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The sacrifice of migrant workers for the World Cup: ‘The Workers Cup’ documentary coming to POV on Monday, July 9, 2018.

Film reveals the human sacrifice for “the beautiful game”



For football fans across the globe, all roads lead to the 2018 FIFA World Cup, now taking place in Russia. And while the thrill and excitement of the games ensue, [The Workers Cup](#) by Adam Sobel is set to premiere on the PBS documentary series POV on **Monday, July 9** at 10 p.m. ([check local listings](#)), the day before the first game of the semifinals.

The film offers a glimpse of the massive stadiums and infrastructure projects now being built for the 2022 games in Qatar, while following the experiences of migrant workers who are recruited from Asia and Africa for the construction projects of local and multinational companies. “This film tries to tell the story on a more intimate level and really comes close to the story... of the migrant workers themselves,” Sobel says in his filmmaker statement.

We learn of the circumstances that bring these workers to Qatar. Most come due to financial need and others in search of opportunity. However, workers quickly find that their new reality is gravely different from what they expected. “The life that I’m living here, I try to hide it from my friends back home because they wouldn’t understand it,” states Paul, a migrant from Kenya. “Their perception of being abroad is the high life... but the life that I’m living here, it’s a different life.”

For most workers, the choice to migrate brings little gain: the salaries they receive—most get 200 USD a month—are too low to make a difference in the situations they left back home. Most cannot change jobs, quit or return home without the permission of the company that contracted them. Sometimes desperate measures are taken: we learn of one worker who attacked his roommate so he would get kicked out of the camp and could go home.

A possible silver lining is presented when workers from 24 companies that are bidding for World Cup-related contracts are invited to participate in a sponsored football tournament called the Workers Cup. It takes place in the very facilities that they are tasked to build. Sobel documents the experience of a team

of workers selected by Gulf Contracting Company (GCC), with players from Kenya, Ghana, India and Nepal.

The tournament quickly becomes an outlet for GCC workers and their excitement over it builds. After the first game, they assess each other's strengths and weaknesses and are motivated to ask for time off work so they can train for the next game. The team bonds across cultural and language barriers through their shared love of "the beautiful game." For some of them it represents a chance to be discovered by the scouts they hope will be watching. But for all it is a rare escape from the drudgery of their everyday jobs as sweepers, cleaners and diggers on sites across the city.

After each exciting game they head back to the labor camp, where they are reminded of the harsh realities they face: living at the mercy of their company, challenges to finding companionship and the struggle to maintain relationships with their families back home. In a moment of reflection, they address the topic of freedom in relation to life at the camp. "You can't go back. You just have to stay and work for the... small salary," states Paul during a conversation among team members contemplating whether they are subject to "modern slavery."

The Workers Cup also presents the stark contrast between the workers' living conditions and the opulence that surrounds them. The unique and modern architecture of Qatar is built on the manpower of these migrant workers, who risk injury and death, yet will never be able to experience and enjoy the luxuries they provide: "A mall is not a place people like me can go," states Umesh, a migrant from India. "On our site we aren't allowed downstairs in the mall while it's open... There's really no reason to go anyway."

Ultimately, after the tournament is over, team GCC will return to "normal life" at the camp. With soccer no longer bringing them together, differences and divisions resurface. Disappointment swells, too, as they come to see the tournament as a PR exercise.

"It was never about the worker," says Calton, a migrant worker from Kenya. "The company's interest is to win tenders to construct stadiums, to construct buildings, to construct roads and all these things that are needed set up for the 2022 World Cup. It was for another person to see what's going on, another shareholder. But I thought that maybe we'd be considered not as workers but as footballers. That was my goal."

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About the Filmmaker:

Adam Sobel, Director

Adam Sobel is a filmmaker who grew up in Arkansas, spent the past five years in Qatar and recently relocated to Chicago. He has produced television and journalism around the Middle East for outlets including *The Guardian*, CNN and ITN. Sport's role in society is a focus of Sobel's work. In 2013, he directed a series that followed the first woman from Saudi Arabia to reach the top of Mount Everest. **The Workers Cup** is his feature-film debut.

Credits:

Director:	Adam Sobel
Producers:	Ramzy Haddad, Rosie Garthwaite
Editors:	Lauren Wellbrock, Anne Jünemann, Adam Sobel
Music:	Nathan Halpern
Executive Producers for POV:	Justine Nagan, Chris White

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Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television's premier showcase for nonfiction films. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world's boldest contemporary

filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 37 Emmy® Awards, 21 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. Learn more at www.pbs.org/pov/.

POV Engage (www.pbs.org/pov/engage/)

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 800 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

POV Spark (www.pbs.org/pov/)

Since 1994, POV Spark has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department has continually experimented with web-based documentaries, producing PBS' first program website and the first Snapchat-native documentary. It has won major awards for its work, including a Webby Award and over 19 nominations. Now with a singular focus on incubating and distributing interactive productions, POV Spark continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its co-productions, acquisitions and the POV Labs, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Endowment for the Arts and the Wyncote Foundation. Additional funding comes from The John S. and James Knight Foundation, Nancy Blachman and David desJardins, Bertha Foundation, Reva & David Logan Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Chicago Media Project, Sage Foundation, Lefkowsky Family Foundation, The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee and public television viewers. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

