



National bonding and meanings given to race and ethnicity: watching the football World Cup on Dutch TV

Jacco van Sterkenburg

To cite this article: Jacco van Sterkenburg (2013) National bonding and meanings given to race and ethnicity: watching the football World Cup on Dutch TV, Soccer & Society, 14:3, 386-403, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2013.801267](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2013.801267)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2013.801267>



Published online: 03 Jun 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 225



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 5 View citing articles [↗](#)

National bonding and meanings given to race and ethnicity: watching the football World Cup on Dutch TV

Jacco van Sterkenburg*

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

In this article, the author examines how the FIFA World Cup broadcast on Dutch television informs its viewers around understandings of race/ethnicity and nation. International sport contests may provide a sense of national belonging that overrides other markers of difference such as ‘race’, ethnicity or gender. As such, the football World Cup can be considered a tool for constructing a collective national identity among viewers of various racial or ethnic origins. The project provides a unique opportunity to explore this further. One of the aims is to explore if and how race and ethnicity as markers of difference may be overridden by feelings of connectivity with the Dutch national team and to what extent this differs for various ethnic audience groups. A total of 36 persons, 12 European-Dutch, 13 Surinamese-Dutch and 11 Moroccan-Dutch, were interviewed. Findings from the study suggest that various ethnic audiences experience a feeling of national bonding but at the same time engage in everyday processes of racialization/ethnization. These results will be situated in an international comparative perspective during the substantive element of this article.

Introduction

Due to their popularity, the sport media can be seen as one of the key sites in reflecting and reinforcing understandings of race, ethnicity and nation. The perceived power of ‘mediasport’ particularly applies to football on television when broadcast during international mega events such as the FIFA World Cup. Football success on this internationally recognized stage has become a signifier of national pride in many countries.¹ By now, the football World Cup has become one of the most widely watched sporting events in the world attracting billions of television viewers across the globe every four years, where a great variety of players of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are visible and represented. As a result, many people get to know the racial/ethnic ‘Other’ through watching football on television during this event.

Given its popularity on television, the international rivalry *among* teams and the multi-ethnicity *within* teams – aspects that all characterize the football World Cup – it is important to consider in more depth how the football World Cup informs its television viewers around their understandings of race, ethnicity and nation. This is especially interesting since some researchers have argued that mega sport events on television give people a sense of unity² and can therefore be considered an efficient

*Email: Sterkenburg@eshcc.eur.nl

tool for constructing a collective national identity among a variety of racial/ethnic groups. Hilvoorde et al. have suggested, for instance, that an event such as the European Football Championships can generate among viewers a shared experience allowing them to feel connected with the national football team and the nation in general.³ The extent to which this occurs and how this may differ for various ethnic audience groups remains largely under researched, however, due to the lack of proper empirical work in this area.

Besides the potential positive bonding effects of football on television, critical researchers have also pointed towards the darker sides of sport and specifically football broadcasts in relation to race. Numerous studies have shown that sport commentators associate Black athletes with natural athletic, animal-like physical capabilities and White athletes with positive mental attributes⁴. Since these messages are repeated over and over again and reach a wide audience, they may, in time, become something of a taken for granted and naturalized form of knowledge. Sabo and Jansen have referred to this as *enlightened racism*: Black success is framed as achievable and acceptable in sport but not in other social domains such as academics, business or politics.

In addition to this, researchers have pointed to the racialized character of nationalist football media discourses.⁵ Gilroy notes, in relation to this phenomenon in an English context, that the national football team is often constructed as a *White* team in everyday discourse.⁶ International sport contests thereby may construct a racialized 'We-They' dichotomy among its viewers that serves more to divide than to integrate/unite multi-ethnic societies.

The small number of reception studies that have been published in relation to race and mediasport has shown, however, that the discourses used by mediasport consumers are not necessarily congruent with dominant race logic within the media. Buffington and Fraley found support for racial/ethnic stereotyping among both Black and White media users along the lines of the stereotypical Black brawn vs. White brains distinction.⁷ McCarthy et al. on the other hand, found that while audience receptions of White TV viewers consuming British televised football were congruent with the dominant race discourses in the British football media, Black viewers received White commentators' discourses differently and held it responsible for the maintenance of the Black 'natural athletic' stereotype in British society.⁸ Hermes additionally concluded that the discourses that Dutch male viewers draw upon in their reception of football coverage depend on the type of football that is being watched.⁹ Whereas male viewers discussed international football players in terms of their technical qualities, with hardly a link to discourses about race or ethnicity, matches featuring the Dutch national team invoked strong nationalist feelings that resulted in racialized forms of discussion in which the White European-Dutch players were implicitly or explicitly considered to be more 'Dutch' than the non-White players who played for the national team.

Despite the insights these studies offer, academic understanding about how audience discourses surrounding race/ethnicity intersect with those surrounding the issue of the nation during major international sport events such as the FIFA World Cup remains largely speculative. Only rarely has research focused on such intersections. This article addresses this neglect. Its aim is to further explore the role of football on television concerning ideas people hold about race, ethnicity and nation. In particular, the article wishes to explore if and how a major sport event such as the football World Cup elicits feelings of connectivity with the Dutch team among its

multi-ethnic television audience and how this connectivity intersects with the meanings viewers give to race/ethnicity and with their racial/ethnic identification more generally.

Theoretical framework

Substantially, this research work is situated within a cultural studies framework. The specific significance of the cultural studies perspective for this research is that it considers sports commentary and audience receptions of sport media content as cultural practices where an ongoing *struggle over meanings* surrounding race, ethnicity and nation takes place. Cultural studies scholars like Hall speak in this regard also of *discourses* that are continuously reconstructed and struggled over.¹⁰ In this article, the author's use of discourse is mainly informed by Hall's definition, specifically as 'ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about a particular topic or practice [...]'.¹¹ According to Hall, discourses, for instance about race/ethnicity, not only 'prefer' certain ways of talking or writing about these concepts but also exclude other ways of talking and writing about them. Discourses thereby help to (re)construct and (re)produce dominant meanings given to race/ethnicity and nation. According to a cultural studies perspective, the specific meanings given to racial/ethnic groups are influenced by relations of power and the assumption that some social groups have more power than others to influence these meanings and articulations. The discourses surrounding race/ethnicity and nation in the football media are mainly created by White (middle to upper class) men who work as editors, programme makers, journalists or commentators.¹² This applies within the Dutch context as it does within many countries worldwide.¹³ Their discourses therefore may best fit the perspectives of many White male football media users. Non-dominant audience groups on the other hand, such as minority ethnic viewers, may tend to reject the hegemonic football media discourse surrounding race/ethnicity and nation, especially if the national football team is implicitly represented as a White team or if commentators use certain racial/ethnic stereotypes to describe minority players. Instead of a 'preferred' reading, minority ethnic viewers may create oppositional and/or negotiated readings more frequently than their White (male) counterparts. Oppositional readings involve interpreting the sport media in an opposite way than the preferred form while negotiated reading requires focusing on other aspects of these images and the coverage as a whole¹⁴. Power relations are, however, never stable but always challenged and undergoing transformation. It would therefore be too simplistic, as Hall has argued, to think of all people who are usually labelled White as belonging to a 'unified and racist ruling class' (20) or, for that matter, of all people who are usually labelled as belonging to a minority ethnic group as by definition not complicit with racialized discourses.¹⁵

The Dutch context

The Dutch context serves as a reference point in this article and therefore requires some further unpacking at this point. Essed discusses how racism often takes the form of 'ethnicism' in The Netherlands since Dutch people prefer to speak of 'ethnicity' instead of 'race' to avoid being perceived as racist and to refrain from using speech that could be labelled 'racist' (see also Costera Meijer and De Bruin).¹⁶ The

largest minority ethnic groups in The Netherlands are defined as Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan. The Surinamese ethnic group came to The Netherlands as a result of the colonial past while the Turkish and Moroccan ethnic groups mainly arrived as labour migrants during the 1960 and 1970s. In contemporary Dutch society, it is in particular the Moroccan-Dutch group who is constructed as the ultimate racial/ethnic Other in everyday discourse. Especially, the category of 'Moroccan male youth' is represented negatively in the mainstream media everyday discourse and associated with traits such as aggressiveness, criminality and unwillingness to integrate into Dutch society.¹⁷ In addition to a categorization based on ethnicity, the Dutch also use another, broader racial/ethnic categorization based on the uniquely Dutch terms 'allochtoon' and 'autochtoon'. Governmental definitions of *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* prescribe that any individual with at least one parent who was born abroad is coined *allochtoon* and any individual whose parents were both born in The Netherlands is coined *autochtoon*. Everyday discourse can differ from such governmental discourse of course. In everyday, popular Dutch discourse, the term *allochtoon* generally refers to non-White minority ethnic groups who experience a relatively low social economic status regardless of the birthplace of their parents.¹⁸ The white Dutch majority ethnic group is coined *autochtoon* (European-Dutch) and occupies a privileged social group position within Dutch society. Since the dominant group of autochthonous White European-Dutch people is usually not considered an ethnic group in popular Dutch discourse, this social group often functions as the invisible norm against which the non-Western minority ethnic groups are measured.¹⁹

In similar ways to Dutch society in general, Dutch professional (televised) football is characterized by racial/ethnic diversity. Football is considered the national sport in the Netherlands and perceived as important to Dutch identity. It has the largest percentage of male and female participants of any sport in the country and has major TV coverage. In the Dutch national football team that participated in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the largest ethnic groups were all represented except for the Turkish group. In addition, the Moluccan ethnic group was represented by team captain Van Bronckhorst. Such multi-ethnic composition was not unique to the Dutch national football team but applied to many teams that participated in the World Cup.

Methodology

A total of 36 persons, 12 European-Dutch, 13 Surinamese-Dutch and 11 Moroccan-Dutch, were interviewed for the empirical work that underpins this article. Members of these ethnic groups were chosen for inclusion in the study because they are among the largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands and are regularly visible in Dutch televised football and the Dutch men's football team. Males and females were more or less evenly divided within the ethnic categories. It was relevant to include males and females in the study since the football World Cup attracts many male as well as female viewers in The Netherlands.

The vast majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 40 years and the respondents differed in relation to their social class, education level and sport participation levels. All respondents shared the experience of having viewed the Dutch national football team during the 2010 football World Cup although they did so to varying degrees. While some respondents were passionate followers of the Dutch

team and watched every match, a few others had only viewed one single match (usually the final which the Dutch team lost) or fragments of a particular game. Two respondents had only watched the matches when they were abroad. Even though it was difficult for those respondents to evaluate the Dutch football commentary during the event, they were included in the analysis as their accounts of feeling connected (or not) with the Dutch national football team and the role their ethnic background and identification played in that was highly relevant for the research.

The respondents were recruited primarily through the use of the snowball sampling method and interviewed by student interviewers and the author, as the principal researcher on the project. The interviews took place between the end of November and first half of December 2010, which was approximately 5 months after the World Cup had finished. Potential interviewees were telephoned or emailed to enquire if they would be willing to participate in the study. Respondents were told that the interviews would be recorded on tape and were guaranteed anonymity. Almost all interviews were individual in nature. In addition to that, one individual interview and two focus group interviews with females of Surinamese origin were conducted by the principal researcher at a later stage as this group was found to be underrepresented in the original sample (September 2011).

The interviews were structured around three topics: (1) participants' connectedness with the Dutch national football team during the 2010 World Cup, (2) the role participants' ethnic identification played in their support for (players of) the Dutch national football team and (3) participants' evaluation of Dutch football commentary and sport commentary generally, and their own discourses surrounding race/ethnicity. The interviews were literally transcribed and then analysed by a search for emerging themes and patterns. This openness to the data is typical of a grounded theory approach, in particular of the initial process in this analysis called open coding.²⁰ Characteristic of open coding is the breaking down of the interview data into separate units of meaning that are labelled identically if they refer to the same phenomenon. New information from the interviews is constantly compared with already constructed labels to see if the data fit the labels well or if a new label should be formed. The end result of this open coding process is numerous labels that represent the interview data.

In this study, the various labels were specified as 'European-Dutch', 'Surinamese-Dutch' or Moroccan-Dutch' to indicate whether they originated with interviewees of Dutch, Surinamese or Moroccan descent. After the open coding phase, the author systematically compared the various labels that had been discovered during the open coding phase in order to reduce their number. Labels that were similar in content were brought together under more encompassing themes. These 'umbrella themes' can be seen to reflect the individual *discourses* used by the respondents in this survey. This process of *axial coding* also implied that the author had checked and judged the extent to which the labels that had been established under each umbrella theme (discourse) represented their theme accurately, or that a new theme should be formulated. When the author had completed the process of axial coding, he compared the various themes with each other to explore their variation. The constant comparison of themes with the data and with each other expanded the density of the analysis and finally resulted in an overview of the data, with only a limited number of abstract themes/discourses that covered the data (selective coding). These themes will be presented in the following section, which

is structured according to the dominant themes that emerged in the interviews and point out similarities and differences in the interpretations and discourses surrounding race, ethnicity and nation of the various ethnic audience groups.

Results

Watching the Dutch men's football team play during the 2010 World Cup generated a strong sense of connectivity with the Dutch team among most interviewees. This feeling of connectedness with the side was strongest for the White European-Dutch viewers. They in particular reported an intense sense of bonding with the Dutch team. Their feeling of bonding was typically expressed by wearing orange clothing, which is the colour of the Dutch national team, or buying orange decorations for display in their homes. The feeling of connectivity with the Dutch football team even applied to individuals who usually tend *not* to watch football on television. The enthusiasm of others stimulated their support. The combination of the orange clothing people wear, the enthusiasm of the sport commentators, the shouting and supporting of games on television and the consumption of alcoholic drinks during matches all contributed to a joint celebration of togetherness within a kind of patriotic, party atmosphere which all the (White, European-Dutch) interviewees enjoyed.

Yes I felt connected [with the Dutch squad]. After all, it is very nice to watch the match together, all dressed in orange, and then celebrate the Dutch victory. (European-Dutch female respondent)

Despite the strong connectedness that the White European-Dutch viewers felt with the Dutch team, their support was not always unconditional. Some European-Dutch interviewees made it clear that they felt more connected to the team when it was successful or when it simply performed well. Their strong emotional attachment with the Dutch team, thus, seemed to be paradoxically combined with a more football technical and achievement-oriented evaluation of the side. Although this also applied to some extent to the minority ethnic viewers, it was most striking for the European-Dutch viewers as they expressed the strongest and most intense sense of connectivity at the same time (as a group). One respondent stated, for instance, in reply to a question around whether winning or losing makes a difference for his feelings of connectedness:

I think a successful team creates more bonding. This is also because no one likes to lose [...] and as I said earlier, I still feel connected with the Dutch national football team, among others because they are now second on the world ranking [...] then you still experience that bonding. (European-Dutch male respondent)

In general, viewers considered the media as being extremely important in generating their strong feelings of connectivity with the Dutch team. The many hours that the media devoted to coverage of the team during the football World Cup combined with the passionate enthusiasm of commentators stimulated their feeling of bonding with and pride in the Dutch team. Commentators seem to have boosted, in other words, a kind of collective national identity for their viewers. This applied to all respondents, irrespective of their racial/ethnic background, though it was most evident for the White European-Dutch audience group.

Ambiguity in feelings of connectedness with the Dutch team

This connectedness with and pride in the Dutch team was more ambiguous for the minority ethnic audience groups, in particular the Moroccan-ethnic group. On the one hand, *some* viewers of Moroccan origin felt a strong sense of connectedness with the Dutch football team comparable to that of European-Dutch viewers. Still, their connectivity was expressed in a different way than it was for the European-Dutch viewers. Whereas the White European-Dutch viewers reported a kind of carnivalesque party atmosphere accompanied by the wearing of orange clothing and watching games in a group, often with friends, interviewees of Moroccan origin generally did not report such elements of carnival in their support for the Dutch team. For instance, they did not generally report the wearing of orange clothing as an important characteristic of their support of the team. In other words, some Moroccan-Dutch viewers were passionate and proud of (performances of) the Dutch team but this was less a 'carnavalesque group experience' than it was for the group of viewers of Dutch origin. At the same time, other Moroccan-Dutch respondents reported a complete lack of identification with the Dutch team. Their ethnic background, and especially their location as a minority ethnic group within Dutch society, seems to have played an important role in their lack of connectedness with the Dutch national team. Some respondents stated that as a minority ethnic group in the Netherlands, they did not feel part of the supporter base around the Dutch team (the 'Orange legion'). Many respondents of Moroccan origin stated that they primarily identified with their 'Moroccan-ness' and with the Moroccan national football team. They argued that this reflects their feeling that they are usually perceived as 'Moroccan' instead of 'Dutch' in everyday Dutch discourse.

[If The Netherlands would play against Morocco, who would you support?]

Morocco! You are still a Moroccan because others perceive you as such. [...] You are Moroccan as long as other people see you as a Moroccan. As a result, you tend to connect with Morocco. (Moroccan-Dutch male respondent)

In line with this is the interesting finding arising from the research that many of the Moroccan-Dutch respondents stated that *if* they found themselves supporting the Dutch team, they identified in particular with the players of Moroccan origin selected on it.

The Surinamese-Dutch audience group occupied an intermediate position in this respect. Similar to Moroccan-Dutch viewers, some Surinamese-Dutch viewers argued that they identified in particular with those players of the Dutch national team that shared their ethnic (Surinamese) roots. Likewise, some Surinamese-Dutch respondents argued they would support the Surinamese football *if* a Surinamese team would compete against the Dutch side during a World Cup tournament.

At the same time, however, many of the Surinamese-Dutch interviewees supported the Dutch team and an imaginary Surinamese team equally or felt more connected to the Dutch national football team. This reflects the suggestion that ethnic identification seemed less of an issue for the Surinamese-Dutch viewers than for the Moroccan-Dutch viewers. Whereas many Moroccan-Dutch respondents reported themselves as feeling more Moroccan than Dutch, the Surinamese-Dutch respondents usually reported more of a balanced (dual) identification; '*You feel just*

a person living in The Netherland and not a person of Surinamese origin who lives here' (Surinamese-Dutch female respondent).

Still, the feeling of connectivity that the Surinamese-Dutch interviewees reported with the Dutch national football team seemed, generally, less intense than it was for the White European-Dutch group. Although some Surinamese-Dutch viewers also said they wore orange clothing while watching the Dutch team together with friends, the majority of Surinamese-Dutch viewers origin did *not* report manifestations of a carnivalesque, patriotic atmosphere to the extent that the White European-Dutch participants did: '*Well I sympathize [with the Dutch team] but I do not – like a friend of mine does – wear only orange or something. I do not do those kinds of things*' (Surinamese-Dutch female respondent).

Stereotypes and ethnic composition of the team

The connectedness the White European-Dutch viewers reported to feel with the Dutch national football team sometimes appeared influenced by the *ethnic composition* of the team. Some European-Dutch respondents emphasized that their support for and identification with the Dutch team would decrease if too many minority ethnic players (in their perception) were selected for the Dutch team. Females thereby referred to non-Dutch players who have been *naturalized* to become Dutch citizens, while males referred to minority ethnic or non-White players more generally. One male respondent argued, for instance, that although ethnic diversity in professional football '*cannot be stopped anyway*', a team with too many minority ethnic players can hinder a feeling of bonding with the team. Another male respondent stated that a minority ethnic player such as Ibrahim Afellay (of Moroccan origin) should perhaps be prevented from playing for the Dutch team: '*If he [Afellay] is selected for the Dutch national team, I would think, well, should he be playing in the Dutch team?*'²¹

Others referred to skin colour rather than (Moroccan) ethnicity. The Dutch national team was considered a White team in the imagination of some of the White viewers.

[Suppose the Dutch team consists for more than 50 percent of dark-skinned players, how would that influence your bonding with the team?] It will decrease.

[Why?]

Well, because the team feels less Dutch. In your imagination, Dutch people are White, intuitively.

[If that would be the case, would you be watching the World Cup less frequently?]

I think that my feeling of national pride would decrease, although I still would want to watch. They still play for The Netherlands, but it just matters less. (European-Dutch female respondent)

Even respondents who argued that ethnic composition of the Dutch football team is irrelevant for their support for the team appeared to feel uncomfortable when talking about the ethnic make-up of the Dutch national football team. Whereas some initially stated that they did not care about this issue and 'see' the skin colour of

players as somewhat irrelevant, they later argued they would have difficulty supporting a team that would completely consist of minority ethnic players that have only recently been naturalized into Dutch citizens.

A capacity to speak Dutch, a strong identification with The Netherlands and passion for the Dutch team were mentioned as important criteria when accepting minority ethnic players on the Dutch national team. Some viewers of Dutch origin perceived the colonial linkage between The Netherlands on the one hand and Surinam and the Dutch Antilles as Dutch ex-colonies on the other an important criterion to accept players of Surinamese and Antillean descent as 'Dutch': *Surinam is just The Netherlands, that is the idea I have. It is just a part of the past of The Netherlands itself* (European-Dutch female respondent).

The worries about the numerical 'racial/ethnic balance' in the Dutch football team expressed by some White European-Dutch interviewees were not found among Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch viewers. On the contrary, they argued that ethnic composition was completely irrelevant for their support for the Dutch team since quality of individual players was considered most important. A few interviewees argued explicitly that a complete White team would not change their attitude towards the Dutch team. Others argued that they liked the fact that the Dutch team is multi-ethnic as it reflects the multi-ethnic character of Dutch society as a whole; *The Netherlands is multi-ethnic so it is nice to see that reflected in football* (Surinamese-Dutch female respondent). Some respondents stated they supported the Dutch national football team during the recent World Cup precisely *because* it was an ethnically mixed team.

At the same time, many Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch respondents' argued that they liked to see players of their own ethnicity in the Dutch team.

Yes, it is very weird but if you watch such a game and if you see that a Moroccan player plays you feel 'Come on'. You just grant him to score that goal. (Moroccan-Dutch female respondent)

Moroccan-Dutch respondents often referred to the Moroccan-Dutch Ibrahim Afellay in this respect. They sometimes even considered the presence of Afellay in the Dutch national football team beneficial for the integration of the entire community of Moroccan-Dutch people into Dutch society. According to some Moroccan-Dutch interviewees, Afellay's presence demonstrates to the White European-Dutch majority group that people of Moroccan origin *can* contribute to Dutch success on the sporting field and, thus, to Dutch society in general. Some Surinamese-Dutch respondents made similar statements. It reflects a wider perception expressed by most Moroccan-Dutch and some Surinamese-Dutch respondents that sport, and especially a mega sport event such as the football World Cup, can be a powerful tool to unite people of various ethnic origins and can serve integration purposes: *I think there is no other moment where the Dutch and the 'allochtoon' feel more connected with each other than during a football World Cup* (Moroccan-Dutch male respondent).

Stereotypes continue to flourish: enlightened racism

Despite this apparent celebration of a multi-ethnic Dutch team among the Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch interviewees, almost all respondents

drew on a White-situated enlightened racist discourse at the same time when discussing the qualities of players of various races/ethnicities. As discussed earlier in this article, enlightened racism can be seen as a covert form of racism based on stereotypical representations of Black athletes as naturally gifted, animal-like athletes and of White athletes as hard working and intelligent/rational subjects. Most of the interviewees accepted the racial/ethnic stereotypes that are part of such a discourse. They referred to these stereotypes as 'true knowledge' that is supported by scientific research findings. In particular, most argued that they were convinced of the natural athletic superiority of Black athletes including Black football players (sometimes the respondents spoke of football players and sometimes of athletes generally). Some of the minority ethnic respondents additionally claimed that they believed Whites to be biologically more intelligent and have a better work ethic than minority ethnic players.

About Black males and athletic capacity. I certainly think it has in part a biological cause, just like [the fact that] White people work harder and have more intelligence.
(Moroccan-Dutch male respondent)

Some of the Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch respondents referred specifically to football players of *Moroccan and Turkish origin*. They agreed with the commonsense stereotype in Dutch society that players/athletes of Moroccan origin are more irrational and aggressive in their behaviour than White European-Dutch players. As such, there seemed to be a thin line for many respondents between awareness of racial/ethnic stereotypes and acceptance of these same assertions.

The Netherlands is extremely rational, that is correct, right? So they [sport commentators] could be right that a Dutch person who plays football is much more rational and conscious of his training while a Moroccan will tend to batter. I just believe in that.
(Moroccan-Dutch male respondent)

There were contradictions to this hegemonic discourse as well. A few media users did *not* agree with the stereotypes and/or challenged them. One respondent argued, for instance, that he believed the stereotype that White 'autochthonous' (European-Dutch) people are more intellectual than 'allochthonous' (minority ethnic) people is a stereotypical misrepresentation of reality. Another respondent challenged the commonsensical view that Black Africans are naturally physically stronger than others by pointing out that White Australians are also physically very strong (European-Dutch female respondent).

Besides these oppositional readings that challenged racial stereotypes, respondents sometimes used a negotiated reading by accepting the stereotype on the one hand but at the same time focusing on other aspects to explain the relative successes of Surinamese-Dutch players in Dutch football. One female of Surinamese origin referred both to physical superiority of Surinamese ethnic football players *and* ambition/motivation of these players to explain their football successes.

Perceived impact of the sport media on understandings of race/ethnicity

Respondents differed in their perception as to what extent the sport media actually informs their understandings of race/ethnicity. Whereas most interviewees were convinced that the sport media have the power to influence opinions and the thoughts of *others*, most also argued the sport media do *not* influence *their own* individual perceptions. Some criticized the sport media for representing minority ethnic football players in a negative light and for strengthening widely circulating racialized discourses and stereotypes. Especially, viewers of Moroccan origin (but some viewers of Surinamese and Dutch origins, as well) referred to the role of the sport media in the process of racial/ethnic Othering and stereotyping. Although they see Moroccan-Dutch football players such as Afellay on the one hand as role models capable of serving an integrative function for the Moroccan-Dutch population, they also point to the fact that in general the sport media represent Moroccan-Dutch people in a negative light by associating them with aggressiveness and problematic behaviour. According to some, this is not unique to the sport media but also applies to mainstream media programmes such as the national news as well. Some respondents argued that football players of Moroccan background are only considered to be ‘Dutch’ when they play very well and contribute to any international successes enjoyed by the Dutch national team. As a result of this ‘conditional belonging’, some Moroccan-Dutch respondents argued they have lost a sense of connectedness with Dutch society. It shows the role of the sports media and mainstream media in contributing to processes of racial/ethnic in- and exclusion and in processes of national identification and *disidentification*.

I think it is a real pity that Moroccans and Muslims are represented negatively in the media. If a Moroccan does something well, for instance when Afellay scores a goal, then he is suddenly Dutch. [...] When this happens I think ‘you see, you are only good enough in this country if you perform well’. I feel very bad about that, people apply double standards. (Moroccan-Dutch female respondent)

Even though some Surinamese-Dutch respondents *also* argued that the sport media sometimes represent Surinamese-Dutch players in a negative way, this did not result in strong feelings of being discriminated against. Surinamese-Dutch interviewees especially referred to the Surinamese-Dutch player Clarence Seedorf in this context, a player who has missed several crucial penalties for the Dutch team in the past. According to some Surinamese-Dutch respondents, the sport media have haunted Seedorf with the missed penalties for many years. The media would not have done so in the case of a White European-Dutch player, they argued.

A considerable number of respondents made contrary claims as well, however, stating that they do not believe in racially/ethnically biased sports media. In particular, White European-Dutch (male and female) interviewees, and Surinamese-Dutch female respondents, argued frequently that they have never noticed any bias on the part of the sport media. Instead they generally referred to the sport media as being unbiased and ‘objective’ in nature. As one European-Dutch female respondent argued, *They only comment on the work that athletes deliver*. A few Surinamese-Dutch females believed that commentators perceive *all* the players within the Dutch team primarily as being ‘Dutch’ in their passionate support for the Dutch team,

regardless of the ethnic background of the player; *If the Dutch squad plays, it is really a Dutch squad, then you see everyone as a Dutchman, at that moment.*

Discussion

The previous section has shown that football broadcasts on television generates strong emotions and temporary expressions of nationalism and pride that do not ordinarily take place (also Hermes, 2005). It also revealed that the discourses surrounding race/ethnicity and nation that viewers draw on when discussing the football World Cup do not always present themselves in a clear cut manner but sometimes contain contradictions. In this section, the author aims to synthesize and reflect on some of the main findings articulated in the previous section.

Connectedness with the Dutch team

One of the central findings that emerged from the interview data is that the 2010 World Cup triggered strong emotions and a demonstration of national pride and connectedness among television viewers that is rarely revealed in everyday Dutch life. Even those people who reported not typically watching sports on television in their everyday life were persuaded to join in the 'ritual participation of sporting success'.²² Such arousal of emotions and national pride seems unique to football; Interviewees in the aforementioned study also asked about other sports but the connectedness with the national team triggered by football was unmatched by any other code or format discussed. The role of the mass media, and television in particular, seems to be of crucial importance in this regard. Television makes football widely available and televised World Cup matches have consequently become social activities characterized by the joint celebration of national identity. This was also evident in the present research, for instance in people's reporting of wearing orange regalia together with others before the television set during matches. As such, the viewing experience can be considered a social act in which connectedness with the Dutch team is actively created by viewers on the one hand and is mediated and reinforced by the television broadcast on the other.

As described earlier, the display of national pride was most evident in the case of the White European-Dutch viewers. This reflects previous research by Van Hilvoorde et al. who measured the possible effects of Dutch national sporting success on feelings of national belonging and pride among Dutch citizens.²³ They also concluded that, in general, White ethnic Dutch people were prouder of Dutch sport achievements than Dutch (non-western) minority ethnic groups. In addition, Van Hilvoorde's research reflects findings discussed here that suggest that support for the Dutch national team from the White European-Dutch is *not* unconditional and is combined with an achievement-oriented evaluation of the team. In other words, people feel more connected when they rate the achievements or the quality of the play of the national team highly²⁴.

Ethnicity subtext of connectedness with the Dutch team

The strong engagement with the national football team that many participants experienced also took *ethnic*-specific forms. Strong connectedness with and support for the Dutch national team among White European-Dutch viewers was accompanied

by the operation of symbolic racial/ethnic in- and exclusion. This was most evident in the fear expressed by relatively many White European-Dutch viewers (male as well as female) about the numerical racial/ethnic balance in the Dutch team. As described in the previous section, some respondents argued that too many non-White or minority ethnic players in the team would decrease their support for and identification with the Dutch national team. The key assumption that underlies such reasoning is that the Dutch national team should be represented primarily by *White* players. It shows that White European-Dutch viewers were easily drawn into racialized types of talk that borders on outright racism, as Hermes formulated it, when discussing their support for the Dutch national team.²⁵ The author concurs with Hermes' claim that such a discourse is especially upsetting because it stands in sharp contrast to the carnivalesque and seemingly inclusive atmosphere that these White viewers *also* report and that characterizes their viewing experience. Apparently, this is a carnival based on a narrow and essentialist sense of Dutchness. It points to an understanding of Dutchness that equates being Dutch with being White.

In a broader, theoretical sense, it may point to the operation of *cultural anxiety*. Grillo refers to cultural anxiety as the 'concern about cultural identity and loss'²⁶. Cultural anxiety was historically found among first- and second-generation migrants who feared their children's loss of cultural and religious values that their families brought with them to the host society. In contemporary Europe, however, White ethnic majorities also fear the loss of 'their culture and civilization' as a result of immigration, cultural mixing and hybridity.²⁷ This has resulted in an increased identification by the majority ethnic group with a specific, essentialist version of 'national' culture. Characteristic of this national culture is the representation of minority ethnic groups as people with fixed cultural features that are incompatible with the normative majority 'national' culture. The national Dutch culture is, in other words, perceived as *an essence* that is characterized by whiteness and that should not be polluted by other racial/ethnic elements. Cultural anxiety seems also evident in the present research when the Dutch team is primarily perceived of as a White team in the minds of quite some White European-Dutch viewers. Their 'White team' should not be 'polluted' by what they perceive as too many racial/ethnic minority players in the team. If that happens, these viewers argued they would perceive the Dutch team no longer as truly representing them or the Dutch nation.

Oppositional readings

Minority ethnic viewers' connectedness to the Dutch national football team appeared more racially/ethnically inclusive. Some Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch respondents were about just as engaged in supporting the Dutch team as the White European-Dutch. Although they felt especially connected to players of their own ethnicity who played for the Dutch squad, they argued that the ethnic composition of the team was largely irrelevant for their support to be expressed. Others, however, kept more distance in their engagement with the Dutch national team. This particularly applied to some of the Moroccan-Dutch respondents who argued that the media played a major role in their detached stance towards the Dutch national team. These respondents perceived the mainstream Dutch media, including the sport media, as negatively biased towards Moroccan-Dutch football players and Moroccan-Dutch people in general. As a result, these viewers not only distanced

themselves from hegemonic, nationalistic *sport* media discourses, but from Dutch mainstream media and society more broadly.

This perception of a biased/discriminatory sport media was also shared by some Surinamese-Dutch and European-Dutch viewers, although many of those also expressed exactly the contrary, arguing that the sport media was *not* biased at all. More research into Dutch television coverage of athletes/players of various racial/ethnic origins is needed to substantiate the legitimacy of claims of a racially/ethnically biased media. Research by Elling and Luijt lends some credence to the idea that the Dutch sport media can be racially/ethnically biased towards minority ethnic athletes who compete for the Dutch nation.²⁸ A study by van Sterkenburg et al. however, did not provide any evidence of stereotyping of Moroccan-Dutch footballers²⁹ but that study focused on club football coverage instead of coverage of the Dutch national football team. Future research should, therefore, focus on representations of race/ethnicity in football coverage of the national team.

Enlightened racism

Processes of ethnic in-and exclusion from the context of the 2010 World Cup were also articulated through what Sabo and Jansen coined *enlightend racism* or what Müller et al. equally refer to as processes of *racialization*: unobtrusive, routine, sub-conscious and everyday practices of racial/ethnic categorizing and stereotyping through which everyday racism in society at large becomes normalized.³⁰ The present research shows a relatively wide range of racial/ethnic stereotypes and differentiations on the part of viewers across all ethnic audience groups represented in the research although some also challenged this discourse. In general, interviewees seemed to speak through the everyday discourses commonly used to define the racial/ethnic Other in The Netherlands. Footballers of Moroccan and Turkish origin were, for instance, occasionally associated with 'aggressiveness' which reflects stereotypes that are more commonly used in the broader Dutch discourse surrounding these groups. Other categories that respondents used were 'Antillean' 'Surinamese' and the US informed racial categories 'Black' and 'White'. When interviewees distinguished between Black and White athletes, they often drew on a 'natural physicality discourse' that states that Black athletes are athletically superior to White athletes. Previous research has shown that especially in the context of sport, people tend to draw on biologically informed discourses about genetic physical superiority of 'Blacks' versus 'Whites'.³¹ It makes (televised) sport an exceptionally vivid platform to reveal how racial thinking enters into one's rationality, even in a society such as the Dutch that tends to avoid discussing issues of race and instead tends to speak of a variety of *ethnic* groups. Knoppers & Elling and Hermes showed how the Dutch sport media tend to draw on the Black natural athletic stereotype in their sport coverage.³² The few audience reception studies that have been conducted in The Netherlands also confirm that centuries-old colonial discourses that associate Blacks with physicality are deeply engrained in the Dutch psyche.³³ The present research confirms these findings. The association many viewers made between Black people (and occasionally 'Antilleans' and 'Africans') and 'natural' physical capacities or 'speed' seems to indicate that centuries-old colonial discourses linger on in and through the context of televised football in The Netherlands. Of course, there were also contradictions to this general pattern. Respondents sometimes used negotiated or oppositional readings which reflect the claim made by cultural studies

scholars that popular culture should be seen as a continuous site of struggle over meaning.³⁴ A few respondents argued, for instance, that they do not believe in natural superior athleticism on the part of Black Africans or superior mental capacities on the part of Whites. Despite such counter-narratives, however, the general trend was one of acceptance of the commonly held racial stereotypes. Such a discourse and the implicit knowledge it (re)produces helps construct and *naturalize* hierarchical racialized/ethnicized relations of power in broader Dutch society where mental capacities and intellect (Brain) are generally more important than athleticism and physical qualities (Brawn) to achieve a social career.

Concluding remarks

During this article, the author has explored whether or not a mega event such as the football World Cup that foregrounds issues of nationhood is capable – through its coverage on television – to elicit feelings of connectedness with the Dutch team that override commonly held racial/ethnic stereotypes among its ethnically diverse audiences. Results show that the televised football World Cup indeed elicits strong feelings of connectedness and bonding with the Dutch team and the Dutch nation among its viewers. The extent to which, and the ways in which, this occurred varied across ethnic audience groupings, however. Support for the Dutch national team from the part of the Dutch majority ethnic audience groups (males and females) can be characterized as intense, patriotic and carnivalesque. Support from the part of the minority Surinamese and Moroccan participants was more diverse and ranged from intense/passionate to weak, with the Surinamese-ethnic group occupying an intermediate position between the European-Dutch and the Moroccan-Dutch group.

Regardless of the strong or weak passion of viewers for the Dutch team, however, racial/ethnic stereotypes flourished in the meaning-making processes of *many* viewers, irrespective of their racial/ethnic background. In other words, connectedness with the national Dutch football team did *not* overrule race/ethnicity as an important marker of differentiation and identification. Results show that despite strong feelings of connectedness with the Dutch team that most viewers experienced, race/ethnicity still remained an important criterion in their discourses of in- and exclusion. This occurred rather explicitly on the part of some White European-Dutch viewers who critically interrogated the presence of too many (in their perception) minority ethnic or recently naturalized players in the Dutch team, and rather implicitly on the part of majority *and* minority ethnic viewers, through the use of deeply engrained, everyday racial/ethnic stereotypes. As I have discussed, these stereotypes sometimes go beyond the Dutch context *per se* and can be traced back to more globalized, centuries old colonial discourses. Other times, they are more contextual in character reflecting the distinctions the Dutch (re)construct between the majority ethnic group and minority ethnic groups in everyday discourse.

To conclude, it must be noted that it remains difficult to tease out the extent to which the racial/ethnic stereotypes used by the respondents applied specifically to footballers of the Dutch national football team or to athletes more generally. Obviously, the context of the interviews was mainly the 2010 World Cup and the Dutch national football team. Despite that, respondents frequently used racial/ethnic stereotypes in relation to sport and athletes *more generally*. This may be because interview questions sometimes referred to racial stereotypes in sport generally, or

because questions about racial/ethnic difference in the context of football opened up a reservoir of meanings related to sport generally in respondents' minds. Notwithstanding the specific sport(s) the respondents referred to, however, it becomes clear from the present study that Dutch viewers of a variety of ethnic origins tend to draw on racial/ethnic stereotypes when they give meaning to race/ethnicity in the context of sport. These stereotypes construct a mind-body split and help stabilize and reinforce existing racialized/ethnicized relations of power, thereby upholding patterns of domination and inequality in wider society.

Acknowledgments

The research project was financially supported by the João Havelange Scholarship that the world football association FIFA and the CIES –International Centre for Sport Studies – award to several scholars worldwide every year. I appreciate FIFA's contribution to this research.

Notes

1. Billings and Tambosi, *Portraying the United States*.
2. Cho, *Unfolding Nationalism*.
3. Van Hilvoorde, Elling, and Stokvis, *How to influence National Pride*.
4. Hylton, 'Race and Sport'; Rada and Wulfemeyer, *Color coded*.
5. Sabo and Jansen, 'Prometheus unbound'.
6. Gilroy, *Multiculture*.
7. Buffington and Fraley, *Skill in Black and White*.
8. McCarthy, Jones, and Potrac, *Constructing Images*.
9. Hermes, *Burnt Orange*.
10. Hall, *Representations*.
11. *Ibid.*, 6.
12. Claringbould, Knoppers, and Elling, *Exclusionary Practices*.
13. Coakley, and Pike (2009) *Sports in Society*.
14. Fiske, 'British cultural studies'.
15. Hall, 'The Whites of their Eyes'; Long and Spracklen, 'Positioning Anti-Racism'.
16. Essed, Understanding everyday racism; Costera Meijer and De Bruin, 'The value of Entertainment'.
17. d'Haenens and Bink, *Islam in the Dutch press*; Essed & Nimako, *Designs and co-incidents*.
18. Captain and Ghorashi, 'Tot Behoud van mijn Identiteit'.
19. Wekker, Gender, Identiteitsvorming en Multiculturalisme.
20. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*; Moghaddam, *Coding Issues*.
21. Ironically, this respondent referred to Afellay as a 'Turkish player'. It reflects the everyday Dutch discourse in which the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch are relatively often grouped together under one label (Muslims).
22. Lines, *Media Sport Audiences*, 675.
23. Van Hilvoorde, Elling, and Stokvis, *How to influence National Pride*.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Hermes, *Burnt Orange*.
26. Grillo, *Cultural Essentialism*, 166.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Elling and Luijt, 'Differential Shades of orange'.
29. Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw, *Constructing racial/ethnic Difference*.
30. Sabo and Jansen, 'Prometheus Unbound'; Müller, Van Zoonen, and De Roode, *Accidental Racists*.
31. Morning, *Towards a Sociology of racial Conceptualization*.
32. Hermes, *Burnt Orange*; Knoppers and Elling, *Gender, Etniciteit en de Sportmedia. Een Inventarisatie*.

33. Knoppers and Elling, *Gender, Etniciteit en de Sportmedia. Productieprocessen*; Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers, *Dominant Discourses*.
34. Hall, *The Whites of their Eyes*.

References

- Billings, A.C., and F. Tambosi. 'Portraying the United States vs Portraying a Champion: US Network Bias in the 2002 World Cup'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 39 (2004): 157–65.
- Buffington, D., and T. Fraley. 'Skill in Black and White: Negotiating Media Images of Race in a Sporting Context'. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32 (2008): 292–310.
- Captain, E.H.G., and H. Ghorashi. "Tot behoud van mijn identiteit". Identiteitsvorming binnen de zmw-vrouwenbeweging ['To preserve my identity'. Identity formation within the Black migrant refugee women movement]. In *Caleidoscopische visies. De zwarte, migranten – en vluchtelingen-vrouwenbeweging in Nederland* [Kaleidoscopic visions: The black, migrants – and refugee women's movement in The Netherlands], ed. M. Botman, N. Jouwe, and G. Wekker, 153–87. Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 2001.
- Cho, Y. 'Unfolding Nationalism in South Korean Media Representations of the 1968, 1984 and 2000 Olympics'. *Media Culture and Society* 31 (2009): 347–64.
- Claringbould, I., A. Knoppers, and A. Elling. 'Exclusionary Practices in Sport Journalism'. *Sex Roles* 51 (2004): 709–18.
- Coakley, J., and E. Pike. *Sports in Society*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 2009.
- Costera Meijer, I., and J. de Bruin. 'The Value of Entertainment for Multicultural Society: A Comparative Approach Towards 'White' and 'Black' Soap Opera Talk'. *Media, Culture & Society* 25 (2003): 695–703.
- d'Haenens, L., and S. Bink. 'Islam in the Dutch Press: With Special Attention to the Algemeen Dagblad'. *Media, Culture & Society* 29 (2007): 135–49.
- Elling, A., and R. Luijt. 'Different Shades of Orange? Media Representations of Dutch Women Medaillists' In *Olympic Women and the Media: International Perspectives*, ed. P. Markula, 132–49. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Essed, P. *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory and Analysis of the Experiences of Black Women*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991.
- Essed, P., and K. Nimako. 'Designs and (Co) Incidents: Cultures of Scholarship and Public Policy on Immigrants/Minorities in The Netherlands'. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 47 (2006): 281–312.
- Fiske, J. 'British Cultural Studies and Television'. In *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. R. Allen, 254–89. London: Routledge, 1987.
- Gilroy, P. 'Multiculture in times of War: An Inaugural Lecture given at the London School of Economics'. *Critical Quarterly* 48 (2006): 27–45.
- Glaser, B.G. *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. San Francisco, CA: Sociology Press, 1978.
- Grillo, R.D. 'Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety'. *Anthropological Theory* 3 (2003): 157–73.
- Hall, S. 'The Whites of their Eyes. Racist Ideologies and the Media'. In *Race and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, ed. G. Dines and J.M. Humez, 18–22. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.
- Hall, S. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.
- Hermes, J. 'Burnt Orange: Television, Football, and the Representation of Ethnicity'. *Television & New Media* 6 (2005): 49–69.
- Hylton, K. *'Race' and Sport: Critical Race Theory*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Knoppers, A., and A. Elling. *Gender, etniciteit en de sportmedia: Een inventarisatie van reguliere en Olympische berichtgeving* [Gender, ethnicity and the sport media: An inventory of Olympic and regular coverage]. Utrecht: Utrecht School of Governance and Leisure Studies, 1999.

- Knoppers, A., and A. Elling. *Gender, etniciteit en de sportmedia: Productieprocessen en publieksinterpretatie* [Gender, ethnicity and the sport media: Production processes and public interpretation]. Arnhem: NOC*NSF Breedtesport, 1999.
- Lines, G. 'Media Sport Audiences – Young People and the Summer of Sport '96: Revisiting Frameworks for Analysis'. *Media Culture & Society* 22 (2000): 669–80.
- Long, J., and K. Spracklen. 'Positioning Anti-Racism in Sport and Sport in Anti-Racism'. In *Sport and Challenges to Racism*, ed. J. Long and K. Spracklen, 3–18. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- McCarthy, D., R.L. Jones, and P. Potrac. 'Constructing Images and Interpreting Realities: The Case of the Black Soccer Player on Television'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38 (2003): 217–38.
- Moghaddam, A. 'Coding Issues in Grounded Theory'. *Issues in Educational Research* 16 (2006): 52–66.
- Morning, A. 'Toward a Sociology of Racial Conceptualization for the 21st Century'. *Social Forces* 87 (2009): 1167–92.
- Müller, F., L. Van Zoonen, and L. De Roode. 'Accidental Racists: Experiences and Contradictions of Racism in Local Amsterdam Soccer Fan Culture'. *Soccer and Society* 8 (2007): 335–50.
- Rada, J.A., and K.T. Wulfemeyer. 'Color Coded: Racial Descriptors in Television Coverage of Intercollegiate Sports'. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 49 (2005): 65–85.
- Sabo, D., and S.C. Jansen. 'Prometheus Unbound: Constructions of Masculinity in Sports Media'. In *MediaSport*, ed. L. Wenner, 202–20. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Van Hilvoorde, I., A. Elling, and R. Stokvis. 'How to Influence National Pride? The Olympic Medal Index as a Unifying Narrative'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45 (2010): 87–102.
- Van Sterkenburg, J., and A. Knoppers. 'Dominant Discourses about Race/Ethnicity and Gender in Sport Practice and Performance'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 39 (2004): 301–21.
- Van Sterkenburg, J., A. Knoppers, and S. De Leeuw. 'Constructing Racial/Ethnic Difference in and through Dutch Televised Soccer Commentary'. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 36, no. 4 (2012): 422–42.
- Wekker, G. 'Gender, identiteitsvorming en multiculturalisme. Notities over de Nederlandse multiculturele samenleving [Gender, identity formation and multiculturalism. Notes on the Dutch multicultural society]'. In *Multiculturalisme* [Multiculturalism], ed. C.H.M. Geuijen, 39–53. Utrecht: Lemma, 1998.