

World Cup!

History, Politics, and Art of The Beautiful Game

Edited by
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Series in Sociology



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Foreword

Patrick Thomas Ridge

Virginia Tech

No other international sporting competition has such a global impact as the FIFA World Cup. Both the men's and women's editions of the tournament, each held every four years, bring together fans in respective countries and attract billions of viewers from around the globe. While the Men's World Cup was first held in Uruguay in 1930, it was only in the 1980s that scholars began to focus their critical work on football (soccer) and its relationship to society.¹ Among other topics, these works have examined the sport in relation to social and national identity, history, politics, business, economics, violence, literary and cultural production, media, and television, as well as the transformation of a game codified at the University of Cambridge in 1848 into what is now a global spectacle.²

Edited by Daniel Noemi Voionmaa, *World Cup! History, Politics, and Art of the Beautiful Game* builds on the work of these and other sports scholars and continues the critical discussion of soccer and society set forth in previous English-language studies dedicated to the FIFA World Cup, among these, *The FIFA World Cup 1930-2010: Politics, Commerce, Spectacle and Identities* (2014); *A History of the World Cup 1930-2014* (2015); *FIFA World Cup and Beyond* (2018); *The World Cup as World History* (2019); *Moments, Metaphors, Memories: Defining Events in the History of Soccer* (2021); *The Business of the FIFA World Cup* (2022); and *Media, Communication and the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup* (2025).³ Noemi Voionmaa brings together critical essays that examine the FIFA

¹ The first Women's World Cup organized by FIFA was held in 1991. Among others, early book-length studies on soccer include: Roberto DaMatta, Luiz Felipe Baêta Neves Flores, Simoni Lahud Guedes, and Arno Vogel, eds., *Universo do futebol: esporte e sociedade brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Pinakothèque, 1982); Eduardo Archetti, *Fútbol y ethos* (Buenos Aires: FLACSO, 1984); Stephen Wagg, *The Football World: A Contemporary Social History* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984).

² Ball games have existed for centuries in various regional contexts, but as sports historians note, the Cambridge Rules established the modern form of football (soccer). Devised in 1848, these distinguished the game from other sports like rugby. See Allen Guttmann, *Games and Empires*, 42.

³ Stefan Rinke and Kay Schiller, eds., *The FIFA World Cup 1930-2010* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014); Lisi, *A History of the World Cup 1930-2014* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2015);

Women's World Cup—officially organized by football's international governing body since 1991—as well as analyses that cover nearly all the corresponding men's tournaments held since 1930.⁴ Readers of *World Cup!*, whether they be students, scholars, or fans, will not only take away a richer and more nuanced understanding of the world's most popular sporting competition and its links to politics, but perhaps most notably, important critical insight into how media, literature, and visual culture greatly affect how we view and interpret the so-called “beautiful game.”⁵

Like the other works mentioned above, an edited collection dedicated to international competitions such as the FIFA World Cup inevitably explores themes of nationalism. Building on Benedict Anderson's oft-cited theory regarding national identity, Eric Hobsbawm argues that “the imagined community of millions seems more real and tangible as a team of eleven players.”⁶ In other words, soccer has and continues to play a key role in our visions of nations and national belonging. *World Cup!* explores well-known examples of this social phenomenon in essays on the Argentine, French, and German national teams,

Kausik Bandyopadhyay, Souvik Naha, and Shakya Mitra, eds., *FIFA World Cup and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Bowman, *The World Cup as World History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Kausik Bandyopadhyay and Souvik Naha, eds., *Moments, Metaphors, Memories: Defining Events in the History of Soccer* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Simon Chadwick, Paul Widdop, Christos Anagnostopoulos, and Daniel Parnell, eds., *The Business of the FIFA World Cup* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Molly Yanity and Danielle Sarver Coombs, eds., *Media, Communication and the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup* (New York: Routledge, 2025).

⁴ Italy and Mexico held the first Women's World Cups in 1970 and 1971, respectively, but the events are not officially recognized by FIFA and associated governing bodies since these were not involved.

⁵ The phrase “beautiful game” (*jogo bonito* in Brazilian Portuguese) is popularly linked to Pelé (Edson Arantes do Nascimento). According to his autobiography, he first used the phrase during his time with the New York Cosmos to distinguish soccer from American football. See *Edson Arantes do Nascimento, Orlando Duarte, and Alex Bellos, Pelé*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 225. However, Joshua Nadel signals the debate surrounding the phrase. He notes that while some credit British sports commentator Stuart Hall or Brazilian midfielder Didi with its inception, journalist Thomaz Mazzoni first used it in *O Brasil na Taça do Mundo* (1938). See Joshua Nadel, *Fútbol!* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014), 248; Tomaz Mazzoni, *O Brasil na Taça do Mundo 1938* (São Paulo: Edições e Publicações Brasil, 1938).

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43. Regarding the “imagined community,” Anderson states that “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 5-6.

as well as lesser-known and less researched cases, such as those of Croatia, El Salvador, and Honduras. A key feature of these analyses is their focus on the role and influence of media, television, literature, and other forms of cultural production in helping fans and audiences to imagine their own national identities, specifically in relation to the national, political, and/or hegemonic 'other.' These essays build on the research of other sports scholars in that they emphasize how the media and soccer-themed cultural production often embeds and naturalizes myths and narratives of the nation.⁷ The collective singing of anthems, cinematic tracking shots of starting elevens, allusions to historical and ongoing political conflicts by journalists and commentators, and myths and narratives of national playing styles all demonstrate soccer's role in shaping one's perception of oneself as part of an imagined community.

One should note that critical discussions of sports and nationalism often center on men's soccer. In countries where the sport has historically been deemed a "man's game," men's national teams have served as symbols of supposed national strength and potential, particularly for nationalist leaders. Accordingly, while male athletes have played an active role in the construction of national identity, nationalists—often with the backing of medical "specialists"—have tended to sideline women in efforts to protect their bodies, valued for their reproductive capacities and viewed as essential to the nation's health and development.⁸ Masculinist nationalism, more precisely, describes this fusing of nationalist ideology with the dominant notions of gender and sexuality that reaffirm cisheteropatriarchy. Regardless, evidence shows that women played soccer in the early twentieth century, and despite official bans on the sport in many countries (e.g., Brazil, England, Germany, Canada), they continued to take the field.⁹ However, the media and soccer-themed cultural production have only further naturalized ideas of masculinist nationalism in that they have most often cast men as the game's protagonists and women on the sidelines as wives, girlfriends, or supporters.¹⁰ Although women's soccer

⁷ Among others, see Pablo Alabarces, *Fútbol y patria* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008); Pablo Alabarces, *Historia mínima del fútbol en América Latina* (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones S.L., 2018); Eduardo Archetti, *Masculinities* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Joshua Nadel, *Fútbol!* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014); David Wood, *Football and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁸ See Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel, *Futbolera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); George Mosse, *The Image of Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Joshua Nadel, *Fútbol!* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014).

⁹ See Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel, *Futbolera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); Alan McDougall, *Contested Fields* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

¹⁰ See, for example, Gabriela Binello and Mariano Domino, "Mujeres en el área chica," in *Deportes y sociedad*, eds. Pablo Alabarces, Roberto Di Giano, and Julio Frydenberg

has received more coverage in both the media and cultural production, these have often downplayed the athleticism of female participants by mocking their play, questioning their gender identity and sexuality, and/or objectifying their bodies.¹¹ As a result, women's soccer and national teams have historically experienced underfunding, unequal access to sporting equipment and facilities, pay gaps, stigma, sexism, homophobia, and little to no media coverage, among other forms of prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, stories of women's soccer are often omitted from "official" histories of the game, including the 1970 and 1971 Women's World Cups, held in Italy and Mexico, respectively. More than 110,000 fans attended the latter tournament's final at the Estadio Azteca (Mexico City)—still the largest attendance ever for a women's football match—yet FIFA and associated governing bodies make no mention of these historic events on their websites.¹² *World Cup!* explores these and other gender issues, particularly in relation to television and media. As some of the following essays demonstrate, social media has served as an influential discursive tool for promoting and inspiring gender equity and social justice. One not only thinks of the global impact of off-field feminist movements such as #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos, but on-field counterparts like #FútbolFeminista and #SeAcabó in Argentina and Spain, respectively.¹³ While these initiatives have

(Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1998); Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel, *Futbolera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); Verónica Moreira and Martín Álvarez Litke, "Un análisis de las representaciones mediáticas," *FuLiA / UFMG* 4, no. 1 (2019); Patrick Ridge, "Fulboy" (unpublished manuscript, April 1, 2025). Many scholars, among these, Richard Giulianotti, use the acronym "WAGs" to refer to the "wives and girlfriends" of male players. See Richard Giulianotti, *Sport*, 2nd ed. (Malden MA: Polity, 2016), 103.

¹¹ David Wood, "The Beautiful Game?", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37, no. 5 (2018): 576-577.

¹² See Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel, *Futbolera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); *Copa 71*, directed by James Erskine and Rachel Ramsay (2023; London: Dogwoof, 2023).

¹³ Initially started by Tarana Burke as a group and sisterhood for survivors of sexual violence, Me Too transformed into global movement in 2017 after the #MeToo hashtag went viral on various social media platforms and decried the sexual misconduct of powerful men—most notably, Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein—in more than eighty countries. See Anjani Datla and Robert Wilkinson, "Leading with Empathy," *Harvard Kennedy School* 2197 (2020): 2. Founded in 2015, Ni Una Menos began in Argentina with the creation of the hashtag slogan #NiUnaMenos which helped to convene thousands of Argentines to protest femicide and gender-based violence, specifically after the murder of Chiara Paez. Inspired by this movement, as well as the Campaign for Legal Abortion, Fútbol Feminista gained traction specifically after the 2018 Copa América Femenina, Macarena Sánchez's legal cases against UAI Urquiza and the Argentine Football Association, and the fight for professionalization of Argentine Women's soccer. Matthew Hawkins and Julia Hang add that "Feminist football connects the right to play and participate with the notion of football as a human right and opposes

addressed and raised awareness of these issues, some of the essays in *World Cup!* show that the fight on and off the field to end gender injustice and inequity serves as an ongoing struggle. Saying that, the Women's World Cup has experienced notable growth in popularity in recent years. For example, according to FIFA, the 2023 Women's World Cup, held in Australia and New Zealand, set all-time attendance records. The final between Spain and England drew a record-breaking average audience of around 13.2 million viewers in the United Kingdom.¹⁴ Helped by a generation of promising young talents, including Colombia's Linda Caicedo and Spain's Aitana Bonmatí, as well as Salma Paralluelo and Olga Carmona, these factors suggest that the women's game will continue to grow in the coming years.

No critical study on the World Cup would be complete without exploring the theme of politics. International sporting mega-events such as these have served as particularly useful tools for legitimizing leadership, boosting tourism, improving domestic infrastructure, and as a form of soft power for governing administrations. From a more sinister standpoint, politicians in host countries have, at times, used the World Cup for sportswashing, that is, utilizing such a mega-event to polish their own reputation and distract from government wrongdoing, controversy, and/or scandal. Notable examples include the 1934, 1978, and 1986 World Cups held in Italy, Argentina, and Mexico, respectively.¹⁵ Other more recent cases include the 2018 and 2022 Men's World Cups in Russia and Qatar, the latter featuring arguably the most exciting final in the tournament's history. For the Qatari hosts, the match between Argentina and France provided an effective distraction from reports of human rights abuses and the worker-related deaths associated with the construction of new

the patriarchal formation of the sport that has long excluded women, transgender, and nonbinary people." See Matthew Hawkins and Julia Hang, "'Our football is joy, it's dissident, and it's feminist!'" in *Women's Football in Latin America*, eds. Jorge Knijnik and Gabriela Garton (Cham: Palgrave, 2022), 37. In Spain, #SeAcabó emerged as a response to the controversy surrounding Luis Rubiales after the Spanish Women's National Team won the 2023 World Cup. The former Spanish soccer federation president's unconsented kiss with Jennifer Hermoso during the medal ceremonies sparked nationwide discussions on sexism, gender inequity, and prejudice on and off the field. See #SeAcabó, directed by Joanna Pardos (2024; Los Gatos: Netflix, 2024).

¹⁴ "FIFA Women's World Cup 2023," *Inside FIFA*, 2023, <https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/fifa-womens-world-cup-2023-tournament-recap#a-world-cup-of-firsts>.

¹⁵ For more on these cases, see Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism*, (New York: Berg, 2004); Patrick Ridge, "El montaje del Mundial de 1978," in *Deporte y sociedad civil en tiempos de dictadura*, ed. Mariano Gruschetsky and Raanan Rein (San Martín: UNSAM Edita); Patrick Ridge, "El Desmadre," *Soccer & Society* 20, no. 7-8 (2019).

stadiums.¹⁶ Along with critical commentary on these and other stagings, *World Cup!* includes chapters that importantly examine the use of football by Mussolini in fascist Italy, and perhaps the most egregious of these cases, the coordination of the 1978 World Cup in Argentina by the military dictatorship as the effective means for distracting the public from the over 30,000 forced disappearances and deaths that occurred from 1978-1983.¹⁷ Equally significant, some chapters include commentary on how national leaders have historically used and depicted soccer in media, film, literature, and culture as propaganda for popularizing their own political agendas and silencing critics.

It remains to be seen how the U.S., Mexico, and Canada will each use the upcoming 2026 Men's World Cup. Initially deemed the "United Bid" before being successfully selected as the 2026 hosts at the 2018 FIFA Congress, the joint endeavor has received heightened scrutiny amid increased political tensions between the neighboring North American countries, particularly during the first months of Donald Trump's second term as U.S. president. Along with ensuring stadium security, one of the most pressing concerns relates to facilitating travel for fans between host nations, particularly amid potential travel bans and lengthy waits for visa appointments in hopes of attending matches in the U.S.¹⁸ Regardless, some scholars foresee the current U.S. president using the event as the opportunity to publicly celebrate his own administration's achievements, garner praise from political opponents, and receive flattering media coverage for domestic and international audiences.¹⁹ Interestingly, however, while the U.S. will host the majority of matches—including the final at MetLife Stadium (East Rutherford, New Jersey)—the tournament will open at the historic Estadio Azteca, so it will be the more left-

¹⁶ For more critical commentary on these cases, see Yoav Dubinsky, "Clashes of Cultures at the FIFA World Cup," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 20 (2024).

¹⁷ As essayist Juan José Sebreli hauntingly describes, the deafening cheers following the victory of the Argentine men's national team at the Estadio Monumental (Buenos Aires) presumably drowned out the sounds of state-sponsored torture and violence occurring at the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (la ESMA) a few miles away. Now known as the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos (el ESMA), the former detention center is currently used for the promotion and defense of human rights. See Juan José Sebreli, *La era del fútbol*, 4th ed., (Buenos Aires: Debolsillo, 2005), 195.

¹⁸ See Adam Crafton, "For 2026 World Cup travelling fans, U.S. visa policy, wait times present roadblocks," *The Athletic*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6163959/2025/02/28/2026-world-cup-usa-visa-wait-trump-fifa/>.

¹⁹ Adam S. Beissel and David L. Andrews, "Art of the Deal: Donald Trump, the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup, and the Geopolitics of Football Aspiration," in *Populism in Sport, Leisure, and Popular Culture*, eds. Alan Tomlinson and Bryan Clift (London: Routledge, 2021), 247-248.

leaning Mexican president Claudia Sheinbaum that receives the world's attention first as she inaugurates the mega-event on 11 June 2026.²⁰ The following essays offer a valuable critical framework for future studies on this and related topics, exploring the connections between football (soccer) and politics.

Finally, Noemi Voionmaa includes chapters that explore the transformation of the World Cup into a global and commodified spectacle, notably since the 1970s and 80s. Along with the adoption of more neoliberal economic policies worldwide, two main factors have facilitated this shift: television and João Havelange, FIFA President from 1974 to 1998. The 1970 Men's World Cup in Mexico—the first to be televised in color—and subsequent editions have revolutionized how fans view the game. Unlike those attending matches in the stadium, television and streaming audiences began experiencing football (soccer) as a carefully orchestrated spectacle by the world's largest and most sophisticated media groups from then on. On the field, World Cup competitions certainly generate their own drama and excitement, but it is television, encompassing commentating, photography, music, sound, editing, on-screen graphics, and more, that embellishes the sport with narrative and aesthetic elements that further entice the viewer and attract new audiences.

With the help of television, Havelange not only understood how to further popularize the World Cup and soccer worldwide, but also the game's commercial potential. The Brazilian won the 1974 FIFA presidential election over the English incumbent, Stanley Rous, with the main support coming from non-European voting nations.²¹ Shortly after, under Havelange's leadership, football's main governing body established partnerships with Adidas and Coca-Cola, both of which became official sponsors of the Men's World Cup. While the former provided uniforms, balls, and other sporting equipment to FIFA member nations, the latter paid 1.2 million dollars to be used for the FIFA/Coca-Cola

²⁰ Regarding the inauguration, President Sheinbaum recently remarked: “Ser la primera presidenta y tener el honor de inaugurar una Copa del Mundo en México es un sueño hecho realidad. Estamos listos para mostrarle al mundo lo mejor de nuestro país” (Being the first woman as president and having the honor of inaugurating a World Cup in México is a dream come true. We're ready to show the world the best our country has to offer). Mariana Campos, “Claudia Sheinbaum será la primera presidenta que inaugure una Copa Mundial de Fútbol,” *Infobae*, June 4, 2024, <https://www.infobae.com/mexico/deportes/2024/06/04/claudia-sheinbaum-sera-la-primera-presidenta-que-inaugure-una-copa-mundial-de-futbol/>. English translation is my own.

²¹ Havelange was particularly favored by many African football federations. While the Brazilian candidate promised increased funding for football development in associated member nations, Rous made no such promises. See David Conn, *The Fall of the House of FIFA*, (New York: Nation Books, 2017), 33.

World Football Development Programme, a joint initiative that facilitated funding for the global development of the sport.²² Sponsorship deals have grown exponentially in recent decades, with multinational corporations like Coca-Cola, Adidas, Emirates, Hyundai, Sony, and Visa paying more than \$1 billion between 2007 and 2014 to serve as the official sponsors of the FIFA World Cup.²³ However, FIFA's sales of broadcasting rights have generated the most revenue, amounting to more than \$3.4 billion between 2019 and 2022.²⁴ In the U.S. alone, Fox and Telemundo (NBCUniversal) paid around \$1.1 billion combined to broadcast the World Cups occurring between 2014 and 2026.²⁵

Considering these factors, scholarly work on FIFA and the World Cup has increasingly focused on themes of business, economics, corruption, television, media, and spectacle. The World Cup today extends beyond sport, nationalism, and politics, as it is now also viewed as a form of entertainment, a commodity, and a business, features that scholars and purists of the game have heavily criticized. Fittingly, this collection opens with critical commentary on Eduardo Galeano's *El fútbol a sol y sombra* (*Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, 1995), arguably the most popular and cited text dedicated to football.²⁶ As the title suggests, the Uruguayan writer's poetic essays offer a nostalgic longing for what soccer once was and a critical vision of what it has become. While Galeano touches on all the issues mentioned above, the elaborate descriptions and figurative language of his writings simultaneously revive some of the most memorable on-field moments associated with soccer and the World Cup, thus reminding readers of why many continue to understand football as the "beautiful game." Similarly, some essays included in *World Cup!* show that in a globalized society, what matters to many fans is not necessarily who or which country takes the field, but how they play the game. As argued in the following pages, this is the case in countries with less successful football traditions, such as India, where every four years, during the World Cup, fans adopt a team based primarily on their love of the game, more so than on national or political affiliation. Chapters such

²² David Conn, *The Fall of the House of FIFA*, (New York: Nation Books, 2017), 46-48.

²³ Ibid, 75.

²⁴ "2019-2022 Revenue," FIFA, 2023, <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2019-2022-cycle-in-review/2019-2022-revenue/>.

²⁵ Richard Deitsch, "FIFA Grants Fox, Telemundo U.S. TV Rights for World Cup through 2026," *Sports Illustrated online*, February 12, 2015, <https://www.si.com/soccer/2015/02/12/fifa-fox-usa-tv-rights-world-cup-2026-telemundo>.

²⁶ Eduardo Galeano, *El fútbol a sol y sombra*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006). Some scholars have advised caution if using Galeano's text as a historical source, specifically for its theoretical deficiencies and more literary approach. See, for example, Pablo Alabarces, "Entre la banalidad y la crítica," in *Fútbol-espectáculo, cultura y sociedad*, edited by Samuel Martínez López, (Mexico City: Afinita, 2010), 73-74.

as these demonstrate the broad regional scope of Noemi Voionmaa's edited collection. Accordingly, *World Cup!* not only offers readers a unique critical history of football (soccer) and the FIFA World Cup, but also a deeper understanding of how the sport and its most notable mega-event are understood, used, and experienced across the globe.

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Introduction

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On December 18, 2022, 1.5 billion people watched the penalty kick by Gonzalo Montiel at Lusali Stadium in Doha, which gave Argentina its third World Cup. Probably, many more heard about it in the following days. Indeed, Qatar's World Cup was the epitome of global sports entertainment: The world was not only one, but it was also, literally, a globe, a football. The 2026 U.S.-Canada-Mexico World Cup is expected to surpass those numbers.

Not long ago, in 1930, Argentina played its first final (with somewhat less success: Uruguay won 4-2). The Estadio Centenario was packed; perhaps a few thousand listened to it on the radio (we don't have the exact numbers), while nobody watched it on TV (that happened only in 1954, and only for a few Central European countries. Color television came in 1970). Many things have changed in football since that evening in Montevideo in 1930, no doubt. However, if we were able to hear a conversation of a group of friends after a football match in 1930 and in 2026, we would be surprised how similar they are. Like in life—a comparison often drawn—change and continuity are simultaneously present. Like life, football can be thought about and analyzed from many points of view: tactics and strategies on the field, attitudes of fans in the stands, the politics it involves, a never-ending market-oriented paraphernalia, nationalist discourses, philosophical discussions—postmodern takes, existentialist reverberations, post-structuralist analyses, psychoanalytical insights—and a myriad of cultural and artistic artifacts and productions. Football, soccer, *fútbol*, *calcio*, *futebol* is, as Eduardo Archetti once said, a mirror of our societies (and ourselves), but also a mask that covers and hides who we are and who we want to be.

This collection of essays aims to offer a multifaceted, interdisciplinary, creative, and colorful perspective on the meanings and possibilities of thinking about football—the beautiful game—and its paramount event: the World Cup. It is intended to appeal to everyday experts, those for whom football is more than a sport, but it also aims to be a source that piques the interest of those who view football as just a curious experience (e.g., those who may have heard, in passing, that a new World Cup will be played in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico). With the same spirit, we have maintained the use of both football and soccer, as well as the American or British spelling, leaving the decision to each author.

This book is a squad with 11 players. The approaches, styles, and perspectives differ considerably, much like having the magic of Messi, the strength of Drogba, the detailed game of Di Stefano, the hands of Yashin, and the genius of Marta and Pelé all on the same team. From politics to poetry, from gender issues to national nostalgia, the authors offer a multifaceted and global portrait of football and the World Cup. “Poets and scoundrels of the beautiful game,” the opening essay on Uruguayan writer and poet Eduardo Galeano, by Joel Sronce, was originally written for Russia’s 2018 World Cup. After numerous conversations and careful consideration, we decided not to modify or update the references to the upcoming 2026 World Cup. However, the contemporaneity of the text is undeniable, and the reader will have no difficulties making the changes herself. Additionally, it is a wonderful reflection on the beauty of the game—and on Galeano’s superb football thinking and writing—and as such, it constitutes the perfect start to this collection.

Maria Mitchell’s “The Tragedy of Seville” is a remarkable essay on the political repercussions of a single moment during a football match. Superbly researched, it reflects how the long-standing historical antagonism between France and Germany took another turn after the semifinal match in the 1982 World Cup in Spain. Conversely, “The Football War Between El Salvador and Honduras” smartly revisits a well-known episode in which a football match ignited longstanding issues of land tenure, migration, and demographic pressures. Ali Emrah Tokatlioglu adds an important linguistic perspective to his analysis. Thus, Tokatlioglu shows how football, politics, nationalism, and language are inextricably intertwined. In “Croatian National Football Team: Connecting Homeland And Diaspora,” Domagoj Krpan provides a very useful overview on national identity and football in several of the most powerful nations, continuing with a detailed study of the Croatian diaspora and how it developed linked to football, including an enthralling section on Croats in Brazil and the aftermath of their match in Qatar.

In “Anti-Patriotic, or Anti-Governmental?,” Antonio Pinto analyzes political propaganda in and through football in the cases of the Spanish and Argentinean coaches during the 2022 World Cup. A notable cultural and anthropological study, it traces a genealogy of political and nationalistic ideas and their manifestation in football in both countries from the nineteenth century to the present, as well as what happens during times of social and political polarization. Going deeper into the Argentine case, in “Football as Political Instrument” Emmanouil (Manos) Karousos deals with the contradictory faces of Peronism since 1945, the dark days of the Dictatorship (1976-1983), and how football and the 1978 World Cup played a key role during those years. A captivating section on Diego Maradona’s political role offers a concrete perspective on the connections between football, stardom, and politics.

Moving to the other side of the world, in “Football *Fanship* and Fragmented Fraternity in India,” Sayandeb Chowdhury and Rajendran Narayanan examine the relevance of football in a nation often considered marginal in the field. Including an analysis of the classic Bengali film *The Seven Steps*, and Moti Nandi’s novel *Striker* (1973), and through an attractive historical and cultural study (and a necessary comparison to cricket’s social significance), the authors show the ways in which fandom is expressed in the country and argues that it should be considered one of the “‘prominent’ marginal soccer nations.” Furthermore, provocatively, the author discusses the possibility of a subaltern solidarity through football amid the colonial past and the neoliberal present. Football as “soft power” is at the center of “Football, gender, politics and social media.” Using an impressive quantitative content analysis of posts published in Twitter and Instagram of the politicians leading the countries that competed in the men’s 2018 World Cup in Russia and the women’s 2019 World Cup in France, Roxane Coche shows the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity and the urgent necessity to give women’s football more legitimacy to achieve gender equality. Next, in “The World Cup and Sportswashing,” Amit Gupta offers another perspective on football as a form of soft power and its use as political propaganda. Beginning with Mussolini’s era and the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, continuing with the Brazilian and Argentine dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, and culminating in Qatar 2022, Gupta demonstrates how the benefits of sportswashing tend to be limited in both time and scope. The author also critiques the “Western-centric” definition of soft power, opening the door to new forms of understanding power dynamics in sports.

Poetry, love, and football take the stage in Tzachi Cohen’s “Roars and Feelings in Stoppage-Time.” A beautiful and sensitive reading of football’s presence in Israeli poetry. Reflecting on father-son relationships and football as a metaphor for love—and vice versa—the author provides a remarkable analysis of masculinity and its manifestations, without forsaking the feminine experience, within the poetic football tradition.

Football, as mentioned earlier, has undergone significant changes over the years. Perhaps one of the most significant changes, and one that may help us understand many other occurrences, was the one that led to the creation of the Premier League in England in the early 1990s. How was football capable of creating such a successful and popular competition coming from the horrors of Heysel Stadium in 1985, the Hillsborough disaster in 1989, and the apparent ubiquity of hooliganism? In “We ain’t no hooligans, this ain’t a football song...”, David Webber masterfully analyzes how this was possible. Using the Gramscian notion of *trasformismo*, and focusing on English cultural production—pop songs, TV shows—prior to the 1990 Italy World Cup, the

author shows how football became aligned with neoliberal politics and economy, emboldened by Thatcher's government.

World Cup! History, Politics, and Art of the Beautiful Game is an invitation to continue to understand and think about one of the most important cultural manifestations of our times. Perhaps, football does not explain the world, but it does help us, as Albert Camus once suggested, to illuminate who we are.

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About the Authors

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Sayandeb Chowdhury teaches courses on literature and cinema in the School of Interwoven Arts & Sciences, Krea University, India. His work has appeared (or is soon to appear) in academic journals and anthologies published by Intellect, Routledge, Palgrave, Vernon Press, and the university presses of Brussels, Amsterdam, Manchester, and Edinburgh. He was a UKNA Fellow at IAS, Leiden (2015), a Charles Wallace UK Fellow (2016), and is the author of *Uttam Kumar: A Life in Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2021). He regularly writes for the cultural press in India and elsewhere, in both Bangla and English. More about his work and interests can be found at <https://sayandeb.in/>.

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His books “*Recite Your Verse for Me*”, a divination practice and reading in the literature of sages” (Resling), and “*What Does cinema resemble?* cultural and thematic readings in contemporary cinema” (Carmel) were published in Israel, 2021. “*Their Language for Love*”, his first poetry book, was published in 2023.

David Webber is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Business and Politics at UCFB (Manchester). Developing his original interest in British politics and international political economy, David’s research explores the multiple and often overlapping political, economic, social and cultural relations that have come to characterize football under conditions of late capitalism. This critical body of scholarship has gone on to inform the evidence that David has presented to various parliamentary select committees, and the several national and international media appearances that he has made concerning matters relating to the regulation, governance, financialization and consumption of the modern game, in all its forms, across the globe.

Daniel Noemi Voionmaa is a cultural critic, chronicler, and scholar of Latin American literature and culture. His research and teaching focus on the intersection of critical theory and literature, and on visual arts, film, and politics. He is the author of five books and many articles. He has written numerous chronicles about the World Cup since 2010. His last book -*¿Quién es Chile?* (2024)—tells the story of two Eastern European football coaches in Chile. He is a Professor at Northeastern University, Boston, where he teaches Latin American literature and cultures.

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