**Why the FIFA Men’s World Cup in Qatar should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North**

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This article defends the conclusion that the FIFA Men’s World Cup in Qatar should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North. The master argument for this conclusion is underpinned by considerations about the economic background conditions in guest workers’ home countries. Three arguments are then considered that have as their conclusion that the World Cup should be boycotted. These arguments are, respectively, entitled “The slavery argument”, “The exploitation argument” and the “The clean hands argument”. It is argued that each of these arguments is unsound. After having shown that the slavery argument is unsound, the article continues by teasing out what a proponent of the argument is committed to. This is a useful exercise because it shows that being a proponent of the slavery argument has demanding implications for what one can believe in domains that have nothing to do with the World Cup. This argumentative strategy is repeated in the discussions of the exploitation argument and the clean hands argument. Section seven contains a discussion of an argument for a boycott that centres on the process through which Qatar was awarded the World Cup. This argument is also rejected. The article lists several ways in which guest workers in Qatar are wronged, but this fact about how guest workers are treated does not justify a boycott by rich countries from the global North.

1. **Introduction**

On November 21, 2022, the FIFA Men’s World Cup begins in The State of Qatar.[[1]](#endnote-2) In the years leading up to this event, there has been a sometimes-heated discussion about whether the event should be boycotted because of the working conditions endured by the guest workers in Qatar who have built the stadiums and other physical infrastructure for the tournament. This discussion has taken place both in the press and in the academic literature.[[2]](#endnote-3) In this article, I defend the conclusion that the World Cup should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North.[[3]](#endnote-4)

In section three, I present an argument for this conclusion. The argument is underpinned by considerations about the economic background conditions in guest workers’ home countries. In sections four to six, I consider three arguments that have as their conclusion that the World Cup should be boycotted. If this conclusion is true, then what I argue for in this article is false. The first argument is entitled “The slavery argument”. The second argument is entitled “The exploitation argument” and the last one is called “The clean hands argument”. I argue that each of these arguments is unsound. They give us no reason for being sceptical about the conclusion of the article.

After having shown that the slavery argument is unsound, I continue by teasing out what a proponent of the argument is committed to. I show that a proponent is committed to the view that sporting events in several countries should be boycotted. This part of the discussion of the slavery argument does not add anything new to the discussion of whether the slavery argument is sound. However, this part of the discussion is useful because it shows that being a proponent of the slavery argument has relatively demanding implications for what one can plausibly believe in domains that have nothing to do with the World Cup. If one is not prepared to accept these implications, then one must reject the argument. I mimic this argumentative strategy in my respective discussions of the exploitation argument and the clean hands argument. First, I show that the argument in question is unsound, and then I tease out what the relatively demanding implications are of being a proponent of the argument. In section seven, I discuss an argument for a boycott that centres on the *process* through which Qatar was awarded the World Cup, and not on the *working conditions* of guest workers. Section eight sums up the findings of the article.

Before I start constructing the argument for the article’s conclusion that the World Cup should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North, it is important to stress that this conclusion does not imply that the government of Qatar does not wrong guest workers or that Qatar is a pleasant country to be a guest worker in. In the next section, I list five ways in which the government of Qatar wrongs guest workers.

1. **Ways in which the government of Qatar wrongs guest workers**

There is incontrovertible evidence that the government of Qatar wrongs guest workers. First, Qatar’s government has been responsible for a legal environment in which it has sometimes been tolerated, but never officially condoned, that employers defraud guest workers by not giving them the salary that they were contractually entitled to.[[4]](#endnote-5) Moreover, enforcement of new laws and regulations aimed at improving the conditions of guest workers have been weak.[[5]](#endnote-6)

Second, Qatar’s legal system should accept a principle of legal egalitarianism in the sense that it explicitly announces, and displays through its actions, that it investigates complaints about breach of contract by an employer, and other complaints about criminal behaviour, with the same energy and rigour independently of whether the complaint comes from a Qatari citizen or from a guest worker. In cases where an employer has breached the employment contract, or committed any other crime against a guest worker, the legal system, moreover, must make sure that the offender is punished, and that compensation is paid to the guest worker or his family. According to one source, the legal system in Qatar commonly fails to hold abusive employers of domestic workers to account. Key provisions in the Domestic Workers Law appear to be rarely enforced.[[6]](#endnote-7)

Third, “Zina” is an Islamic legal term that means “illicit sexual relations”. According to *The Economist* newspaper there are examples of female guest workers in Qatar who have been imprisoned for Zina offences.[[7]](#endnote-8) Sometimes their “crime” consists in that they have been raped by their employer. It goes without saying that it is completely unacceptable to imprison a female guest worker who have been subjected to sexual assault by her employer. Extramarital sexual relations are criminal in Qatar.[[8]](#endnote-9) This is morally impermissible. Homosexual relations are criminal in Qatar.[[9]](#endnote-10) This is morally impermissible. According to Human Rights Watch, sharia law, which only applies to Muslims in Qatar, dictates that sexual acts by a married person outside of marriage is punishable by death. Also, sexual acts by non-married persons are punishable by flogging.[[10]](#endnote-11)

Fourth, the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance visited Qatar in November 2019. In her report to the Human Rights Council, she “raises concerns regarding a de facto caste system based on national origin, which results in structural discrimination against non-citizens, ..”.[[11]](#endnote-12) Structural discrimination against non-citizens is morally unacceptable. Each concrete example of a non-citizen being discriminated against reinforces the morally troubling picture of society that stratifies into an A- and B-team.

Fifth, Qatar has failed to establish a medical team that ensures that all deaths of guest workers in Qatar are investigated and certified in accordance with international best practice.[[12]](#endnote-13) Failure by the authorities in Qatar to properly investigate the deaths of guest workers in a manner that makes it possible to determine the underlying cause of death is problematic for several reasons. First, it adds to the picture of a stratified society. The death of guest worker is not taken as seriously as the death of a Qatari citizen. Second, if there is no medically proper death certificate for a dead guest worker, then his family is denied the opportunity to receive compensation if his death was caused by criminal negligence by his Qatari employer. As pointed out by Amnesty International, the establishment of a medical team that properly investigates the death of each guest worker would enable an accurate overview of how many guest workers have died as a result of their working conditions. Amnesty International says that it “remains extremely difficult” to know this number because Qatari authorities often do not investigate the underlying cause of a guest workers’ death.[[13]](#endnote-14)

1. **The economic background conditions in guest workers’ home countries**

Qatar is currently home to over 2 million guest workers, predominantly from Asia and Africa.[[14]](#endnote-15) These guest workers are typically low-skilled individuals with no formal education. Male guest workers typically do manual labour in the construction or transportation sector whereas female guest workers typically work as domestic help. Asking the question of why so many guest workers are in Qatar constitutes a good place to start the discussion of whether the World Cup should be boycotted. It is likely that guest workers are in Qatar because of the bad economic background conditions they face in their home countries.[[15]](#endnote-16) These economic background conditions are unjust. There are several reasons as to why they are unjust. Some of these reasons have to do with the domestic institutions in some poor countries. Sometimes, such institutions allow a corrupt elite of kleptocrats to enrich themselves by selling the natural resources of the country and keeping the profit instead of investing it in, say, health- and education-services for the general population.[[16]](#endnote-17) In India, there is an unjust caste system in place that violates the moral principle that no one is, from birth, entitled to certain economic and social privileges. The caste system is a significant feature of the social and economic setup of Indian society, and being born into one of the lower castes translates into facing economic, educational and social disadvantages.[[17]](#endnote-18) The leading view in development economics is that the economic growth of a country is mainly determined by its economic and political institutions.[[18]](#endnote-19) Institutions that are prominent in producing economic growth include secure property rights, the rule of law, anti-monopoly mechanisms that permit the entry of new businesses and the right of individuals to choose their own career.[[19]](#endnote-20) These institutions are not well entrenched in the countries from which guest workers in Qatar typically originate.

There are also non-domestic contributors to the unjust economic background conditions that guest workers live under in their home countries. First, rich countries from the global North put up trade barriers such that producers in the poor countries cannot export their products to affluent markets where there is a demand for the products. Trade barriers between rich and poor countries unjustly stifle economic progress in poor countries and they unjustly harm individuals in poor countries who have products/services for which there are voluntary buyers in rich countries. Second, various unjust immigration policies in rich countries from the global North make it impossible for low-skilled individuals in poor countries to migrate for economic reasons and gain employment in these rich countries. These restrictive immigration policies unjustly condemn such individuals to a choice between staying in their home countries, with bad economic prospects, or accepting work abroad under physically gruelling and dangerous conditions in countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.[[20]](#endnote-21)

For a guest worker in Qatar, it is likely that his job there (unfortunately) is his best employment option all things considered. It is his best option to escape the crippling poverty and dire conditions under which he lives in his home country. It is his best way forward to better the life for himself and his family. Rich countries from the global North do not offer him the possibility to be an economic immigrant. Qatar does, and the country deserves a lot of credit for this. The fact that so many guest workers have chosen to work in Qatar indicates that the conditions that they have to endure there are better than the ones that they are being offered in their home countries (and in rich countries from the global North).[[21]](#endnote-22) Typically, guest workers simply rank the Qatar package of increased risk and increased pay higher than the homeland package of lower risk and lower pay.[[22]](#endnote-23)

This is a point worth dwelling on. There is a significant amount of hypocrisy involved in, on the one hand, complaining about the working conditions for guest workers in Qatar and, on the other hand, doing nothing to prevent that the best option for guest workers is to accept the kind of physically gruelling and dangerous work that is available there. The hypocrisy reaches nauseating heights if one combines one’s hand-wringing about conditions in Qatar with an active political endorsement of those trade- and immigration policies that play a major causal role in making work in Qatar the best employment option for guest workers.

These considerations about the economic background conditions in guest workers’ home countries underpin what I denote “The Master Argument”. It goes like this:

1. By erecting trade barriers between rich countries from the global North and the countries from which guest workers originate, the governments of these rich countries actively and unjustly harm guest workers.[[23]](#endnote-24) (Assumption)
2. By implementing immigration policies that make it impossible for guest workers to be economic migrants in rich countries from the global North, the governments of these countries actively and unjustly harm guest workers. (Assumption)
3. By allowing millions of guest workers to be economic migrants, the government of Qatar improves, on net, the lives of millions of guest workers and ameliorates some of the harm imposed by rich countries from the global North on the global poor. (Assumption)
4. If the governments of rich countries from the global North actively and unjustly harm guest workers and the government of Qatar improves, on net, the lives of millions of guest workers and ameliorates some of the harm imposed by rich countries on the global poor, then it is morally misplaced for the governments of rich countries from the global North to sanction the government of Qatar through a boycott of the World Cup. (Assumption)
5. It is morally misplaced for the governments of rich countries from the global North to sanction the government of Qatar through a boycott of the World Cup. (Conditional E)
6. If it is morally misplaced for the governments of rich countries from the global North to sanction the government of Qatar through a boycott of the World Cup, then the World Cup should not be boycotted by these countries. (Assumption)
7. The World Cup should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North. (Conditional E)

There are a few things to note about the Master Argument. First, (1) and (2) imply that by erecting trade barriers and implementing restrictive immigration policies, the governments of rich countries from the global North do not merely fail to help guest workers and other members of the global poor. These governments actively harm guest workers. These governments violate a strong and entrenched negative duty not to harm others.[[24]](#endnote-25) Second, (3) does not imply that Qatar is a pleasant place to be an economic migrant. Third, the Master Argument does not have any implications for the question of whether countries not mentioned in the argument should boycott the World Cup.

I contend that the Master Argument gives many countries a strong reason to not boycott the World Cup. This is a presumptive reason. The Master Argument can be defeated, and it is defeated, if there is a stronger argument for a boycott. However, here at the outset of the discussion of whether the World Cup should be boycotted it is appropriate to say that the Master Argument shows, using a soccer metaphor, that the score is not tied between proponents of a boycott and those who are against a boycott. The proponents of a boycott are trailing by at least one goal. They must present an argument that defeats the Master Argument. If they cannot do that, the Master Argument stands, and the World Cup should not be boycotted by the relevant countries. Let us now turn to a discussion of the three arguments for a boycott of the World Cup.

1. **The slavery argument**

A common argument in favour of a boycott of the World Cup centres on the idea that the conditions under which guest workers work are akin to slavery, slave-like conditions or modern-day slavery.[[25]](#endnote-26) Here conceptual rigour is important. According to *A Dictionary of World History*, slavery is “The ownership of one person by another, who controls the slave’s life and labour. Slaves are viewed by their owners as property, and are bought and sold accordingly”.[[26]](#endnote-27) What makes the social institution of slavery abhorrent from a moral perspective is that one person can legally own another person. It would be morally terrible if individual A could legally own individual B because this would legally allow that A could, say, destroy, sell or bequeath B.

An understanding of the concept of slavery is important because it enables one to see that that there is no conceptual link between being a slave and undertaking physically gruelling and dangerous work with little or no pay. There is, however, an empirical link because many slaves in, say, the Caribbean and the United States in the 19th century were indeed assigned physically gruelling and dangerous work with little or no pay.[[27]](#endnote-28) This empirical link, together with the observation that guest workers in Qatar often do physically gruelling and dangerous work with relatively little pay, probably helps explain why many commentators have found it appropriate to say that the conditions under which guest workers work are akin to slavery, slave-like conditions or modern-day slavery. Consider now the following argument that we can denote “The slavery argument.”

(1) Qatar’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which the typical guest worker works. (Assumption)

(2) The typical guest worker works under slave-like conditions or is a slave or a modern-day slave. (Assumption)

(3) If Qatar’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which the typical guest worker works and the typical guest worker works under slave-like conditions or is a slave or a modern-day slave, then Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Assumption)

(4) Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Conditional E)

(5) If Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner, then the World Cup should be boycotted. (Assumption)

(6) The World Cup should be boycotted. (Conditional E)

The slavery argument is valid. To determine whether it is sound, it is necessary to say more about a key term in the argument: namely “the typical guest worker”. The definition employed in this article is that someone is a typical guest worker if and only if he is employed under legal conditions in Qatar, has not been coerced to sign his employment contract and has consented to it on an informed basis. The empirical question of how many of the guest workers who have been employed in building the infrastructure for the World Cup qualify as a typical guest worker is difficult to answer. It is, however, beyond doubt that there are many current and previous guest workers who are/were not “typical” in the sense defined. There is, for example, credible evidence that some guest workers’ consent to their employment contract was not informed. Some guest workers were defrauded in the sense that the salary they were contractually promised for work in Qatar was higher than the one they received.[[28]](#endnote-29) Such a defrauding practice undertaken by employers in Qatar is morally wrong and renders any employment contract, that is based on it, morally void.

The fact that a guest worker in Qatar is poor and lived under unjust economic background conditions in his home country is, however, compatible with it being the case that his informed consent to an employment contract (that does not harm other individuals who have not consented to being harmed) is of a type that renders the contract between him and his employer morally legitimate and worthy of respect from the legal system. A guest worker is certainly morally permitted to own his own peaceful and non-rights-violating labour, and he is morally permitted to give it away for free to an employer. Therefore, he is morally permitted to sell it to an employer in Qatar on terms that both parties agree to.[[29]](#endnote-30)

Let us now return to the issue of whether the slavery argument is sound. Premise (1) true. Premise (3) is plausible. What about (2)? On the standard definition of slavery, it is false that the typical guest worker is a slave. He is not legally owned by his employer. The employer does not have full property rights in the guest worker in a manner identical to the manner in which the employer has full property rights in, say, her mobile phone. If it is wrong to say that the typical guest worker is a slave, is it then correct to say that he is a modern-day slave? If it is accepted that the typical guest worker in Qatar is not legally owned by his employer, then it is difficult to see why it is appropriate to use the word “modern-day slave” about the typical guest worker. On the standard definition of “slavery”, modern-day slavery is a modern institution that essentially involves that one human being can legally own another human being. The legal environment (including the Kafala system) that determines the working conditions of guest workers in Qatar is a modern institution.[[30]](#endnote-31) However, this legal environment does not allow legal ownership of people. It is therefore false that guest workers in Qatar are either modern-day slaves or working under conditions of modern-day slavery.

But perhaps (2) is true because the typical guest worker is working under slave-like conditions. The issue of whether this is true depends crucially on what “slave-like conditions” exactly means. If it does not mean that the person who works under slave-like conditions is legally owned by another person, then it can be appropriate to use this term about the working conditions of the typical guest worker. Anyone who uses this term to describe conditions in Qatar is, however, saddled with the responsibility of explaining what is meant by saying that the conditions are slave-like. In the absence of such an explanation, it is not clear, given the standard definition of “slavery”, what “slave-like conditions” means. If this is not clear, then the truth-value of (2) cannot be determined. If this cannot be determined, then the proponent of the slavery argument has a serious problem because her argument rests on the assumption that (2) is true.

A proponent of the slavery argument can acknowledge this. She can continue by saying that what she means by “slave-like conditions” is something that has to do with being paid a relatively low salary, having to live in relatively cramped accommodation, having to work long hours outside in extreme heat, having to work in a relatively dangerous environment, having to relinquish control over one’s passport or having to work under conditions so poor that it is difficult to understand why anyone would voluntarily consent to such conditions (or some combination thereof). If she says this, there is a plausible case for (2). This leaves us with premise (5). One might think that (5) is false because if it were true, then it is possible to construct a sound argument in favour of a boycott of a sporting event where the cited reason as to why the hosting government acts in a morally problematic manner is *unrelated* to the event that, according to the argument, should be boycotted. Moreover, one might think that it is implausible that this possibility exists. The third argument of this article, “the clean hands argument”, is explicitly motivated by this line of thought, and, consequently, seeks to ground a boycott of the World Cup in a set of premises that do not involve (5).

There is a separate reason for thinking that (5) is false. Confronted with (5), the correct thing to say is that the Qatar government does so much good to those members of the global poor who arrive as guest workers in Qatar, and ameliorates harm to the global poor imposed by rich countries from the global North, that the many ways in which the Qatar government wrongs guest workers do not justify a boycott by rich countries from the global North. The massive scale of the harm imposed on the global poor by rich countries from the global North, together with the ameliorating effects of Qatar’s immigration policy, makes a boycott by these countries morally misplaced. If the governments of rich countries from the global North really cared about the well-being of guest workers in Qatar, and other members of the global poor, they would look inwards and radically change their trade- and immigration policies. Such a change of policy would put an immediate end to their harmful behaviour, and it would immediately help those guest workers who currently toil in Qatar. As long as this change has not been implemented by the governments of rich countries from the global North, a boycott of the World Cup by these countries is morally misplaced. Moreover, if a boycott by these countries is morally misplaced, they should not engage in one.

So, even on the assumption that Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner, it is false that rich countries from the global North should boycott the World Cup. If this is true, then (5) is false and if (5) is false, even the strongest version of the slavery argument is unsound.

Let me continue by trying to tease out what a proponent of the strongest version of the slavery argument is committed to. Assume that the proponent offers the above characterization (involving being paid a relatively modest salary, having to live in relatively cramped accommodation, etc.) of what it means to be working under slave-like conditions. On this characterization, many individuals the world over, in addition to guest workers in Qatar, can reasonably be said to be working under slave-like conditions. For example, Singapore has a large population of guest workers who live in relatively cramped dormitories, are paid relatively little and work outside all day in the tropic heat on dangerous construction sites. They also count as individuals who work under slave-like conditions.[[31]](#endnote-32)

Consider also fruit pickers in Almeria in Spain’s southern province. The commercial fruit/vegetable producing firms in this province depend, to a significant degree, on migrant workers who are often illegally employed. Migrants work in conditions of extreme humidity and high temperatures.[[32]](#endnote-33) According to one report, some workers spend up to eight hours in pesticide-covered crops without protective gear. At night, workers sleep in packed rooms without electricity or sanitation. Their accommodation is a concrete structure without doors or windows.[[33]](#endnote-34) According to a 2020 BBC documentary, some workers are paid between 4.50 and 5 Euros per hour despite the fact that the legally mandated minimum wage is 7.20 Euro per hour.[[34]](#endnote-35) Illegal immigrants in Almeria who work under the worst conditions certainly count as individuals who work under slave-like conditions if the above characterization (involving being paid a relatively modest salary, having to live in relatively cramped accommodation, etc.) of what it means to be working under slave-like conditions is accepted. Moreover, there can be little doubt that even the migrant workers who receive the minimum wage count as working under slave-like conditions given that they receive a relatively modest salary, live in relatively cramped accommodation, work with dangerous pesticides and must work long hours in hot and humid greenhouses.[[35]](#endnote-36)

Perhaps the proponent of the slavery argument is willing to accept this implication of characterising, in the above manner, what it is to be working under slave-like conditions. Assume that she is. Now, consider the following argument. Let us call it “The Almeria argument”.

(1) Spain’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which legally employed migrants in Almeria work. (Assumption)

(2) Legally employed migrants in Almeria work under slave-like conditions. (Assumption)

(3) If Spain’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which legally employed migrants in Almeria work and legally employed migrants in Almeria work under slave-like conditions, then Spain’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Assumption)

(4) Spain’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Conditional E)

(5) If Spain’s government acts in a morally problematic manner, then the 2022 [UEFA Europa League](https://allsportdb.com/Competitions/UEFA-Europa-League-695) final in Sevilla should be boycotted. (Assumption)

(6) The 2022 [UEFA Europa League](https://allsportdb.com/Competitions/UEFA-Europa-League-695) final in Sevilla should be boycotted.

(Conditional E)

The Almeria argument has the same form as the slavery argument. So, given that the latter argument is valid, so is the former. A proponent of the slavery argument is not logically committed to the conclusion of the Almeria argument. For example, she makes no logical mistake if she rejects (3) in the Almeria argument. It is, however, difficult to see how a proponent of the slavery argument can plausibly reject any of the premises in the Almeria argument. (1) is obviously true. She must accept (2) because under her preferred explanation of what “slave-like conditions” means, legally employed migrants in Almeria work under such conditions. Can she reject (3) because there are fewer individuals in Almeria living under slave-like conditions than there are individuals in Qatar living under such conditions? This is implausible given that there are literally thousands of individuals in Spain living under these conditions and the difference between this number and the number of individuals in Qatar living under those conditions makes no moral difference. Can she reject (5) because the event in Spain is smaller than the World Cup in Qatar? This is implausible given that the [Europa League](https://allsportdb.com/Competitions/UEFA-Europa-League-695) final in Sevilla is itself a big event and the difference in size between this event in the World Cup makes no moral difference. So, I suggest that a proponent of the slavery argument ends up with an implausible normative/empirical set of views if she rejects conclusion of the Almeria argument.

If this suggestion is correct, then it must be appreciated that the proponent of the slavery argument is committed (though not logically) to several substantial views about boycotts of sporting events outside of Qatar. It is not only the World Cup in Qatar that should be boycotted. Many sporting events in several countries should be boycotted. This is so because it is easy to construct arguments identical in form to the slavery argument that involve, say, the government of Singapore and the 2022 Formula 1 Grand Prix in Singapore or the Saudi Arabian government and the 2022 Spanish Super Cup held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.[[36]](#endnote-37)

1. **The exploitation argument**

One might think that the slavery argument does not work. Perhaps one is inclined to believe that talk of guest workers in Qatar being slaves, modern-day slaves or individuals working under slave-like conditions is misguided. Guest workers are none of these things. Guest workers are, however, being *exploited*, and it is this fact that grounds a boycott of the World Cup. Someone sympathetic to this line of thought could proceed by defending the following argument. Let us call it “The exploitation argument”.

(1) Qatar’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which the typical guest worker works. (Assumption)

(2) The typical guest worker is being exploited by his employer.[[37]](#endnote-38)(Assumption)

(3) If Qatar’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the working conditions under which the typical guest worker works and the typical guest worker is being exploited by his employer, then Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Assumption)

(4) Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner. (Conditional E)

(5) If Qatar’s government acts in a morally problematic manner, then the World Cup should be boycotted. (Assumption)

(6) The World Cup should be boycotted. (Conditional E)

This argument is valid. (1) is true. (3) is plausible. What about (2)? Is it true that the typical guest worker is being exploited by his employer? To answer this question, we need to know more about what the working conditions are of the typical guest worker, and we need to be clear about what it means to “exploit” someone. The former issue is empirical, and the latter is conceptual. Let us start with the empirical one. In March 2021, Qatar introduced a minimum wage[[38]](#endnote-39); Qatar has removed the exit permit requirement for guest workers (guest workers no longer require the permission of their employer to exit Qatar); since 2020, Qatar allows guest workers to change jobs without their employer’s permission; a law from 2015 prohibits an employer holding their employee’s passport unless the worker requests this in writing;[[39]](#endnote-40) under a 2017 agreement with the International Labour Organisation, Qatar committed to i) enhancing a wage protection system that monitors electronic payment of guest workers, ii) enforcing sanctions for non-payment of wages, iii) establishing a wage guarantee fund and iv) supporting guest workers in submitting complaints about their working conditions.[[40]](#endnote-41) Amnesty International has an illuminating and informative graphic timeline of changes to the kafala (sponsorship) law from 2004 to 2020.[[41]](#endnote-42)

1. These reforms of the legal system have improved the working conditions of guest workers. A proponent of the exploitation argument can recognize these improvements in the working conditions of guest workers but go on to say that the improvements do not change the fact that guest workers are being exploited.[[42]](#endnote-43) Even with these improvements in place, (2) is true. The general point here is likely to be that Qatar is a rich country and that both state and private employers in Qatar could easily pay guest workers more and could easily improve the working conditions much more radically than what they have hitherto done. State and private employers in Qatar are simply exploiting the fact that many poor people in poor countries have very limited economic options and therefore are willing to consent to employment contracts in Qatar that involve physically gruelling and dangerous work for relatively little pay. Moreover, the Qatari government is complicit in this exploitation in the sense that it puts in place a legal system that permits the exploitative practices of state and private employers.

This line of argument rests crucially on a particular conception of exploitation. In the political philosophical literature, exploitation is a highly contested concept. Various authors have defended various conceptions of what it means to be exploited. The proponent of the exploitation argument must be ready to offer an, at least rudimentary, account of what conception of exploitation she utilizes in her argument. Here is a suggestion for an account she can invoke:

Exploitation does not require that the exploited party be harmed, nor does it require that the person exploited is coerced or manipulated. Indeed, it is even possible to exploit someone with her cooperation, and even at her request. Such benefiting can be wrong because it involves unfairly taking advantage of others (or their situation), benefiting from their misfortune, and benefiting disproportionately to their contribution.[[43]](#endnote-44)

This conception of exploitation is desirable to the proponent of the exploitation argument because it allows her to maintain that the typical guest worker is being exploited even though he has neither been coerced nor manipulated into signing his employment contract. It can even be allowed that the typical guest worker, on net, benefits significantly from his work in Qatar. However, the typical guest worker is being exploited by his employer because the employer takes unfair advantage of him, benefits from his misfortune and because the employer benefits disproportionately from the contribution of the guest worker. The economic surplus of the interaction between employer and the typical guest worker is divided unfairly. The typical guest worker simply does not get a big enough slice of the economic surplus generated by his interaction with his employer in Qatar.

If the proponent of the exploitation argument invokes the above conception of exploitation, then she has an argument for the truth of (2) that is coherent, empirically informed and resting on respectable considerations about the key philosophical term in (2) (“exploitation”). Whether (2), in the end, is true depends on a complicated discussion of whether Meyer’s conception of exploitation is correct and can withstand criticism.[[44]](#endnote-45) It lies outside the scope of this article to settle this discussion, but let us, for the sake of the argument, assume that (2) is true.

This leaves us with (5). This proposition is identical to premise (5) in the slavery argument which was discussed extensively in the previous section. The upshot of this discussion was that (5) in the slavery argument is false. Premise (5) in the exploitation argument is, therefore, also false. From this it follows that the exploitation argument is unsound.

Let me end the discussion of the exploitation argument by considering yet another argument. Let us call it “The Xinjiang argument”.

(1) China’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the way that members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province are treated by China's security forces. (Assumption)

(2) Members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province are treated in a morally reprehensible way by China’s security forces. (Assumption)

(3) If China’s government is responsible for the legal environment that permits the way that members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province are treated by China's security forces and members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province are treated in a morally reprehensible way by China’s security forces, then China’s government acts in a morally reprehensible manner. (Assumption)

(4) China’s government acts in a morally reprehensible manner. (Conditional E)

(5) If China’s government acts in a morally reprehensible manner, then the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing should be boycotted. (Assumption)

(6) The 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing should be boycotted. (Conditional E)

This argument has the same form as the exploitation argument. So, given that the exploitation argument is valid, so is the Xinjiang argument. A proponent of the exploitation argument is not logically committed to the conclusion of the Xinjiang argument. For example, she can reject premise (2) in the Xinjiang argument without making a logical mistake. A proponent of the exploitation argument cannot plausibly deny (1), (3) or (5) in the Xinjiang argument. Can she deny (2)? I contend that she cannot. Everyone has to accept (2) in the Xinjiang argument. Afterall, numerous members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang province have been arbitrarily detained and imprisoned by the Chinese security forces. This is large-scale wrongful coercion by a state actor.[[45]](#endnote-46) This kind of coercion is morally reprehensible, and, I contend, the actions of the Chinese government are, from a moral perspective, much worse than the actions of the Qatar government.

An upshot of the discussion of the exploitation argument is that if one is in favour of a boycott of the World Cup and grounds this view on the exploitation argument, then there is no plausible case for denying that the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing should be boycotted. If one is not in favour of a boycott of this event, and still thinks that World Cup in Qatar should be boycotted, then one must replace the exploitation argument with another argument.

1. **The clean hands argument**

Perhaps one is unhappy with the exploitation argument because it relies on premise (5) and one may dislike this premise because it helps license a boycott of a sporting event in country x even in cases where the reason why x’s government acts in a morally problematic manner has nothing to do with the sporting event.[[46]](#endnote-47) One may dislike this feature of (5) because one wants to ground a boycott of the World Cup on considerations about how this particular event has come about and not on considerations about how Qatar’s government behaves in domains unrelated to the World Cup (say, what international trade policies it implements, what penal code it puts in place or how it treats members of the LGBT+ community). Someone inclined to accept this line of reasoning could proceed by defending the following argument. Let us call it “The clean hands argument”.

(1) If the infrastructure for the World Cup has been constructed in a morally improper way, then every country has a moral obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other countries do. (Assumption)

(2) The infrastructure for the World Cup has been constructed in a morally improper way. (Assumption)

(3) Every country has an obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other countries do. (Conditional E)

(4) If every country has an obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other countries do, then the World Cup should be boycotted. (Assumption)

(5) The World Cup should be boycotted. (Conditional E).

This argument is valid. Is it sound? (4) is true. What about (2)? It should be acknowledged that (2) is true. The five ways, listed in the introduction, in which the Qatar government wrongs guest workers are jointly sufficient to establish (2). This leaves us with (1). This is a normative premise that embodies a particular moral principle. Let us call this the “clean hands principle”. An example may help elucidate this principle. Think of a scenario in which a government has confiscated several plots of land from their legitimate owners simply because the legitimate owners are not, according to the prevailing state-ideology, of the “correct” ethnicity. The government now organises a group event that consists of an auction where members of the “correct” ethnicity can make bids on the various plots of land. Many individuals have already signed up for the auction and you are offered the chance to participate as well. The auction will go ahead regardless of whether you participate and regardless of whether some of the individuals, who have already signed up, drop out of the event. What should you do?

Contemplating this scenario is likely to create a strong intuition to the effect that you should not participate in the auction. This intuition is explained by the clean hands principle. This principle says that regardless of what other people are doing, one has a moral obligation to, figuratively speaking, keep one’s hands clean and not participate in a group event that is morally tainted in the sense that it has come about in a morally improper way. In the present example, the auction takes place on the heels of a morally inappropriate event: namely the state confiscation (stealing) of property motivated by a morally inappropriate view about the respective worth of different ethnicities. The clean hands principle implies that regardless of what other people are doing, you have an obligation to not participate in the auction.[[47]](#endnote-48)

Premise (1) embodies the clean hands principle and applies it to the issue of whether any given country should participate in the World Cup. The clean hands principle is a plausible moral principle. However, (1) is false. The reason is this. Premise (5) in the Master Argument is true. This premise says that it is morally misplaced for the governments of rich countries from the global North to sanction the government of Qatar through a boycott of the World Cup. If this is true, then it is true that the governments of rich countries from the global North should not boycott the World Cup. Now, if this is true, then it is false that every country has a moral obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other countries do.[[48]](#endnote-49) So, the consequent of (1) is false. The antecedent of (1) is true. This means that (1) is false.

Let us move on by investigating what a proponent of the clean hands argument is committed to. Consider the following argument which we can call “The no participation argument”.

(1) If the infrastructure for the World Cup has been constructed in a morally improper way, then every individual has a moral obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other individuals do. (Assumption)

(2) The infrastructure for the World Cup has been constructed in a morally improper way. (Assumption)

(3) Every individual has a moral obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other individuals do. (Conditional E)

(4) If every individual has a moral obligation to not participate in the World Cup, regardless of what other individuals do, then the World Cup should be boycotted by every individual. (Assumption)

(5) The World Cup should be boycotted by every individual. (Conditional E)

The no participation argument has the same form as the clean hands argument. So, given that the latter argument is valid, so is the former. A proponent of the clean hands argument is not logically committed to the conclusion of the no participation argument. For example, she makes no logical mistake if she rejects (1) in the no participation argument. However, on pain of having an implausible moral standard, she must accept (1). After all, if one thinks that the World Cup is a morally tainted event and that anycountry that has qualified for the event should keep its hands clean and not participate in the event, it is normatively odd, if one, at the same time, thinks that it is morally permissible for oneself, at the individual level, to participate in the World Cup. If one thinks that any given country should keep its hands clean and not participate in the World Cup, then it seems normatively straightforward that the same must be true for individuals. A proponent of the clean hands argument has to accept (2). (4) seems obvious. So, I contend that a proponent of the clean hands argument has an implausible normative standard if she rejects the conclusion of the no participation argument.

Let me say something about what the practical implications are of being committed to the conclusion of the no participation argument. If one either travels to Qatar to watch the World Cup, follows the World Cup in one’s home country on any media platform or bets on matches in the tournament, then one fails to boycott the World Cup. Media outlets that send journalists and technical personnel to Qatar to cover the World Cup, as a sporting event, also fail to boycott the World Cup.[[49]](#endnote-50)

So, a proponent of the clean hands argument is committed to the proposition that one cannot do any of these things. Being committed to this is being committed to something relatively demanding.[[50]](#endnote-51) If one is not prepared to be committed to these things, one must abandon the clean hands argument.

1. **Procedural irregularity in the process through which Qatar got the World Cup**

Here at the end of the article, it is worth mentioning another line of argument that has been fielded for the view that the World Cup should be boycotted. This argument does not centre on the working conditions of guest workers. It draws attention to the process through which Qatar was awarded the World Cup by FIFA.[[51]](#endnote-52) This process was marred by procedural irregularity. Put somewhat informally, the argument rests on the premisses that FIFA ought to consider the human rights records of those countries that apply to host the World Cup, and that FIFA should not let financial considerations override concerns about human rights violations in a potential host country. Moreover, FIFA should be able to demonstrate transparency in its decision-making to avoid the impression that a country has been awarded the World Cup through a process in which financial considerations has overridden human rights concerns. In the case of Qatar, the complaint goes, FIFA has failed spectacularly in these respects. First, prior to awarding Qatar the World Cup, there were rather clear reasons for believing that human rights concerns did apply in the case of Qatar. Second, there is strong evidence that Qatar won the right to host the World Cup through the buying of votes (bribery) of some members of the FIFA committee that selected the host country.[[52]](#endnote-53) In sum, these considerations provide a reason for boycotting the World Cup, and they provide a reason for *every* country, not just rich countries from the global North, to boycott the World Cup.[[53]](#endnote-54)

I have some sympathy for this argument, and I think that it is the strongest argument for a boycott of the World Cup. Proponents of a boycott of the World Cup would do themselves a favor if they concentrated their energy on this argument and abandoned the slavery, exploitation and clean hands arguments which have taken up so much time and space in the debate about a boycott.

I do not have a knockdown argument against this argument, but I have two worries about it. First, where exactly is the bar set for when human rights concerns become so grave that a country cannot host an international sporting event? If a concern for human rights should play a decisive role in deliberations about where international sporting events can take place, then it seems that such events cannot take place in Egypt, China, Iran, Venezuela, Russia, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates and Nigeria.[[54]](#endnote-55) It is not clear that they can take place in Israel or Romania.[[55]](#endnote-56) Can they even take place in Denmark given Denmark’s extensive, and often criticised[[56]](#endnote-57) use of solitary confinement in its prisons?[[57]](#endnote-58) A consistent application of the “human rights concerns” angle leads to it being the case that only a rather limited number of countries are appropriate hosts of international sporting events. This is a somewhat problematic outcome given that international sporting events can serve as venues for a fruitful exchange between individuals, between countries, between organizations and between for-profit companies and their customers. If countries A and B are at odds with each other or if country A is at odds with a group of other countries, then a sporting event can be valuable in the sense that it brings together individuals from each “group” and facilitates a joint peaceful activity that can lead to greater mutual toleration and economic interdependence and thereby de-escalate any move towards increased, even armed, conflict. Often, it is good if disagreeing parties meet for occasions where there is an overlap of interests and where the issues that normally separate the parties are momentarily forgotten. All else being equal, it would, for example, be good with a media covered chess tournament in Ramallah with commercial sponsors and participants from the US, Israel, Iran and Palestine.[[58]](#endnote-59)

Second, assume that one finds that the World Cup in Qatar should be boycotted because Qatar bribed its way to being host. That is a consistent and respectable view to hold. However, if one holds this view, then it has implications for what one can consistently think about previous World Cups. There is credible evidence to the effect that several other World Cups were awarded to countries through a process that involved bribery. According to the US Department of Justice, representatives working for Russia bribed FIFA officials to secure hosting rights for the 2018 World Cup.[[59]](#endnote-60) Former FIFA official Chuck Blazer has admitted that he took bribes in the processes leading up to choosing the host country for the 1998 and 2010 World Cups that were held respectively in France and South Africa.[[60]](#endnote-61) If one thinks that the Qatar World Cup should be boycotted because of bribery concerns, then one must think that these three previous World Cups were hugely problematic and should have been boycotted. If one is not ready to accept this implication, then one is treating Qatar unfairly in the sense that one holds it to standards that one is not ready to apply to other countries that behave in a manner that is identical in all morally relevant respects.

Moreover, if one believes that the Qatar World Cup should be boycotted because of bribery concerns, then it is morally dubious to not hold that *FIFA* should be boycotted. Why single out Qatar for its (undeniably) bad behaviour? FIFA is an organisation that allowed this morally impermissible behaviour to take place (and has allowed similar behaviour on *three* previous occasions). High-ranking officials in FIFA were in on the Qatari bribery scheme, and FIFA did not strip Qatar of its right to host the World Cup after it became clear how this right was acquired in the first place. FIFA has a clear responsibility for the events that led to Qatar being named host, and if one thinks that these events are so bad that they make Qatar an appropriate target for boycott, then there is a strong case for thinking that they make FIFA an appropriate target for boycott. In practice this means that one should boycott *all* FIFA events and activities.[[61]](#endnote-62) An implication of this is the rather demanding one that one cannot watch any FIFA-organised matches for enjoyment. If one is not ready to accept that all FIFA events and activities should be boycotted, then one must abandon the view that the Qatar World Cup should be boycotted because of bribery concerns.

1. **Conclusion**

This article has defended the conclusion that the 2022 FIFA Men’s World Cup in Qatar should not be boycotted by rich countries from the global North. In section three, the Master Argument for this conclusion was presented. The argument was underpinned by considerations about the economic background conditions in guest workers’ home countries. In sections four to six, three arguments were considered that have as their conclusion that the World Cup should be boycotted. These three arguments are, respectively, entitled “The slavery argument”, “The exploitation argument” and “The clean hands argument”. It was argued that these arguments fail in their intended scope. In short, they give us no reason for being sceptical about the conclusion of the article.

As an important part of the discussion of the slavery, exploitation and clean hands arguments, the article has tried to tease out what a proponent of each of these arguments is committed to. The Almeria argument, in section four, aimed at showing that a proponent of the slavery argument is committed to believing that several sporting events *outside* of Qatar should be boycotted. This is a demanding commitment that a proponent of the slavery argument must be prepared to accept. In section five, the Xinjiang argument was used to show that a proponent of the exploitation argument is committed to the proposition that the 2022 Olympic Winter games in Beijing should be boycotted. Again, this is a demanding commitment that a proponent of the exploitation argument must be prepared to accept. In section six, the no participation argument was used to show that a proponent of the clean hands argument has an implausible normative standard if she does not believe that the World Cup should be boycotted by every *individual*. Acceptance of the clean hands argument carries with it a demanding commitment to not follow the World Cup for enjoyment.

The penultimate section of the article contained a discussion of an argument for a boycott that centres on the *process* through which Qatar was awarded the World Cup. It is interesting to discuss this argument given that it has a stronger conclusion than the Master Argument. Its conclusion is that the World Cup should be boycotted by *all* countries and not only by rich countries from the global North. It was argued that this argument is the strongest one in favour of a boycott. There is no knockdown argument against it, but it is appropriate to have several worries about it.

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**NOTES**

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1. ## “FIFA” is the acronym of “*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*”. FIFA is the governing body of international soccer. It is the organizer of the World Cup which takes place every fourth year. The organization proclaims that “FIFA exists to govern football and to develop the game around the world.” See <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa> (Accessed May 3, 2022).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Carole Gomez, "Boycott and Diplomacy: When the talking stops," in *Sport and diplomacy: Games within games*, ed. J Simon Rofe (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2018); Toby Miller and Pal Ahluwalia, "Editorial: human rights and football," *Social Identities* 27, no. 6 (2021/11/02 2021),https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2021.1995144, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2021.1995144; Amnesty International, *“In the prime of their lives”: Qatar’s failure to investigate, remedy and prevent migrant workers’ deaths*, Amnesty International (London: Amnesty International, 2021), https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/MDE2246142021ENGLISH.pdf ; Louise Callaghan, "Qatar 2022: Dying for the World Cup," *The Times* (London), November 13 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/qatar-2022-dying-for-the-world-cup-r3kh38qnd ; Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*, Amnesty International (London, 2020), https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MDE2232972020ENGLISH.pdf . [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. The rich countries from the global North are the countries in the European Union, the countries in North America as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, South Korea, Australia and Japan. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Amnesty International, *Qatar: “Why do you want to rest?”: Ongoing abuse of domestic workers in Qatar*, Amnesty International (London, 2020), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/ : 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. See <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/12/07/what-are-zina-laws> (Accessed May 22, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Qatar Ministry of Justice, "Penal Code," ed. Qatar Ministry of Justice (Qatar, 2004).: article 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Qatar Ministry of Justice, "Penal Code.": article 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. See <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/lgbt_mena0418_annex_0.pdf> (Accessed May 22, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. See <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/44/57/Add.1> (Accessed May 22, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. (Amnesty International 2021a: 10). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. (Amnesty International 2021a: 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Amnesty International, *“In the prime of their lives”: Qatar’s failure to investigate, remedy and prevent migrant workers’ deaths*.: 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Qatar’s guest workers come predominantly from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya or the Philippines. See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/02/migrant-workers-and-qatar-world-cup> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Leif Wenar, "Property Rights and the Resource Curse," https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2008.00122.x, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2008/01/01 2008),https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2008.00122.x, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2008.00122.x.: 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Kaivan Munshi, "Caste and the Indian Economy," *Journal of Economic Literature* 57, no. 4 (2019),https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20171307, https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jel.20171307.: 781 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Bas van der Vossen and Jason Brennan, *In Defense of Openness: Why Global Freedom Is the Humane Solution to Global Poverty* (Oxford University Press, 2018). https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/10.1093/oso/9780190462956.001.0001/oso-9780190462956.: 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail : The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (London: Profile books ltd, 2012).: 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. In making these claims about the contributing factors to the unjust economic background conditions in many poor countries, I follow arguments presented in Bryan Caplan and Zach Weinersmith, *Open Borders : The Science and Ethics of Immigration* (New York: First Second, 2019); Loren Lomasky and Fernando Teson, *Justice at a distance: extending freedom globally* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); van der Vossen and Brennan, *In Defense of Openness: Why Global Freedom Is the Humane Solution to Global Poverty*; J. Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy," *The Monist* 86, no. 3 (2003).. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. An economic migrant from, say, Bangladesh will, if he peacefully tries to cross the border into, say, Denmark, be detained and detainment equals no income for him. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. In saying this, I follow a line of argument put forward by Zwolinski about how the typical worker in a sweatshop reasons Matt Zwolinski, "Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2007),https://doi.org/10.5840/beq20071745, https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/sweatshops-choice-and-exploitation/DE53EDF70087D7350CA28A1A5FBE4830.: 694. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. The voters who put these governments in office also actively and unjustly harm guest workers. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. See T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002). for an influential discussion of the distinction between positive and negative duties in the global justice debate. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. # A 2017 *Independent* article has the headline “World Cup 2022: Qatar's workers are not workers, they are slaves, and they are building mausoleums, not stadiums“. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/world-cup-2022-qatar-s-workers-slaves-building-mausoleums-stadiums-modern-slavery-kafala-a7980816.html> (Accessed May 3, 2022).

    # A 2013 article in *The Guardian* says that “thousands of Nepalese, who make up the single largest group of laborers in Qatar, face exploitation and abuses that amount to modern-day slavery”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves> (Accessed May 3, 2022).

    A 2017 opinion piece in *The Guardian* says “Right now, countries need to stand up at the ILO and elsewhere to Qatar’s financial muscle and oppose its use of modern slavery. Those that don’t will be held to account.” See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/19/qatar-world-cup-slavery-migrant-workers> (Accessed May 3, 2022).

    In a 2015 article, Amnesty International claims that guest workers in Qatar work under slave-like conditions. See <https://amnesty.dk/slaver-i-verdens-rigeste-land/>

    <https://amnesty.sa.utoronto.ca/2019/06/05/labour-rights-and-the-2022-qatar-fifa-world-cup/> (Accessed May 3, 2022).

    A 2014 article in *The Guardian* has the headline "Qatar's foreign domestic workers subjected to slave-like conditions”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/feb/26/qatar-foreign-workers-slave-conditions> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Anne Kerr and Edmund Wright, "slavery," in *A Dictionary of World History*, ed. Anne Kerr and Edmund Wright (Oxford University Press, 2015). https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199685691.001.0001/acref-9780199685691-e-3390.. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Paul S. Boyer, *American History : A Very Short Introduction* (Cary, UNITED KINGDOM: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2012). http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aalborguniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=934462.: 51-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/02/migrant-workers-and-qatar-world-cup> (Accessed May 3, 2022) and <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/01/migrant-guards-in-qatar-still-paid-under-1-an-hour-ahead-of-world-cup> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. I agree with the idea expounded by Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski, "If you can do it for free, there's some way to do it for money," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 17, no. 1 (2021),https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744137420000351, https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/if-you-can-do-it-for-free-theres-some-way-to-do-it-for-money/F1AEB3BAB314D38EF970A6C2FE6C03E8.: 171; Jason Brennan and Peter M. Jaworski, *Markets without Limits : Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2016). that not all peaceful commercial transactions between consenting adults are morally permitted. i) there are certain things that people simply should not have. This implies that there are certain things that people should not be morally permitted to sell or buy (for example, stolen goods or images of paedophilia). ii) sometimes particular individuals should not sell a particular thing though it would, under normal circumstances, be morally permissible to sell it (for example, someone has promised not to sell a particular object, say, the family Bible). However, there are no things such that individuals are morally permitted to own them (and give them away for free) but not morally permitted to sell them. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. For a brief description of the Kafala system, see: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system#chapter-title-0-5>. (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. In June 2021, Singapore had a foreign workforce of 1197100 individuals. See <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers>. (Accessed May 3, 2022). In the first half of 2021, there were 6411 workplace injuries in Singapore. 23 of these were fatal and 312 of them count as major injuries Singapore Ministry of Manpower, *Workplace Safety and Health Report January – June 2021*, Ministry of Manpower (Singapore, 2021), https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/safety-health/reports-stats/wsh-national-statistics/wsh-national-stats-2021.pdf?la=en&hash=0DA09E0B07CF863F1B30DBDE20554B2D . Of the 23 fatal accidents, 18 of them were in either Construction, Transportation & Storage or Manufacturing Singapore Ministry of Manpower, *Workplace Safety and Health Report January – June 2021*.. These are industrial sectors in which migrant workers typically work in Singapore. In Singapore, between 2013 and 2020, there were 160 fatal accidents in the construction sector alone Singapore Ministry of Manpower, *Workplace Safety and Health Report 2020* (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2020), https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/press-releases/2021/0319-annex-a---workplace-safety-and-health-report-2020.pdf . [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/10/16/consumers-are-not-aware-we-are-slaves-inside-the-greenhouses> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/10/16/consumers-are-not-aware-we-are-slaves-inside-the-greenhouses> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. See (<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-52319537> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. A bilateral agreement between Morocco and Spain led in 2019 to almost 20000 Moroccan women picking strawberries in Spain. It is part of the agreement that migrants lose the opportunity to work in Spain if they leave their Spanish workplace for any reason. Out of 16 female farm workers, interviewed by Al Jazeera and Danwatch, several told of things such as penalties for taking toilet breaks, sexual harassment and being blackmailed for sex. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/10/in-spains-strawberry-fields-migrant-women-face-sexual-abuse> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. The think tank Freedom House rates people’s access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries. Freedom House gives each country a score between zero and one hundred point. In the latest ranking, Qatar gets a score of 25. Saudi Arabia gets a score of 7. For reference, Sweden tops the ranking with a score of 100. See <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores?sort=asc&order=Total%20Score%20and%20Status> (Accessed May 3, 2022). Here is what Freedom House says about Saudi Arabia: “Saudi Arabia’s absolute monarchy restricts almost all political rights and civil liberties. No officials at the national level are elected. The regime relies on pervasive surveillance, the criminalization of dissent, appeals to sectarianism and ethnicity, and public spending supported by oil revenues to maintain power. Women and religious minorities face extensive discrimination in law and in practice. Working conditions for the large expatriate labor force are often exploitative.” See <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2021> (Accessed May 3, 2022). On the assumption that this description is correct, it is difficult to see how a proponent of the slavery argument can avoid endorsing a boycott of the 2022 Spanish Super Cup. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. Amnesty International says that they, and others, have shown that guest workers have been subjected to “serious exploitation and labour abuse, sometimes amounting to forced labour”, by employers operating under the Qatari labour system Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. The monthly rate is around US$275 if food and accommodation is provided by the employer Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Amnesty International conducted interviews with 105 domestic workers in Qatar between May 2019 and September 2020. The organization found that 83% of these domestic workers had their passport confiscated by their employer. In most cases, the worker’s recruitment agency had handed over the passport of the domestic worker to her employer who then confiscated it Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 22. The practice of confiscating a passport is morally impermissible. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Amnesty International, *REALITY CHECK 2020: COUNTDOWN TO THE 2022 WORLD CUP. MIGRANT WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN QATAR*.: 4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. In 2021, Human Rights Watch recognized that there have been improvements in the working conditions of guest workers. The organization is, however, of the opinion that these improvements have not been far-reaching enough. There are still very substantial problems with the way guest workers are treated. See <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/qatar> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Chris Meyers, "Wrongful Beneficence: Exploitation and Third World Sweatshops," https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2004.00235.x, *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (2004/09/01 2004),https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2004.00235.x, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2004.00235.x.: 324. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. For one criticism, see Zwolinski, "Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation.": 721. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. This terrifying video from the BBC sheds light on the wrongful coercion undertaken by China's security forces in Xinjiang: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwBaL-5o1oc> (Accessed May 3, 2022). For a detailed account of the gross violation of Xinjiang Muslims’ basic human rights by the Chinese government, see Amnesty International, *“LIKE WE WERE ENEMIES IN A WAR”: CHINA’S MASS INTERNMENT, TORTURE AND PERSECUTION OF MUSLIMS IN XINJIANG*, Amnesty International (London: United Kingdom: Amnesty International, 2021), https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/ . The opening section of the report reads: “Since 2017, the government of China has carried out massive and systematic abuses against Muslims living in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). The human suffering has been immense. Huge numbers of men and women from predominantly Muslim ethnic groups have been arbitrarily detained and sent to internment camps or prison. The internment camp system is part of a larger campaign of subjugation and forced assimilation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang” Amnesty International, *“LIKE WE WERE ENEMIES IN A WAR”: CHINA’S MASS INTERNMENT, TORTURE AND PERSECUTION OF MUSLIMS IN XINJIANG*.. See also: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/china-draconian-repression-of-muslims-in-xinjiang-amounts-to-crimes-against-humanity/> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. For reference, consider the Xinjiang argument where the reason given for why the Chinese government acts in a morally reprehensible manner is based on considerations about how the Chinese government behaves in a domain unrelated to the Beijing Winter Olympics. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. Jason Brennan has written instructively about the clean hands principle, and he has argued that this principle can be applied in the context of the ethics of voting to show that some voters have an obligation to abstain from voting Jason Brennan, "The Ethics and Rationality of Voting," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: California: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/voting/ ; Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011).. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. If government x should not do y, then it is false that x has a moral obligation to do y and therefore it is false that every government has a moral obligation to do y. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Media outlets do not fail to boycott the World Cup if they send investigative journalists and technical personnel to Qatar during the World Cup to report on, say, the grueling working conditions of guest workers or on how Qatar's immigration policy of admitting low-skilled workers from poor countries is one that typically allows guest workers to transform their lives in a positive way. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Judith Lichtenberg has drawn attention to the kind of things that people, who wish to have clean hands in an international system of global commerce, must pay attention to: “Don’t buy clothing made in sweatshops. (Find out which those are.) Was your oriental rug knotted by eight-year-olds? (Find out.) Do you own stock in a company that exploits its workers? (Find out.) Is the coltan in your cell phone fueling wars in the Congo?” Judith Lichtenberg, "Negative Duties, Positive Duties, and the “New Harms”," *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (2010/04/01 2010),https://doi.org/10.1086/652294, https://doi.org/10.1086/652294.: 559. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. See <https://www.dw.com/en/world-cup-2022-in-qatar-buzz-growing-as-threat-of-boycotts-dwindles/a-59848445> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer from *Public Affairs Quarterly* for prompting me to mention and discuss this argument. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. See this list of countries with the worst human rights records: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1256220/highest-human-rights-and-rule-of-law-index-by-country/> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. According to the US State Department, there are “significant human rights issues” in Romania. See: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. Reiter et al., “Theoretical and empirical limits of Scandinavian”. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. Freedom House rates Denmark 10th from the top in its country ranking of people’s access to political rights and civil liberties. 210 countries and territories are surveyed. See <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores?sort=asc&order=Total%20Score%20and%20Status> (Accessed May 25, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. This line of thought only goes so far. As this paper is being revised (spring 2022), Russia is engaged in an unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. This is sufficient reason to boycott all sporting events in Russia. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html> (Accessed May 3, 2022); <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/12098/11969691/world-cup-2022-in-qatar-new-bribe-and-corruption-claims-from-us-prosecutors> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. See <https://www.france24.com/en/20150603-fifa-blazer-admits-taking-bribes-1998-2010-world-cup-france-south-africa> (Accessed May 3, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. Believing that all FIFA events and activities should be boycotted does not commit one to believing that there should be no global governing body that organises soccer at an international level. One can believe that FIFA should be replaced with a new organisation that has a more virtuous and clearly transparent set of guidelines for how future World Cups are awarded.

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