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Kytölä, Samu

“Are they singing the national anthem?”: Football followers’ responses to the ethnic diversification of Finland men’s national football team¹

1 INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION OF FOOTBALL AND DIVERSIFICATION OF NATIONAL TEAMS

The current stage of globalization – epitomized by mass mobility, economic and cultural flows – and the growing complexity of what ‘diversity’ means these days have radically changed the socio-cultural domain of association football (*soccer*; henceforth ‘football’) (Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Kytölä, 2013; Besnier, 2015). Whereas the mobility of what I call ‘actors-in-the-field’ (professional and amateur football players, coaches, journalists, audiences, fans, etc.) has always been an important feature of football culture, the past two decades have seen such mobility accelerate and acquire more complex patterns and outcomes than hitherto. Simultaneously with the competitive strand of club football (e.g., FC Barcelona, Manchester United), the ethos underlying *national teams* based on nationality² (e.g., France, the Netherlands, Finland) has undergone major transformations. National teams in men’s football have long been multicultural to some extent, whether mainly due to a country’s ethno-cultural composition (e.g., the Spain team with Catalanian and Basque athletes) or colonial history (e.g., players of varying background in the France team). In focus here is the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of European national teams, which once were more homogeneous, more predictable in terms of their ethno-cultural composition (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Markovits & Rensmann, 2010, pp. 267–270; Besnier, 2015). The socio-cultural history of football is inextricably linked to more general socio-cultural historical developments (see e.g., Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; cf. Blommaert & Rampton, 2011).

This chapter explores popular discourses on the inclusion and exclusion of ‘New Finns’, Finnish citizens with varying kinds of immigrant background in their late 20th/early 21st-century family histories (see Saukkonen & Pyykkönen, 2008; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016; Westinen, this volume) in the Finland men’s national team³. My main point of interest here are the *identification* and *disidentification* discourses that are elicited, drawn upon, and recirculated by Finnish football followers, fans and supporters on the question of who (can) represent the nation Finland in the domain of international football. This development should be seen as a part of the general ethno-linguistic diversification of Finland over the recent decades due mainly to immigration. Pöyhönen and Tarnanen (2015) identify ‘contested immigration’ as the fifth stage of immigration to Finland, a stage characterized broadly by criticism of immigration, integration and multiculturalism, and often a problem-centered approach to the immigration debate. Before the mid-1990s, most Finland football national team players were of Finnish (notably also ‘White’⁴) origin, from Finnish-speaking, Swedish-speaking or Finnish-Swedish bilingual⁵ families; however, the mobility occasioned by geopolitical changes, such as the post-Iron Curtain wave of globalization, has triggered an increase in the number of immigrant-background footballers obtaining Finnish nationality – with the top talents recently rising to the national team level.

My main dataset comprises web discussion forums, which in many respects (Kytölä, 2013; Kytölä & Westinen, 2015) predate the most popular social media of the 2010s. Moreover, I use online media articles as contextualizing data to initiate a tentative comparison across footballing nation states and across online discourse formats. The empirical locus of this chapter is the old tradition of the playback and singing-along of the national anthems of the competing countries before all international football matches, and the process of (mainly Finnish) football followers and enthusiasts ascribing categories and identities to top players in national teams: whether a particular player can be regarded as truly Finnish ‘at heart’ to represent Finland, based on complex constellations of mediated performance and behavior, part of which is the player’s behavior during the (televised) pre-match national anthem. In so doing, I outline recurring online discourses (opinions, arguments, perspectives) on the ethnic diversification of the Finland men’s national team in a time (the early 21st century, the early 2010s) characterized by the polarization of digital discussion cultures and (at least in Finland) more over expressions of national chauvinism, racism and hate speech towards immigrants (see Sakki & Pettersson, 2016; Mäkinen, 2013). In line with more general societal trends, contemporary football followers’ discourses range from ‘purist’, ‘banal nationalist’ (Billig, 1995; C. White, 2015) and ethnically discriminative views to ‘integrationist’, ‘pluralist’, even anti-racist, ‘counter-nationalist’ and, interestingly, ‘mock-nationalist’ views posted by Finnish football followers on key social media sites for discussing football (Kytölä, 2013). More concretely, I explore the sociolinguistic, discursive and semiotic strategies discussants use to categorize and represent Finland national team players with varying kinds of immigrant backgrounds in relation to the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) of Finnish Finns. These strategies include both inclusion and exclusion of ‘New Finns’; i.e., both *identification with* them (as ‘us’ Finns) and *disidentification from* them (‘non-Finns’).

Focusing on a heavily loaded ‘nexus of practice’, a “point at which historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, and objects come together to enable some action which in itself alters those historical trajectories in some way” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii), this chapter has the theoretical and empirical aims of contributing to the debate on ethnicity, nationalism and diversity in sociolinguistics and sport sociology. My methodological aim is to suggest a tentative framework with which to analyze the complex semiotic relationships between offline, embodied events and online ‘discourse events’, using the concept of *resemiotization* (Iedema, 2003; Leppänen, Kytölä, Jousmäki, Peuronen, & Westinen, 2013) as an analytical tool, as well as empirically exploring the links between resemiotization and (dis)identification processes online. In the analysis, a complex range of (dis)identification axes is at work: ethnicity (who counts as a ‘real’ ethnic Finn), diversity (evinced in football by mobility, new groupings and connectivities), and nationalism (how footballers can be seen as representatives of a nation, or as targets of (dis)identification for their supporters and followers).

Below, I first present the theoretical frameworks of ‘banal nationalism’ and (dis)identification (Section 2), then outline the tenets of national team football in the European context (Section 3), including the national team eligibility rules of the International Football Federation (henceforth FIFA). Against that backdrop, I review the ethnic diversification of European national teams in general (Section 4), and that of Finland more recently, in particular. I then describe the online contexts of data collection (Section 5), focusing on the Finnish web forums Futisforum and

Futisforum2 (FF2). I briefly review some media debates on the ethnic diversification of national football teams *vis-à-vis* playing and singing along with the national anthem before international matches (Sections 6 and 7). I then analyze two key discussion threads from Futisforum2, focusing on the singing (or not singing) of the Finnish national anthem (Section 8), concluding with a critical final discussion.

2 BANAL NATIONALISM AND (DIS)IDENTIFICATION

Billig (1995) coined the term 'banal nationalism' to account for the mundane ideological habits that enable established nations to be reproduced and indicated, 'flagged', in everyday life. Agreeing that discourses around sports offer highly relevant perspectives for addressing societal issues, Billig (*ibid.*, pp. 119–127) discusses sports in general as a domain of life where, at least in the British contexts, 'flags are waved' (as Billig's overarching metaphor for banal nationalism has it) more overtly and with less distancing than in other domains of cultural and social life. In his tentative analysis of ubiquitous banal nationalism in sports discourse ('waving the flag'), Billig finds surprisingly little difference between, for instance, the social-liberalist/left-wing and conservative/right-wing media, suggesting that sports rather easily unite people in their belonging in 'imagined community'. Drawing on Billig's framework and extending the discussion to national anthems, Cynthia J. White argues that the emergence of the internet as a "constituent and mediator of everyday activities" (2015, p. 627) has notably changed the contexts for the performance of banal nationalism – a perspective also taken here. She studied New Zealand anthems on YouTube (the globally leading online video sharing site), discussing how situated practices of banal nationalism and belonging are performed online, showing alignment or disalignment with imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). Very similarly to my analysis here, White approaches user comments on YouTube as "resounding echoes of the imagined community" and "dimensions of banal nationalism and modes of belonging" (2015, p. 641), exploring ways in which "modes of belonging" in a web of co-authored "network narratives" can be "embedded and constructed in particular socio-political contexts" (2015, p. 642).

In line with the aims of this volume, I discuss both identification and disidentification processes unwinding in online debates and, to an extent, in offline activities. For an understanding of identification processes, I draw on Brubaker and Cooper (2000), who argue for the processual understanding of identification, highlighting the agency of the actors doing (dis)identification, instead of the more static 'identity'. Similar conceptualizations are presented by Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2003) in the context of youth identities, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) with regard to language and sexuality, Blommaert (2005, pp. 203–211) on the semiotic and performative aspects of doing identity, and Krzyżanowski and Wodak (2008) in relation to migration and belonging. Common to all of them is a social-constructivist understanding of identity as fluid, dynamic and prone to transformations, highlighting both the agency of people to do self-identification (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 15) and, importantly for my analysis, people's agency in ascribing identities and categories to others (*ibid.*). This chapter thus adopts a dynamic, processual understanding of identity (work); 'identification' and 'disidentification' as terms for conceptualizing the behavior and discourse of players, coaches, followers, and fans when they navigate across particular practices and activities of football culture (here: national anthems),

exploring ways in which these behaviors and discourses are intertwined in complex, multisemiotic ways.

Many of the social media debates in this vein have highly ironic, sarcastic or jocular, even satiric undertones and embedded humor, making straightforward interpretations or typologies of discourse impossible (cf. Kytölä, 2012, 2014; Kytölä & Westinen, 2015); these aspects will be discussed below in the analysis. The identification and disidentification processes of Finnish football followers relate to players whom the followers may or may not identify with in the particular context of representing (or failing to represent) Finland the nation state, Finland the imagined community. Simultaneously, there are alleged identification and disidentification processes of the national team players themselves when they choose to sing (or not to sing) the national anthem(s). However, I do not attempt to discuss the possible cognitive processes going on in the players' and followers' minds; instead I focus on the complex, mediated discourses, representations of such (alleged) (dis)identification processes. In such a framework, as seen below, singing or, in another modality, just moving one's lips during the national anthem, or not doing so, can lead to complex connotations of identification or disidentification with a team, and hence with a nation and, simultaneously, with the supporters and followers in focus.

3 ORGANIZED COMPETITIVE FOOTBALL IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Organized competitive football can be divided into two main tiers: club competitions and national team competitions; I will limit my discussion here to national team competitions in the European⁶ context. Club football, the dominant tier in many respects, is a locus where increased globalization and mobility are highly prevalent: dreams of a football career drive (especially male) players from different countries and continents to make a living with their football skills. Both club football and national team football in Europe are in major transition owing to globalization, mobility and growing diversity, particularly in the last two decades (accelerating since ca. 1995) (Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 34). National team football continues to be based on premises of nationality: one is only eligible to represent a national team when holding the nationality (although not necessarily citizenship; see below) of the country in question. However, we can also clearly observe the growing ethnic, racial and cultural diversity of national teams which, until at least the early 1990s, used to be visibly more homogeneous, more predictable in composition. According to recurring popular discourses among some football followers, who lament the loss of such purity and predictability, the national teams of the bygone era were 'purer' and 'more homegrown'. This is in direct (and obvious) correlation with the increase in legitimate citizens with a 'foreign' ethnic or cultural background in European countries; we will see examples below.

National team competitions (see Poulton, 2004; Giulianotti, 1999) are governed by international football associations (such as UEFA and the world federation FIFA). With a few exceptions (see endnote 2), national football associations mainly follow the borders of sovereign states. In contrast to the daily 'bread-and-butter' of club football activities, national teams gather together at intervals, during pre-determined breaks from the major leagues of club football. In short, club football (at the top level) is the job of professional footballers, whereas participation in national teams happens outside one's job contract. European national teams' activities aim at maximum success in the

World Cup and European Championship (marketed as ‘UEFA EURO (2012, 2016, etc.)’), which alternate biennially. Both of these major competitions are preceded by an approximately 15-month qualification campaign, during which a predetermined number (currently 14–23) of the best teams qualify for the actual tournament. It is in connection with these tournaments and, in Finland’s case, the qualification matches (and non-competitive ‘friendly’ matches between them) that the media data of this study are drawn.

3.1 FIFA’S ELIGIBILITY RULES

To understand the football fans’ and followers’ debates on the cultural and ethnic diversification of men’s national teams, one needs to be familiar with FIFA’s eligibility regulations, which form a complex combination of factors including nationality, place of birth, place of birth of *biological* parents or grandparents, place of residence, emigration and immigration, along with age restrictions (as paraphrased by Press Association Sport (*The Independent*, 2013).⁷ The only absolute requirement is nationality. FIFA’s statutory articles have direct, concrete implications for practically all European national teams because of the growing (and ever more complex) patterns of mobility and manifestations of diversity (*superdiversity* for scholars such as Vertovec, 2007; Wessendorf, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), coupled with a European-wide growing debate on who belongs to, and is allowed into, national team(s). This should be seen as a part of a broader debate on membership, belonging, and identity politics in (European) societies (see e.g., Wessendorf, 2013).

A brief note on the distinction between nationality and citizenship is in place here. Bauböck (2007) defines *nationality* as “the international and external aspects of the relation between an individual and a sovereign state, whereas *citizenship* pertains to the internal aspects of this relation that are regulated by domestic law.” (Bauböck, 2007, p. 17; italics added). However, in many languages, ‘nationality’ is also “used for membership of an ethno-national group that need not be established as an independent state” (ibid.). A prime example of this are the numerous players with a Kosovan family background in European nation states (see the Finnish examples below); they can be considered to have Kosovan and Finnish nationality, but to hold (for instance) Finnish citizenship. At particular points – depending on their life trajectories – they may also have been considered to hold Yugoslavian, Serbian, or even Serbia-and-Montenegrin nationalities (see Section 7), whereas citizenship in a war-torn region was a fragile status subject to rapid changes. The determination of citizenship and, as a corollary, nationality, can be broadly speaking divided into two principles, *jus sanguinis* vs. *jus soli* (e.g., Brubaker, 1992, 2001; Weil, 2001). *Jus sanguinis* (Latin ‘right of blood’) refers to the idea that citizenship is inherited, determined by parents’ citizenship (often including that obtained in diaspora). In contrast, *jus soli* (Latin ‘right of soil’) defines citizenship on the basis of the country of birth. *Jus sanguinis* has historically been dominant in Europe, but most European countries apply a modified mixture of these principles to citizenships, including legitimation (e.g., parents’ marriage) and ‘naturalization’ (of an immigrant after a prolonged stay). Both principles can be used – and have been used – as arguments both for and against the inclusion of immigrant-background players in national teams in Europe; we will consider some examples below.

4 THE ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION OF NATIONAL TEAMS IN EUROPE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As outlined above, not only football clubs but also national teams have become more multi-ethnic due to complex factors of globalization and mobility. One of the clearest examples of this is France, that is frequently evoked also in the Finnish online discussions (whether as a negative or a positive example, varies). France was probably the most multi-ethnic European national team in the 20th century, with Raoul Diagne, of Senegalese descent, in the squad as early as 1931, subsequently joined by Algerian- and Polish-born players in the geopolitically turbulent 1930s. However, the post WW II decades were times of relatively mono-ethnic ‘White’ national teams in Europe. The *équipe* that won the 1984 European championship and gained third place in the 1986 World Cup was predominantly white and ‘European-French’, with Jean Tigana (born in French Sudan) the main exception. Twelve years later, the France team that gained both major trophies (World Cup 1998 and EURO 2000) was markedly more multi-ethnic, with several players born in French overseas territories or North Africa. The new *Tricolore* was “black, blanc, beur [Berber]” (Ke Nako, 2010), and the reactions to such ethnic diversification both in France and across the football world were mixed. In the new millennium, the rhetoric has gone even further, the new *Tricolore* now being proclaimed as “Black, Black, Black?” (ibid.), which is not completely without foundation, as the *équipe* of the first decade of the 2000s has – at least in individual matches and competitions – had even more players from France’s ‘non-White’ ethnic minorities than at the millennial turn (Yassin & Carlson, 2015; Ke Nako, 2010)⁸.

Other European national teams that have become ethno-culturally more diverse in the past two decades include England, the Netherlands, and somewhat more recently, Germany. Debates similar to those reported by Ke Nako (2010) or Yassin and Carlson (2015) in the French context have arisen elsewhere. One national context which has served as a closer model to the Finnish followers and supporters (see Kytölä, 2013 for more) is Sweden, where superstars from immigrant backgrounds such as Martin Dahlin, Henrik Larsson and, most notably, Zlatan Ibrahimović, have gained the status of national heroes for a clear majority of supporters. Such phenomena are hitherto unseen in Finland, despite the relative success of certain Finnish immigrant-background players.

4.1 FINLAND MEN’S NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM

Individual players aside, men’s club football in Finland has experienced immigration since the late 1970s, with a notable increase in the numbers and prominence of foreign (mainly British, Soviet, and Eastern European) players in the early 1980s (Jokiranta, 2012, pp. 47–55). The most common term for non-Finnish players in Finnish clubs has traditionally been *ulkomaalaisvahvistus*, literally ‘foreign reinforcement’; any (negative?) connotation raised by this English equivalent notwithstanding, the term has had mainly positive connotations. As for the Finland (men’s) national team, before the late 1990s, by far most selected players were from Finnish or Finnish-Swedish family backgrounds, and exceptions to this were very few (notably the Finnish-Tatar Atik Ismail). The mobility brought about by geopolitical changes, especially the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Balkan Wars in this context⁹, has triggered an enormous increase in the number of (young) footballers of immigrant background (see also Nieminen, 2012). Due to the official inclusion policies of the Football Association of Finland (Palloliitto) and prominent Finnish clubs, and partly

as an outcome of systematic ‘scouting’ among juniors throughout the country, the most talented and ambitious immigrant-background players have progressed to the national-team level. In roughly age order (regardless of their age of or reasons for immigration), the first to make it to the men’s national team are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The ‘first wave’ of immigrant-background players in the Finland men’s national team (born between 1976 and 1989; debuts between 1999 and 2010).

Shefki Kuqi (also his brother Njazi Kuqi)	Kosovo Albanian
brothers Alexei Eremenko Jr. and Roman Eremenko	born in Soviet Union to Russian parents
Berat Sadik	Macedonia Albanian
Perparim Hetemaj (also his brother Mehmet Hetemaj)	Kosovo Albanian
Lukáš Hradecký	born in (Czecho)Slovakia to Slovak parents

While the discussion in this chapter is confined to established men’s national team players, the next generation, currently (2015–2016 season) playing in junior age competitions such as the U21 (under 21 years old) national team, is already significantly more multicultural: a brief look at any selection of any junior boys’ national team confirms that both the proportion and the diversity of immigrant-background players is growing (see Palloliitto, 2016, for the current situation).

5 DATA AND RESEARCH CONTEXT: FUTISFORUMS AS MULTI-VOICED HUBS OF FINLAND-BASED FOOTBALL DISCUSSION

The primary data for this chapter come from the Finnish context, and it is complemented by a review of comparative online media data from other national contexts collected for my larger research project on discourses on football and (super)diversity. The Finland-based data come from the two leading online discussion forums for Finnish football, Futisforum and Futisforum2. The former was very active in 1999–2007, whereas the latter has been prominent since its foundation in 2006. Although there are other types of interactive online media devoted to discussions on Finnish football (blogs, edited websites, Facebook pages, Twitter), the two Futisforums have had by far the biggest number of participants and the greatest variety of opinion, allowing various controversial topics and extreme opinions to surface (Kytölä, 2012, 2013). Unlike French, English or German football, on which media material is overwhelming, immigrant-background players in the Finland national team have not been the topic of blog writing (but see the lengthy newspaper column by Nieminen, 2012). Studying web discussion forums has also an additional asset: institutionalized mainstream media tend to voice more cautious or, often, overtly positively framed opinions about immigrants in society and in football, whereas discussion forums are a prime example of big masses mobilized for debates and discussions, including extreme opinions and polemical ways of expressing them (see Kytölä, 2013, for a more thorough discussion of the diversity within Finnish football forums online). Whereas most professional journalists, football associations (notably Palloliitto) and clubs keep their opinions moderate and their policies inclusive with regard to immigration issues, digitally mediated multi-authored ‘grassroots’ media of the 21st century (such as web forums) offer an alternative window on the processes of societal change¹⁰. For this chapter,

this means identification and disidentification processes in the multiple voices of Finnish football fans, supporters and followers, who have invested varying amount of their social and material capital in their supportership. Social media like these make visible the diversity of opinions and views in Finland, where the growth and complexity of ethno-cultural diversity has been marked since the 1990s, transforming the country from a relatively monocultural to a much more multicultural nation state (for a numerical overview, see Finnish Immigration Service, 2016; for descriptive overviews, see Saukkonen & Pyykkönen, 2008; Holm & Londen, 2010; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016).

Digital social media in general, and here Finnish football discussion forums in particular, are informal, easily accessible contexts in which identities are constructed, interrogated and debated in the larger contexts of football culture and the changing ('globalizing') world. Such identity work is manifest in discourses of identification and disidentification via linguistic and semiotic resources with complex mediation chains (see Leppänen et al., 2013; Leppänen & Kytölä, in press). The key axis of (dis)identification in focus here is the changing notion of 'Finnishness': who counts as Finnish and on what grounds? Instead of overtly racist, 'pro-White' discourses, the focus is on a more subtle, often ironic and jocular discourse, where ethnically discriminative talk is more covert and not on the majority's agenda. (I base this argument, first, on my long-term engagement with Finnish football in many different roles, and second, on my long-term discourse-ethnographic research on Finland-based football texts and communities of practice 'doing football culture' online; see Kytölä (2013) and Kytölä & Androutsopoulos (2012) for more discussion and documentation.).

The analyst should ideally be immersed in the surrounding discourse and the emic ways of the community to be able to locate sarcasm and jocularities as intended, or as interpreted by the community members. In the classification and the analysis of the non-literal, figurative expressions (irony, sarcasm, jocularities, and satire) in the web forum data at hand, I draw on the following definitions. The overarching metaphor, *irony* is "the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect" ("irony", 2016), while *sarcasm* is, in most but not all definitions, a type of irony that aims at negative, critical evaluations of its target (see e.g., Gibbs, 2000) and is "often used to vent frustration" (ibid., p. 7). Importantly for my analysis of ambiguous (dis)identification discourses, sarcasm "may also be self-directed and thus affirm the speaker's allegiance to the group and the prescribed behavioral norms" (ibid., p. 7). In contrast to sarcasm (which most often uses positive statements to convey negative messages; see e.g. Gibbs, 2000, p. 23), *jocularities* denotes humorous and playful ways of using language (sometimes mocking, sometimes not). Jocularities is perhaps the least contested analytical category here, with relatively little variation in definitions (see "jocular", 2016, and Gibbs, 2000, p. 12). Finally, some of the Futisforum discussions analyzed below reach the dimension of *satire*, "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices [...]" ("satire", 2016).

In my description and analysis of the interactive web forum data below, I utilize ethnographically accrued insights that I gathered during my earlier studies (Kytölä, 2012, 2013, 2014; Kytölä & Androutsopoulos, 2012; Kytölä & Westinen, 2015). These entail a large number of Finnish and non-Finnish football forums, blogs and edited websites (see Kytölä, 2013 for details). However,

here I focus on a selected number of discussion threads from Futisforum and FF2; the core thread is the one from FF2 which concerns Finnish, immigrant-background national team players singing or not singing along with the national anthems. Moreover, apart from the data samples quoted, I have researched more football web forum data on the issue of how national teams (e.g., Finland men's team) should be selected with regard to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of players. Due to the large size of both forums, as well as the fact that similar discussions have also surfaced on other online platforms, these are by no means the only discussion threads on these issues; therefore, the analysis is not claiming to be fully representative. However, the digital ethnographic work I have carried out for many years in the online Finnish football communities has provided rich insights with which to evaluate representativeness; for example, which data samples can be considered 'telling cases', and which ones exceptional (Kytölä, 2013; Kytölä & Androustopoulos, 2012; Rutter & Smith, 2005). Below, I therefore begin with a mini-analysis, a 'prelude' that helps to contextualize the analysis proper in Section 8.

6 THE FRANCE OF 2006 VS. FUTURE FINLAND – EARLY DEBATES ON THE ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION OF NATIONAL TEAMS

Triggered by the great ethnic diversity of the French national team in the World Cup 2006 (see above), one Futisforum member opens a discussion¹¹ on a possible (projected in the then-future) ethnic diversification of the Finnish national team. The responses to that discussion opening, and to several similar ones in my dataset of Futisforum discussions, represent three main stances that recur in the debates with slight variations. One is what I call the 'conservative' wing of the debate: the France team is 'too black-dominated' to properly represent France while a similar, immigrant-based Finland team would be unacceptable. This view echoes the familiar '*I am not racist, but...*' argument known in popular and scholarly discussions of everyday and structural racism (see e.g., van Dijk, 1984, 1992). The other stance is 'anti-racist', strongly disapproving of any form of ethnically discriminative discourse – and rather bluntly expressing this disapproval. In contrast to the fierce, uncompromised anti-racist discourse, there is a third typical stance, a more analytical and reflective one. This 'meritocratic', moderately liberal view highlights that the key criteria for selection of competitive football teams should always be players' skills and compatibility; whenever racial or ethnic factors are allowed to affect team selections, they present a risk of making teams less competitive. This tension – whether considered dual or tripartite – underlies most online debates on the issue of ethnic diversification in football that I have encountered in my research. International and national football federations have officially taken stances against racism and ethnic discrimination for several decades now; currently FIFA has an official diversity and anti-discrimination policy as a part of its broader 'Sustainability' policy (see FIFA 2016), while UEFA's long-lasting campaign is simply titled "No to Racism" (see UEFA 2016). Connections between racism and nationalism (including 'banal') are rooted very deeply and a more profound discussion of them is outside the scope of this chapter.

In the early Futisforum debates on the ethnic diversification of the Finland national team, the participants draw on different variations of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* (see Section 3.1), depending on place of birth, childhood place of residence, and parents' nationality, to debate who should be eligible to represent Finland – or France, or some other footballing country. Only a small proportion of the 'conservative' turns contain explicitly racist formulations, but some have implicit racist

undertones, especially expressions of national-chauvinistic ideas, and yet more contain direct critique of the diversification of national teams. These discussions over a timespan of about a decade (ca. 2004–2014) repeatedly draw on the prototypes of ‘conservatives’ (who would keep national teams more ‘pure’ and ‘native’), ‘anti-racists’ (who strongly oppose all possible racist or national-chauvinistic stances in football), and ‘meritocratic liberals’ (who may also oppose racism in their writings but highlight the principle that the best of the eligible players should always be selected). These categories are tentative: within single authors’ contributions over time, even in single contributions (messages in forums), the stances can overlap, with the exception that the ‘anti-racist’ stance seldom gels with the ‘conservative’ stance.

In Section 8 below, I focus on two key discussion threads, where Finnish-speaking participants in FF2 reinvigorate this old topic (in 2012) by looking at the Finnish situation via the lens of the national anthem played before Finland’s international matches, and the question of who (seem to) sing along with it, and who do not. First, I shall briefly discuss national anthems in sports at large.

7 NATIONAL ANTHEMS IN SPORTS: OLD-FASHIONED BANAL NATIONALISM OR A POSITIVE SIGN OF IDENTIFICATION?

International football matches are, by tradition, supplemented with a few rituals preceding and following the actual core event, the competitive game (see Markovits & Rensmann, 2010, pp. 71, 265). Some minutes before the starting whistle blows, a ritual ensues where the national anthems of both teams are played via the stadium public address system. The eleven players of both teams’ starting lineups stand in a row, facing one of the long sides of the stadium stands, accompanied by the team of referees and, nowadays, also junior escorts. Other multisemiotic rituals include the inter-locking arms of the players standing shoulder to shoulder, the intensity of their facial expressions, or the placing of hand over heart (and often a nationalist symbol on their jersey). National flags are also often on display (waving from flag poles, displayed on large screens, or unfurled on the field). All of these add up to what can be described as a semiotic aggregate of banal nationalism. The tradition of players joining in anthems may be somewhat newer than the playback of anthems. To my best knowledge, there is no systematic research on the topic, but Markovits (2010), with the help of limited video footage research on YouTube, locates the emergence of the tradition of players singing along in the 1990s, observing that some players sang along already in the 1970s. There are several aspects of this ritual to be interrogated and researched: How can we know when football players began singing or mouthing along with their national anthems in international competitions? How can we measure whether players are singing along more now than in the past? As we enter the 2000s, they increasingly seem to sing along, and this may have become a new expectation in the presence of television cameras and vast mediated audiences. Does singing correlate with the history of national or international media coverage for European national football teams? And what about the importance of the specific match: Do players sing (or mouth along) more passionately as the competitive significance, and thus, the media coverage, of the game grows (e.g., World Cup finals vs. a friendly match)? Does it matter who the opposing team is? What about the history of the national team’s performance on the international stage? Or individual athletes’ professional trajectories *vis-à-vis* the national team (e.g., debutants vs. experienced players)?

The oldest national anthems date from the 16th century (the Netherlands) (NAW, n.d.), and the 1740s (England) (Geisler, 2005, p. xxv). Opinions on anthems differ both among sports spectators and in society at large (Hunter, 2003, pp. 416–417; Ismer, 2011; BBC Sport, 2005; Mungazi, 2005); their uses are often linked to patriotism, some even reference militarism or war heroism, whereas others praise more peaceful national qualities. National anthems can be considered highly compatible with 19th-century nationalism and the partly overlapping Modernist era (Geisler, 2005; Gilboa & Bodner, 2009): one country, one nation, one language – and one anthem. However, it is a truism by now, pointed out by many scholars in the Late Modern era (e.g., Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Wessendorf, 2013), that such categories are severely at odds with the globalization and (super)diversity of the late 20th century, accelerated by heightened mobility and the development of information technology in the early 21st century. The ‘death of the nation’ has been predicted for a while now, and notions like ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) have been proposed to model the more fragmented Late Modern identity ethos. This has been duly noted in the sociology of football, and indeed, the growth of club football (e.g., The UEFA Champions League) has overshadowed national team football to a great extent, with the exception of the biennial big competitions, where national teams take center stage (Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Poulton, 2004).

Yet old ‘isms’ die hard, and the immensely influential ideals of the modern, along with the nationalist thinking in the Western world and elsewhere remain strong (see Blommaert, Leppänen, & Spotti, 2012). For many, national anthems remain a celebratory, positive sign of identification with nation (albeit an ‘imagined community’), a uniting ritual, an act of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995; C. White, 2015). Indeed, looking at the anatomy of an international football match, its commencement with national anthems is a heavily ritualized, performative moment, in which this immediately preceding preparatory and warm-up phase transforms into the excitement of the core game itself via the multi-semiotics of the songs, including melody and lyrics, as well as the positioning of the players before television cameras and audiences, whether in the stadium or at home. More than just a ritual, the practice of national anthems can be seen as a way of performing, producing, and consuming a *specific kind* of nation: disciplined, male, dominant, and competitive (cf. Billig, 1995, pp. 119–127).

Next, I focus on discourses of identification and disidentification pertaining to national team footballers as ascribed to them by authors in online media.

7.1 MEDIA DEBATES ON FOOTBALL PLAYERS (NOT) SINGING NATIONAL ANTHEMS IN BIG TOURNAMENTS

Media debates both in edited, institutional media and in social media have surfaced on the issue of the national anthems in football matches. Both my real-time and retrospective data collection¹² tentatively suggest a peak in the national anthem discourses during major international competitions, specifically the World Cups in 2010 and 2014 and the European Championship in 2012. This is understandable because national team football, especially from the European perspective, always peaks at these events, whereas the respective qualification rounds spread between the big tournaments receive somewhat less (if still significant) attention. I briefly illustrate this by reviewing three online media articles from different European national contexts. First,

Duncan White (2010; *The Telegraph*) discusses how the German player Mesut Özil, with a Turkish (and Muslim) family background, does not sing along with the national anthem but murmurs The Quran instead. White concludes that most Germans are relaxed about it in a rapidly diversifying multicultural Germany, where Turkish immigrants, in particular, have played a major role in the recent decades (cf. Özkök, 2006, for an earlier take on the topic). Second, Democratic Audit UK (2014; a collectively authored piece) investigates the ways in which playing and singing “God Save the Queen” before England’s matches is problematic. According to them, playing the UK anthem in football matches is ambivalent enough for England, let alone Scotland or Wales, who have their own national teams and anthems. A recurring theme, also found in the Germany-based debates (with the celebrated coach and player Franz Beckenbauer) and Serbia (see below), is how the national team coach – in England’s case Roy Hodgson¹³ – takes the public role of a leader who insists that the anthem be sung by *every* player in the starting lineup (see also McNulty, 2014). Third, Haydon (2012) critically documents a case where the Serbian national team player of Bosniak ethnicity, Adem Ljajić, was dropped from the national team by the then coach, Siniša Mihajlović, for not singing the Serbian national anthem in a friendly match in 2012. “[G]iven that the anthem, *Righteous God*,” Haydon (2012, n.p.) concludes, “has already caused controversy for not properly recognising the ethnic plurality of the region, it would seem misguided of the coach to make it such a cornerstone of his manifesto.” To my knowledge, this is the most extreme and concrete case of this phenomenon, whereas other debates and critiques concerning the national anthem issue have remained on the level of public statements and social media debates, rather than having such drastic material consequences. For players like Ljajić, in particularly vulnerable constellations of ethnicity and conflict, national anthems can indeed become career-defining ‘nexuses of practice’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). While a more detailed international and cross-media comparison would be needed to gain more representativeness and a clearer idea of the ways in which the issue of (not) singing the national anthem has been discussed across footballing countries and cultures, this brief review serves to illustrate some of its complexity and ‘universality’. This sets the scene for the next section, where I discuss the same issue with data from Finnish web football forums, along with mediation chains and resemiotization processes from the events on the pitch via several mediating means to online debates.

8 “PATRIOTIC FEELING, THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, AND TRAITORS TO THE FATHERLAND”

Although a few debates on the national anthem issue and many discussions around the ethnic diversification of football emerged already in the heyday (ca. 1999–2006) of the original Futisforum, it is the currently (2007–2016) thriving Futisforum2 from which I take the core dataset for this chapter. The massive shift by active members from Futisforum to FF2 (Kytölä, 2013, pp. 33–68) coincides with the rapid increase in immigrant-background players in the Finland national team (see Section 4.1); therefore, FF2 has proved the richest social media source of issues on ethnic diversity in the Finland national team(s) and the question of national anthems.

Web forum discussions involve varying kinds of multimodality in meaning-making and chains of resemiotization (Iedema, 2003; Leppänen et al., 2013); this requires methodological and conceptual attention from scholars working with such data. The theoretical lens of resemiotization, Iedema (2003, p. 29) argues, helps us trace “how semiotics are translated from one into the other as social

processes unfold”. While my analysis is not a full description of resemiotization chains pertaining to the data and issues covered here, I use resemiotization as a concept for structuring the multi-semiotic and transformative nature of the forum discussions, and for describing the dynamics and dimensions of the forum discussions. To model the complex chain discussed below, we have, on the one hand, the match itself as a highly loaded nexus of practice, and within the bounded event of the match, a moment of approximately two minutes when the (Finnish) national anthem is played and sung by the players standing in a row. When the national anthem is played via the PA system and the loudspeakers of the stadium (another mediating means), the players have the options of standing still, singing along, and (as claimed by observers and online commenters) moving their lips without singing. The constellation of the bodies’ postures, gestures, lip and jaw movement, melody, lyrics and voice volume create a unique semiotic aggregate for each player, while they simultaneously form an entity: the starting lineup of the team, and more than that, they form and embody a national entity, the nation (cf. Billig, 1995). A small minority of the spectators in the stadium may be able to see the details of the players’ multisemiotic performance and behavior, but those using another mediating means, a television broadcast (itself created by a very complex, sophisticated combination of technologies and networks) or an internet live stream, or possibly a large screen when at the stadium, are likely to see the program director’s choice of individual players in close-up. Those fleeting moments are the very moments, the thick loci of multisemiotic action, which are in focus for football followers interested in the national anthem issue, either in a serious or jocular way, or both, which I interpret to be the case with FF2 and the Finland national anthem. These fleeting moments of mediated multisemiotic action – to an extent controlled by the directors of the television companies in question – are then resemiotized, represented in a very different format, such as interactive web forum discussions, which are, in their way, multi-authored, multisemiotic, dialogic texts (see Kytölä, 2013, 2014; Kytölä & Westinen, 2015).

A key actor in the case analyzed below, Alexander Ring (b. 1991) is a young Finnish professional player who was selected to the national team in 2011 when still playing in the Finnish league. Ring has a Finnish-Swedish family background¹⁴ and was born in Helsinki, but he grew up in Germany where his father worked. Ring has a very Scandinavian appearance: blond skin, blond hair and light-colored eyes. In contrast to other immigrant-background players in the national team, neither *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis* arguments can logically be used to identify him as a ‘non-Finn’; the only logical argument against his full ‘Finnish-ness’ might be his life trajectory centered in Germany. As is the case with most Finnish male professionals abroad, a discussion thread¹⁵ devoted to Ring is initiated in FF2 (sub-forum ‘Finnish players abroad’) when he gets a transfer from HJK Helsinki to the German Bundesliga club Borussia Mönchengladbach on 4 January, 2012, at the age of 20. In some interviews at the time Ring highlighted his German instead of Finnish ‘mentality’ – another act and layer of (dis)identification explicitly and verbally performed by him that caught fire among his Finnish followers. This ‘revelation’ triggers discussion in the thread devoted to Ring on his motivation to play for Finland, as well as a metapragmatic debate on how fans and supporters should position themselves with regard to that ambiguity; it is then that the issue of the national anthem is evoked (Example 1)¹⁶.

(Note: The Finnish national anthem is called “Maamme” (‘Our Land’; in Swedish: ‘Vårt land’).)

EXAMPLE 1

User ‘pk’; reply #259:

Does anybody remember if Alexander has sung Maamme in national team matches? This should be checked immediately, and it should be investigated whether he shows his emotions during the song – because of the recent revelations.

[the next day, 36 messages later]

t-pe, reply #295:

Why on earth did he even have to bring out that Germanness issue? Does it have any relevance to his development - no. To the Finland national team - a strong maybe.

Hopefully Finland will not face Germany in an international match, then it might make both national anthems play in stereo in AR’s head.

As most of the over 300 comments posted in this thread so far had been about Ring’s career and future prospects in Germany, the above example illustrates how the nationality issue is only one of the aspects discussed, and the question of the national anthem only one factor in a larger constellation of citizenship, nationality, eligibility, belonging and (dis)alignment. Some forum members interpret Ring’s media statements as disidentification with Finnishness and identification with Germanness; other participants use this as a criterion for disidentifying with Ring in the context of the Finland national team, while yet others follow a more ‘meritocratic’ approach, accepting and welcoming Ring because of his skills and attitude. The national anthem is evoked in a sarcastic manner, as one indicator, a ‘shibboleth’, of Ring’s earnestness and Finnishness in the more serious matter of national team performance. User ‘t-pe’’s reply is critical of Ring’s dual (German + Finnish) alignment, speculating on the question of *two* national anthems in Ring’s head in a possible future game between Finland and Germany. A plausible interpretation is to take the first part (on ‘Germanness’) as serious and the latter part (on ‘two anthems’) as satirical (exaggeration and ridiculing of the entire anthem issue).

As the discussion thread continues, there are traces of moderators having deleted ‘off-topic’ messages from a couple of days, most likely connected to the question of Ring’s ‘Germanness’ and the semiotics of the national anthem. Indeed, this thread subsequently remains dedicated to Ring’s career in Mönchengladbach. However, one prolific forum member opens a new discussion thread (8 Jan 2012, Example 2) in another Futisforum2 sub-forum (‘Finland national team’) titled “Patriotic feeling, the anthem “Maamme”, Alexander Ring and other traitors to the fatherland”¹⁷ in a more overtly ironic tone. The jocular and satire notwithstanding, this new thread soon turns into a more serious discussion on native Finns and immigrant-background Finns in the national team.

EXAMPLE 2

SL; opening message:

National anthems and ethnic diversification of football national teams

[...] Here we discuss and analyze the impact of nationalist feeling, bloodline, blue-eyed-ness, blonde-haired-ness, and the singing of the national anthem with tears running from your eyes, to the performance of the national team.

In a time-consuming multi-stage study, it turned out that the fatherland traitor Alexander Ring was the only one who did not sing the anthem in his first three international matches [...] In the latest match against Hungary, however, his jaws were moving, although there was apparently no sound. So some progress has been made. [...]

The opening message, as typical of many discussions on the two Futisforums (Kytölä, 2012, 2013, 2014), elicits a range of ambivalent responses: alongside the ironic undertone (jocular and satirical exaggeration), more serious statements of identification and disidentification are present. The message lists features associated with ‘pure’ Finnishness (blue eyes, blond hair) in the spirit of (national) chauvinism. Moreover, according to this writer, all the other players apart from Ring sang along or at least *moved their jaws or lips* during the Finnish national anthem, thus participating in the performance of ‘banal nationalism’ pertaining to football spectacles premised on the idea of nation states. As an example of the passion that *should* be displayed during the national anthem instead of Ring’s serious face, the message contains an embedded hyperlink to a YouTube video of the Italy national team singing their anthem passionately in their 2006 World Cup match against Ukraine.¹⁸ The first reply appears within just a few minutes (Example 3).

EXAMPLE 3

Ed; reply #1:

This is the least I’m expecting from Ring in the next game, or someone can put a foot up his German ass 🙄 [angry face emoji]

Like in the preceding Italy example, the word ‘this’ embeds a hyperlink (a common multimodal affordance in most web forums) to yet another YouTube video¹⁹ in which Jong Tae-se, the North Korean national team player, is weeping copiously during the anthem before North Korea’s first match in World Cup 2010 (against Brazil, 15 June 2010) – a moment when he, his teammates, and North Korean football were receiving unprecedented international media attention. The stance on the pre-match behavior of Ring and other national team players thus becomes almost ‘forensic’: scrutiny of the evidence (singing or not singing?) in order to proclaim a verdict, and even administer a punishment (expulsion). But immediate challenges are presented to such verdicts, such as the sarcasm and jocular evident throughout the discussion. For the sarcastic discussant above, such overblown sentimentality (“This is the least...”) would be required from Ring to prove his identification with Finland; otherwise, supporters should disidentify with Ring’s “German ass”. The hyperlinks, emoticons, and linguistic representations of (not) singing are multisemiotic affordances deployed by the forum discussants for their (dis)identification work, *vis-à-vis* the national team players in question and their own positioning in the issue, supporting and strengthening the sarcastic dimension of the discussion. Critical evaluations are directed simultaneously at Ring (when he is

disidentifying himself from Finnishness in various ways) and at critics of Ring (when they are taking too extreme stances against Ring's behavior from the vantage point of seemingly national chauvinistic ideologies).

Subsequent comments in the thread continue to take alternative stances: for some, Ring's reluctance to move his lips during "Maamme", showing a surly face instead, is connected to his reluctance to represent Finland instead of Germany, the country he grew up in. Other national team players discussed in the same vein are the Eremenko brothers, Perparim Hetemaj (see Section 4.1 above), and the Finnish-Swedish Tim Sparv – the most prominent 'non-Finnish(-speaking)' members of the contemporary squad – but also some ethno-linguistically Finnish players. Some commenters direct the discussion in an overtly satirical direction by, for instance, continuing to name Ring as "the traitor to the fatherland" or recreating the "alliance" between "Aryan brother nations" (Germany and Finland in World War II). While Ring's true critics in this discussion explicitly and implicitly argue that Ring shows disidentification from Finnishness by not caring about the anthem, they simultaneously disidentify themselves from a national team where not everyone is Finnish 'at heart', judging players by their behavior during the anthem. However, a more complex (dis)identification process is at play in some of the sarcastic, jocular comments (see Example 4).

EXAMPLE 4

Jo; reply #6:

Take away his passport, kidnap him and drive him over the border. Also ban NIGGERS like Hetemaj from the national team.

IB; reply #7 (quoting #6 above):

I don't know much more about Tim Sparv's ancestry, but he's too dark for my taste. Let's ban him too, to be on the safe side.

The forum member 'Jo' uses the Finnish verb *muiluttaa* (translated above as 'to kidnap' + 'to drive'), which has a gloomy political history. The so called Lapua movement (*Lapuanliike*; 1929–1932) in Finnish political history had a radical nationalist, vehemently anti-Communist agenda, a concrete feature of which was the activity of *muilutus*: kidnapping their political enemies, often beating them, throwing them in a car and driving them to the Finnish–Soviet border (see Silvennoinen, 2015). This participant links kidnapping and 'deportation' with rejecting the inclusion of 'NIGGERS' ('neekeri' in Finnish is an equally loaded word) in the national team. The sarcasm becomes clearer here, as it is clearly self-directed (cf. Gibbs, 2000, p. 7), considering that (Perparim) Hetemaj is a Kosovo Albanian, and his skin is only very slightly, if at all, darker than the Finnish average. Moreover, the exaggeration of the point with all capital letters highlights the overdriven, satirical function. Tim Sparv (later to become the national team's captain) is another key player in the squad; although the most plausible interpretation of 'IB's response is arguably jocular, its stance is simultaneously compatible with an extreme view of nationalism: only Finnish-speaking (light-skinned and blond-haired) Finns are good, whereas Sparv is not only dark-brown-

haired but also from the almost monolingually Swedish-speaking region. Such discussants are simultaneously ascribing one type of disidentification to ‘non-Finnish’ players in the Finland national team and, by means of humor, disidentifying themselves from the real (possibly racist) nationalistic chauvinism of other, often imagined (‘straw man’) football followers who would *really* like to dismiss any ‘non-Finnish’ players from the national team.

While the discussion thread takes several ironic and jocular, even ‘off-topic’ turns, most replies take ‘on-topic’ stances to questions of immigrant-background players in the national team and/or singing or moving one’s lips during the national anthem. From the very beginning, the representations of the national anthem are mediated in a complex way. The main mediating means for watching matches is television, which has recently converged with online television and online streaming services. This mediational chain is the default in the analysis of resemiotization in meaning-making, although it is possible that some commenters have been watching the matches in question live in the stadium. In the latter case, it is impossible, solely through the auditory channel, to discern who is singing at what point, whereas in the former, the latest technology may allow individual players’ voices to be heard, simultaneously as the camera zooms in on their faces. However, the debate on FF2 does not remain fixated on the question ‘Who sings?’ (*auditory*), but the discussion turns frequently to the *visual* modality available via broadcasts, asking instead: ‘Whose lips are moving?’. Whereas this distinction may seem insignificant at first, there turns out to be a clear difference in supporters’ discourse whether a player ‘only’ moves his lips (‘half-heartedly’) or sings aloud (‘wholeheartedly’). The latter option is regarded as a stronger sign of positive identification with the national team and therefore the Finnish nation. In line with this, supporters may identify more strongly with players who sing wholeheartedly, while there are explicit and implicit discourses of disidentification with the players who do not even move their lips, such as Example 5 below.

EXAMPLE 5

wb; reply #8:

[... Ring’s] facial expression tells more than a thousand words. What’s more, Ring just told us he’s a German, bashing Finns for being content with very little. Why the fuck should I respect such a player as a fan when it’s about the national team. Now forget about racism and such shit as this is all about a Finnish player who so badly wants to be a German. [...]

Member ‘wb’, whom I take to be genuinely critical of Ring’s behavior, bases his rather extreme disidentification from Ring mainly on the young player’s media statements, but his reply begins with the mention of Ring’s ‘facial expression’ during the anthem. This message, too, includes the multisemiotic affordance of an embedded YouTube link, this time a highlights video of the (then) recent game between Finland and Moldova (Sep 2, 2011), where Ring’s total silence during “Maamme” actually does stand out from the singing along of the other players. As outlined above and in my earlier research, the ethos of the two Futisforums, and the discussion thread in focus in particular, is framed with both jocular and sarcasm, which is illustrated in Example 6 below.

EXAMPLE 6

Iata; reply #31:

Ring who keeps his mouth shut should of course be expelled, but some disqualification should also apply to those who do sing on the basis of their musicality. Quite embarrassing if, for instance in a World Cup watched by millions, a Finnish player sang out of tune.

[...]

bar; reply #48:

As I noted in another thread, fatherland traitor Ring *sang* or at least *moved his lips* during the national anthem before the Denmark game. Was I the only one who noticed this? [...]

The sarcasm here, while probably evident also to an outside reader, is unmistakable to a researcher conversant with many of the emic ways of this online community (Kytölä, 2013, pp. 74–76). First, ‘Iata’ offers a categorization of national team players on the basis of their performance of the anthem: Ring should be dismissed, because not singing is the extreme sign of ascribed disidentification from Finland, while *musicality* should be used as a further, more nuanced criterion of inclusion. Instead of any criteria based on ‘Finnishness’ or ‘non-Finnishness’ or players’ ethno-cultural background, the players’ ability to reproduce the anthem correctly is offered as the decisive factor for inclusion, and thus identification with the nation. Players singing out of tune are not explicitly ascribed disidentification from imagined Finnishness, but supporters should disidentify from bad singers because of possible ‘embarrassment’ caused by failed attempts to perform and adhere to an act of ‘banal nationalism’. User ‘bar’, slightly later, adds an intermediate layer to the (still jocular) categorization: *moving his lips* is already a preferred alternative to not singing, while *singing* (both italics in the original data) is the ultimate sign for identification with the nation, and thus a ‘gate’ that needs to be passed in order to convince supporters and induce them to identify with a player who has a transnational, not ‘purely’ Finnish life trajectory. In sum, particular and very nuanced pieces of ‘evidence’ (mediated television coverage or online streaming of the singing) are used rhetorically to present particular evaluations of the players’ national (dis)identification.

However, even the most obvious evidence of sarcasm does not erase the fact that such characterizations *are actually used* in the (Finnish) online debates to illustrate *something that clearly matters*, whether at face value or in order to attribute certain characteristics or features to the ‘other camp’ by means of ridicule. We see ‘inverted’ identification and disidentification, processes ‘with a twist’, and we may not know for certain which passages, if any, to interpret at face value. The messages that make, in exaggerated ways, the point of the national anthem being the ‘shibboleth’ of true identification can quite plausibly be interpreted as satirical stances *against* banal nationalism, and *against* judgements about immigrant-background Finnish players not being in the game ‘wholeheartedly’. The more sarcasm or satirical exaggeration that can be located in a forum comment, the more likely it is to be rejecting its ‘face value’ interpretation, transforming it into disidentification from the ascribed ‘other camp’ (i.e., any ‘too serious’ form of supportership which would actually require players to sing anthems wholeheartedly). Often multiple elements –

sarcastic, jocular and serious – are present and intertwined in single discussions and even single messages. We should also note that any conclusions drawn from the players' behavior during the anthem (i.e., whether they sing, just move their lips, or stand stone-faced) may be matters of individual preferences to do with the ideal way of preparing for and focusing on the game. Singing the anthem visibly and loudly may not be an ideal preparation ritual for all players, and may actually tell very little about their real motivation for representing their current nationality, whether *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli*, in the sports setting.

Finally, I will discuss another layer of negotiation that is brought to the discussion in May 2012 by a prolific, often controversial member (Example 7).

EXAMPLE 7

Sake; reply #87:

In the Maamme song, Finland is sung about as the country of birth [*synnyinmaa*]. In the starting lineup almost half of the players may have been born elsewhere, so why should they even sing anything like this?

[after four jocular replies]

Sake; reply #92:

[...] the Maamme song is about the country of birth, and if you weren't born in Finland, this kind of chant can hardly bring you to tears.

In these two contributions to the debate, member 'Sake' twice draws on the distinction between *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* (Weil, 2001; Brubaker, 2001): there is, in his view, a discrepancy between the lyrics of the national anthem, which literally labels Finland both as "our land" (more flexible) and "country of birth" (restrictive). However, even some (by now former) national team players with a Finnish family background were born outside Finland. This is relatively well known (often quoted) among active participants in the discussions; therefore 'Sake's' point about the country of birth is literally valid.

The discussion thread was at its most active in January 2012 (83 replies), after which the pace of the discussion gradually evened out. In spring and autumn 2012, the thread is reinvigorated on most of Finland's game days for a few comments, but after that, it only 'bumps' a few times (in 2013, 2014, and 2015). Both the topic of ethnic diversification and the issue of national anthems resurface under numerous other discussion threads in FF2 (and other forums and social media); this can be verified with purposeful searches utilizing either the forums' internal search facilities with selected keywords, or even with a general search engine (e.g., Google) with a restricted site parameter.²⁰ Although these threads diverge into many sub-topics (some of which are typically rather off-topic), they frequently return to the comparison of immigrant-background national team players (the Eremenko brothers, Perparim Hetemaj, Njazi Kuqi; see Section 4.1) with the native Finns. At some points, only the behavior of the immigrant-background players is at issue, a strategy which we may

interpret as a covert act of power, of normalizing ethnic Finnishness. Researching Finnish followers' representations of and (dis)identifications from the players of Russian or Kosovo Albanian origin in the national team more extensively is outside the scope of this chapter and would be an important topic for further, comparative study.

9 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Grounded in my previous digital ethnographic work (Kytölä, 2013; Kytölä & Androutsopoulos, 2012), and drawing on discourse-analytic and ethnographically grounded methodologies, I have above analyzed a purposefully constructed, topically delimited data sample. A more systematic and extensive data collection could be conducted to form a more holistic idea of ethnic diversification across different nation states, and identification and disidentification processes related to such diversification, and the complex resemiotization chains involved therein. As a methodological step for the investigation of complex chains of mediation, I have suggested the concept of resemiotization as an analytical tool with which to unpack the complexities between offline (the pitch) and online (the broadcast, the media debates) representations of the events in locus. The application of resemiotization here has been a tentative one; it is important to try to get a grasp of the complex relationships of offline and online activities, as well as across sites of social actions, and the ways in which various multisemiotic affordances for meaning making are translated from one another. An even more systematic analysis of the semiotic means used at each point of discourse trajectories and in transitions between them would be desirable (see also Leppänen et al., 2013). In the above, some European comparison was included as a backdrop to illustrate the degree of 'universality' of the theme in focus; it would be fruitful to engage in a comparison of discourses, in different national and local languages, from different nation states, both *vis-à-vis* the ethnic diversification of football national teams (including women's and juniors' teams) and the issue of the national anthem as a performance of 'banal nationalism', and as a potential trigger for the expression of national chauvinistic ideas. Comparison of football with other sports would also be worthwhile, even in the Finnish context where (the less multicultural) ice-hockey is a popular sport in terms of spectators and media coverage, and where (both men's and women's) basketball is undergoing growing racial diversity, mainly owing to a US-derived influence.

10 DISCUSSION: DIVERSIFICATION, CHANGE, TENSION, AND AMBIGUITY

Contextualized within the rapid globalization and increased mobility of football, this chapter has explored ways in which Finnish football followers in online communities make sense of and respond to the growing diversity and complexity of national team football, one of the two major strands of competitive football alongside club football. Supporters and players are trying to cope with a new and unfamiliar kind of diversity: the cultural and social flows, mobility of people and football discourses make the circumstances pertaining to doing the sport ever more complex and unpredictable. Drawing attention to the established tradition of the playback and singing of national anthems in international football matches, I have argued that in Finland, as in other European footballing nations, singing the national anthem visibly and audibly, 'wholeheartedly', has been regarded by some as a readily observable sign, index, of an allegedly positive identification with the nation one is playing for. However, as can be seen in the analysis above, some discussants in social

media contest such a view and, by means of sarcasm and even satire, ridicule the alleged indexical connections between the singing of the anthem and identification with the nation. Media debates around players (not) singing the national anthem have been complex and ambiguous, and the Finnish discussions on the selected online sites of research (Futisforum and FF2) are no exception.

The social media discussions explored in this chapter co-occurred (in the early 2010s) with the rise of overt national chauvinism, racism and hate talk in Finland, which have been reflected in radicalized debates and discourses in digital social media, too (for recent discussions, see e.g. Mäkinen, 2013; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016). The boundaries of hate speech, and what is generally deemed acceptable public or semi-public discourse, have been stretched relatively rapidly, often in the name of freedom of speech. However, for the sake of contextualization it should be noted that the Futisforum data explored here predated by some years the unprecedentedly severe refugee movements of 2015 (notably those from the Middle East to Europe), a process that triggered even more hate discourse premised on ethnicity than before – in more extreme, overt, and visible forms than before.

Along with European nation states at large, European (men's) national football teams have become more ethnically diversified over the last two decades. Together with FIFA's eligibility rules for national teams – a complex combination of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* types of citizenship – this development has triggered critical debates on the meanings and connotations of national team football, most dramatically in France, where even a majority of a given selection of players have been of immigrant family origin. Finland is behind many European countries in ethnic diversification based on immigration, which has only really started to grow since the 1990s (see Statistics Finland, 2016). It is only relatively recently that immigrant-background players have made it to the men's national team in numbers.

One axis of the identification–disidentification processes concerns the players themselves, especially those who have grown up under two or more distinctive cultural influences but end up representing only one national team: whether they fully identify with Finland and Finnish nationality, or whether they have allegiances to their 'other culture(s)' (such as Kosovo or Russia). Simultaneously, another layer of identification–disidentification processes surfaces in supporters' and followers' debates: Who counts as a Finn nowadays? Who can represent Finland in (the world's most competitive) sport? How should identifications and allegiances be displayed by 'New Finn' athletes with multi-ethnic backgrounds? Who can 'we' identify with, feel proud of, celebrate, and on what conditions?

As a heavily loaded 'nexus of practice' (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) for the performance of 'banal nationalism' in international sports, the national anthem occupies a key indexical role. This is illustrated in the eagerness with which professional actors-in-the-field and (social) media participants respond to the intricacies of the brief moment when the national anthem is played before the match and mediated to the spectators in the stadium and at home. Discourses around national anthems, while controversial and highly contested, clearly assign national team players (doing the work alongside their actual contract jobs in clubs) a layer of duty and discipline. National team football is a complex social construction premised on nations, nationalities, and competition between them. Although legal citizenship or nationality can be a binary opposition, the discursive

notion of, for instance, 'Finnishness' or 'non-Finnishness' strongly emerges from the actors in the field: fans, followers, players, coaches ('imagined communities' at work). Finnishness, or 'earnestness' about being 'wholeheartedly' a representative of Finland, thus emerges as a complex outcome of everyday negotiation situations (cf. Westinen, this volume). When discussing football, which can be a very serious matter for many of its actors-in-the-field (Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009), we must remember that for many it is, and remains, also a source of leisurely well-being and fun. In that vein, the above analysis has illustrated ways in which the Finnish debate around the singing of the anthem also becomes the target of different types of irony: jocularity, sarcasm, satire, and mockery, and in so doing even 'inverted' (dis)identification from the target(s) of mockery.

While liberal views on ethnic diversification in European and Finnish football tend to be rather 'meritocratic', big national narratives persist in club and national team football. There is variation in how big narratives can or should be constructed; apart from the binary opposition of citizenship, there is always also an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991); and materializations of the imagined community of the (footballing) nation are particularly well encapsulated in the nexus of the national anthems in sports spectacles. As seen above, football supporters are eager to engage in complex processes of identification and disidentification, targeted both at self and others (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, pp. 14–15), *vis-à-vis* their imagined communities – much like the contemporary polarization of debates and discussions on immigration and particular ethnic migrant groups at large. When contextualized in relation with the more general, societal and transnational problematics of migration, mobility and globalization so sorely present in today's world, (dis)identification discourses around questions of ethnicity in football open a window on Late Modern social change, complexity and the ambiguity of experiences.

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² The international football federations (notably FIFA and UEFA) have member federations which do not directly correspond to sovereign states. These are determined by a complex combination of historical factors; current examples include the national teams of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (instead of a joint UK team), Faroe Islands (instead of being part of Denmark), and most recently, the Gibraltar and Kosovo national teams.

³ While women's football would be an equally legitimate target of study, I confine myself here to men's football, which has gained by far the most media attention and fan activities in recent decades and is likely to continue to do so in the near future. Other foci of future study should include juniors' football as well as futsal, the official five-a-side indoor variant endorsed by the major international associations.

⁴ I acknowledge the highly complex problematics of this denotation and I use it rather tentatively, in the Finnish context, to denote a Northern European, light-skinned appearance, with blond or brown hair.

⁵ Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages of Finland, with native Swedish speakers currently comprising approximately 5% of the population. For more, see Statistics Finland, 2014; http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2014/01/vaerak_2014_01_2015-12-10_kuv_001_en.html (accessed 22 June 2016).

⁶ As in almost any context, 'Europe' is a relative, not neatly definable concept here. While everyday talk and other geopolitical definitions of Europe often exclude former Soviet states with the exception of the Baltic states, UEFA has 11 out of 15 former Soviet states as members. Also Turkey – a case in point about the difficulty of defining the (eastern) borders of Europe – is part of UEFA and virtually always included in the context of 'European football', as also is Israel.

⁷ For the full paragraphs, see FIFA's Statutes, Articles 5 through 8. http://www.fifa.com/mm/Document/AFederation/Generic/02/58/14/48/2015FIFAStatutesEN_Neutral.pdf (accessed 25 March 2016)

⁸ This blog (Ke Nako, 2010) is a collection of non-academic writings on the World Cup 2010 held in South Africa. Although not framed as academic, it has an analytical approach and has served as an inspiration for my research on the diversification of European football national teams.

⁹ Immigration to Finland has several other important countries of origin, but they are outside the scope of this chapter; see Finnish Immigration Service (2016).

¹⁰ It has indeed been argued (e.g., Mäkinen, 2013) that a single web forum (Hommaforum) played a major role in the rise of the populist, anti-immigration party Perussuomalaiset (The Finns' Party) to the center stage of Finnish politics in ca. 2009–2012. For similar developments in political blogs, see Sakki and Pettersson (2016).

¹¹ "Hyssyttelystä asiaan"; <http://suomifutisnet.advl.nebula.fi/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=64558> (thread started 4 July 2006; last accessed 25 March 2016).

¹² I thank Sonya Saffidine, Outi Etuaho, Anni Aarnio, and Piia Jäntti, our former research assistants, for their contributions to the data collection.

¹³ Hodgson had previously been Finland men's national team coach in 2006–07 during the qualifying rounds for the European Championship 2008. I have found no media data on Hodgson mentioning, in an interview or a press conference, the singing of the Finnish anthem before Finland's matches at that time.

¹⁴ All his three names are somewhat 'pan-Germanic' in spelling, making it easier to mistake him for a German national.

¹⁵ <http://futisforum2.org/index.php?topic=133441.0> (last accessed 25 March 2016)

¹⁶ Owing to space restrictions, I quote all Futisforum excerpts here with text only. At the expense of losing the 'authentic' (mostly in-Finnish) data, I include just my English translations of them here for practical reasons and because of ethical caveats. My translations are rather pragmatic, possibly at the expense of nuance or idiomaticity. I have given each participant quoted a new pseudonym here, although another ethically viable option would be to give full credit to the actual writers with their actual usernames (see Kytölä, 2013, pp. 69–76). I use boldface emphasis to make the nicknames stand out visually, just as is the case in the Futisforums' layout, and I have added the ordinal number of each reply for identification of the

precise point in the discussion. Most of the original discussions remain available online; I have also saved all of them in my data archive. The interactional dynamics of the online discussions, with all the meta-data and the ‘flow’ and order of messages, can only be experienced by accessing the forums in real time and retrospectively (Kytölä, 2013).

¹⁷ <http://futisforum2.org/index.php?topic=133698.0> (last accessed 25 March 2016)

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5muGVKdJFV8> (accessed 25 March 2016)

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nG2ZJvoNZE8> (accessed 25 March 2016)

²⁰ These are included in the methods I deployed in my earlier research on web forums (see Kytölä, 2013, esp. pp. 149–155).