



Antworten

1 Antwort

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZ_H_2nyXGQ ; 17.5.2023



Calzabbath vor 3 Monaten

As an Argentine, I want to thank all Bangladesh for your overwhelming support. You really bring tears to our eyes and you can surely consider this triumph as yours as it is ours. Hope one day Bangladesh qualifies for a World Cup under the guidance of an Argentine coach. My warmest greetings from Buenos Aires.



Antworten

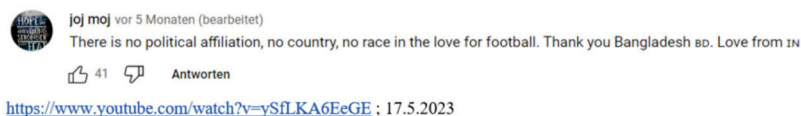
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGdxVesgAB4> ; 17.5.2023

It must not be overlooked that the last two comments contain a paternalistic attitude in a certain, obvious way, which could give the impression of positioning Bangladesh in an inferior role in the “world order” in comparison to Argentina, and is not too far away from a hegemonic self-confidence. In other words, it is indeed brotherhood (see section before) but with a clear attribution of who is the bigger brother.

Category D) National Symbolisms

As we have seen, cosmopolitan solidarity does not mean giving up *roots* and feelings of local (or national) affiliation (Nussbaum, 1997: 9). It is therefore not surprising that – besides the cosmopolitan expressions looked at before – national affiliations and symbols are played with here. Even in a comment that reads “there is no [...] country, no race in the love of football. Thank you Bangladesh BD.” (Fig. 8), an indication of national belonging is inserted: “Love from IN[di]a”.

Fig. 8: *Dissolution and allusion to nationality.*



The expression of a national attachment and alignment with a national football team is a relatively simple process on social media; it only requires the use of a flag emoji. From a cosmopolitan perspective, it is worth noting that certain forms of hybrid national identities can be observed in this category, challenging the traditional logic of sports competitions between nations. However, in the theoretical part of this chapter, we explored how nationalism and cosmopolitanism can coexist without contradiction.

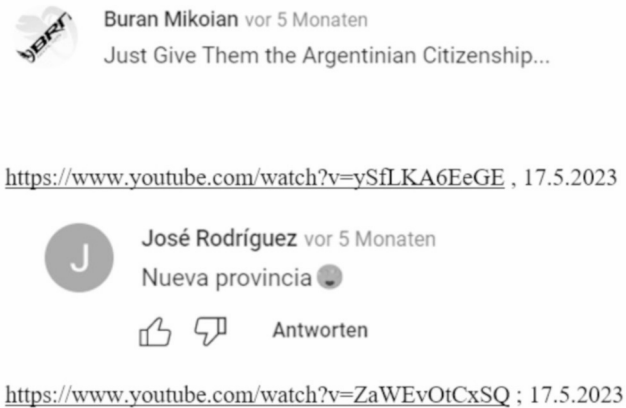
Fig. 9: *Collage of tweets playing with national symbolism.*



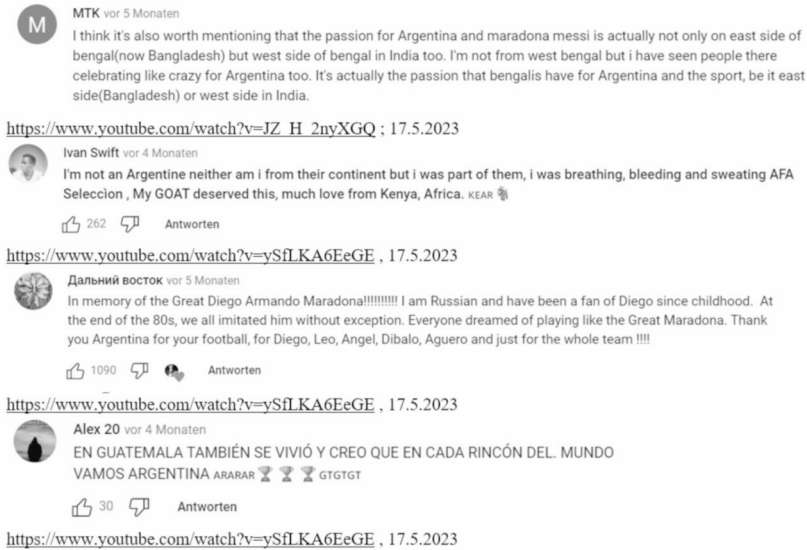
Figure 9 presents two images. The first image displays a screenshot from a social media video that contrasts and also merges national symbols such as native birds, places and political leaders from Bangladesh and Argentina; bringing again the solidarity but now also national symbolism to a political level. The second image shows a waving flag of Bangladesh during a celebration taking place on *Avenida 9 de Julio*, close to the *Obelisco*, the symbolic landmark of Buenos Aires. The significance of this lies in the incorporation of the Bangladeshi flag into Argentine symbolism, which

allows Bangladesh to gain a foothold in the heart of the Argentine capital. And it continues the online video from the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, where the whole social media discourse started. Thus, the waving of the Bangladeshi flag in Buenos Aires can be seen as another act of reciprocity. Additionally, other posts suggest political unity between Bangladesh and Argentina (Fig. 9: “New province”) but under Argentine leadership and thus taking again a paternalistic stance:

Fig. 10: Unification Expressions.



However, when frowning about the numerous usages of national symbolism, we should not forget that all expressions are linked to a sporting competition – the FIFA World Cup, the central logic of which is to bring nations into competition. Accordingly, people worldwide (not just in Bangladesh) cheered for Argentina, and there exists a distinct social media trend in which individuals express their pro-Argentinian football fandom while explicitly stressing their geographical origins (Fig. 10; examples from: India, Kenya, Russia, Guatemala). This could also be read as a link to a *rooted cosmopolitanism*. This phenomenon of fandom is likely to be fuelled by the status of Argentina as a winning team, which tends to generate a more positive reaction, as well as by the aforementioned long and mediatized history of sport and the idolizing of sporting figures such as Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona:

Fig. 11: *Stressing the own geographical location.*

7. Conclusions

This article has shed light on a social media phenomenon that arose during the FIFA World Cup 2022. Even if this story may seem surprising at first glance, it can be explained by historical developments and follows today's established logic of social media and mediatization in general. The underlying anti-colonial and anti-imperial narrative is not only an abstract, historical construct, but could also be identified here in a concrete and banal way in several actual statements, broadcasted by ordinary people on social media. The Argentine anti-colonial narrative is, however, complex and must be understood within the framework of a history of colonialism and later colonial-settlement and in the ways in which Argentines negotiate their image and hierarchy in the global order (see Pereyra in this volume), particularly through football. Against this background of shared experiences with the coloniality of power and narrations of subaltern resistance a certain kind of "brotherhood" thrives. The stranger is seen as the "brother", not taken as a blood brother, but as a compatriot (brother in arms) with whom painful (coloniality and a disadvantaged world order) and happy (football World Cup victories) experiences are shared. As we have seen, this fraternization also leads to expressions and actions of reciprocity and mutual support. We deconstructed these statements and placed them within the narrative of *cosmopolitan solidarity*.

In connection with the solidaric stances, we identified furthermore the cosmopolitan narration of a sport that is supposed to be able to overcome borders, while the ordinary actors beyond the pitch, i.e. the fans, unthinkingly adopt cosmopolitan narratives. Overcoming “borders” does not only refer to the overcoming of national borders, but also to social and psychological boundaries of what separates people; for example boundaries through socio-structural determined spaces of encounters.

Even though the discourse regarding this Argentine-Bangladeshi football friendship seems to be attached in a way to cosmopolitanism it is without doubt also related to the logics of nationalism and demarcation. This might follow the very logic inherent in an international sporting event, which is based on an unmistakable competition between nation states. Of course, fan discourse is always subject to this structure of adversary and so here many references are made to nationality and the strengthening of the nation. That is maybe even more nourished in social media that follow the primacy of catchphrases and/or mediated imaginaries and give space and power to mediated national symbolisms and demarcations.

The widespread availability of televised matches and social media platforms enables fans to access and interact with football content from around the world, transcending geographical boundaries. This mediatized environment not only fuels the passion and enthusiasm of football supporters but also facilitates the exchange of ideas, narratives, and experiences across boundaries. As a result, mediatization emerges as a fundamental force in shaping the global reach and interconnectedness of football fandoms, bridging distances and fostering a cosmopolitan sense among fans worldwide.

However, social media are becoming spaces in which the crossing of borders (also in a figurative sense) can become an everyday experience, including leading to very physical cross-border encounters, e.g. through mutual visits, by chance encounters in football stadiums on site (that indeed happened for example at the World Cup) and also through the reopening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka. These physical meetings can be new catalysts for strengthening a friendship between Bangladesh and Argentina which began cautiously in a pre-internet era and has lately blossomed in the online space.

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