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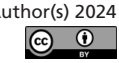
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Contrasting media representations of race and national identity: The case of England and Italy at the Union of European Football Associations Euro 2020

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Abstract

The continuous growth of international sport events as media spectacles has magnified their ability to project ideas of nationhood. In media coverage, the athletes/players are portrayed as the embodiment of the 'nation', but this process is far from linear. Historically, mass media have constructed highly gendered and restricted ideas of the nation, placing women and ethnic minorities at the margins or erasing them altogether. The analysis of the coverage of the England and Italy men's teams at the Euro 2020 brings to the forefront the persistence, but also the evolution, of such tensions. Combining critical discourse analysis with theories of race and racialisation, this article aims to unpack the often-overlooked role of 'race' in the articulation of national identity in Europe. While the England team proudly embraced the ethnic diversity of British society, Italy was the only Western European team not to select players with an immigrant background or ethnic minorities. By looking at a British popular newspaper, *Daily Mail*, and at an Italian one, *Corriere della Sera*, this article provides a necessary update to the understanding of the function of mass media as 'gatekeepers' of the nation.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, football, Italy and immigration, media discourse, race and national identity, sport mega events

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Introduction

There is a significant body of research on the media representation of nationhood in relation to sport, and especially association football. This should not come as a surprise if one considers the deep political and symbolic reverberations of major international sport events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA Men's World Cup. Since their emergence at the turn of the 20th century, and particularly after the first World War, international sport competitions have exalted the nation-state as the 'natural' form of organisation of societies, crystallising in popular imagination the inter-state world view (Levermore, 2004) and providing mass media with newsworthy resources to cultivate their nationally bounded audiences. The profile of these events is historically defined by their close, interdependent relationship with mass media (Kidd, 2013).

However, there is also an apparent contradiction in paying attention to the 'nation' as a delimited socio-cultural framework when discussing cultural forms which embody and magnify globalisation. Since the 1970s, major international sport events have been interpreted not purely as festivals that celebrate physical prowess across cultures, as they originally were intended to be, but more prominently as vectors of a transnational language, which is very effective in the promotion of commodities (Horne, 2006). Television has been instrumental in making this happen, popularising different sports across the world while providing corporations with a powerful promotional tool for their goods and services. At the same time, sports themselves have turned into lucrative commodities (Kellner, 2003). This process has intensified over the last 30 years through the emergence of digital media of communication (Billings and Hardin, 2014).

If television has been the key actor in the construction of the media sport event, and the core component of the sport-media complex (Rowe, 2013), other traditional mass media have contributed in different forms to the mediatisation of sport. Newspapers have historically been the sites of multifaceted representations of nationhood, based on their types of audiences, political ideologies and national contexts. They continue to do so in the digital environment, amid structural changes that have transformed the news media industry. Despite a decline in circulation, and a less than homogeneous adaptation to the digital, newspapers remain central to the articulation of political discourse in many countries, and influential in setting the agenda of public discourse (Chadwick et al., 2018).

This article focuses on the UEFA Euro 2020, which took place, due to Covid pandemic, in 2021. It examines the coverage of the event by two major national newspapers, one British, the *Daily Mail*, and one Italian, *Corriere della Sera*, in relation to the two teams that played the final, England and Italy. These teams symbolised two contrasting, almost opposing ways to interpret ethnic and racial diversity, with the England team embracing and celebrating the diversity of backgrounds present in their squad, while Italy was the only Western European team that did not select any player with an immigrant background or ethnic minorities. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and drawing on theories of race and racialisation, the aim of this study is to highlight certain patterns and differences in the media discourse around nationhood and national identity articulated by the press when covering the national teams. After a review of the literature on the relationship between sport, media and nationhood, the article defines the conceptualisations of nation and race, which theoretically inform the analysis. It

will then present the methodological approach, showing the relevance of discourse analysis in capturing what Stuart Hall (1996: 612), referring to nations, defines as 'systems of cultural representation'. The last part of the article includes the discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks.

Football, nationhood and the press

What makes football such an attractive field to explore media discourses around national identity? Since the 1990s, several researchers have examined the press coverage of sport events to capture ideas of nationhood. According to Crolley and Hand (2006: 3), 'the long-standing tradition of reading sport as a code for broader national characterisations is never more apparent than in football'. This article focuses on the role of print media in the construction of discourses on race and national identity, but it is useful to acknowledge a growing body of research, across Europe, that examines sports media more broadly, with particular attention to broadcasting. As noted by van Sterkenburg (2019: 388), 'mediated sport is one of the most visibly mixed racial/ethnic cultural practices in today's world and has become a unique platform for transmitting ideas and discourses about race and ethnicity to massive audiences'. Studies on the Dutch context have evidenced how sports media and audiences tend to construct the Dutch national football team as 'White', framing non-White players of immigrant background as 'non-properly' Dutch (Hermes, 2005; van Sterkenburg, 2019; van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). This echoes studies conducted in Spain (Longas Luque and van Sterkenburg, 2022; Mauro and Martínez-Corcuera, 2020), Germany (Fischer and Mohrman, 2021), Portugal (Almeida, 2022) and Poland (van Lienden and van Sterkenburg, 2022). Longas Luque and van Sterkenburg (2022: 1195) argue that 'Spanish televised football seems to reproduce hegemonic discourses about race/ethnicity that reinforce a racial/ethnic hierarchy through the use of an "us" versus "them" frame and that it reinforces exclusionary understandings of national identity'. Looking at Denmark, Agergaard (2019: 130) presents a distinctive perspective, highlighting how 'athletes who become exemplary others along ethnic and national lines are deprived of their transnational belonging and of their potentially critical voice'.

The case of Italy lacks specific literature on the intersection of sports media, race and nationhood. A few available studies have highlighted the popular media framing of the Black Italian athlete, namely, Mario Balotelli, as epitomising 'the other' in Italian society (Doidge, 2015; Mauro, 2016, 2020; Sredanovic and Farina, 2015). Following Italy's exit from the 2014 World Cup, the main Italian newspapers produced 'an extraordinary discourse of racialisation' where 'the only Black man in the team was chosen as the symbol of a "national demise"' (Mauro, 2020: 936). The history of Afro-Italian boxer Leone Jacovacci, who became middle-weight Italian and European champion in 1928, during the Fascist regime, has been narrated in a book and in film (Saccucci 2017; Valeri, 2008). The day after his victory, the national media took aim at a Black man representing Italy, with the sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport* publishing on its front page an editorial titled: 'Can a black man represent Italy in Europe?' (GdS, 25 June 1928). Finally, an early study by Porro and Russo (1999) emphasised the role of national stereotypes in the media representation of the football rivalry between Italy and Germany.

Their analysis shows how broadcasters rely on stereotypes (such as Italy playing defensive football and Germany performing a methodical game) to construct the match as a media event. This work is useful to better understand the role of media in the reproduction of popular ideas of nationhood, but it is of limited help for our study as it does not consider ethnic diversity within German and Italian societies and how they might be reflected in their football teams.

In comparison to the Italian case, national identity is a popular research subject for those interested in the media coverage of the England national football team. Historically, sport is the main cultural site in which national identities within the United Kingdom, the 'home nations', can be expressed and popularised. By paying attention to these studies, it is possible to map patterns of continuity and change in the way the British press interprets England as a 'nation' through football. Commenting on the persistent use of national stereotypes in the coverage of Euro 1996, Garland and Rowe (1999: 86) argue that 'stereotypes have their roots in a sense of confusion about English identity that began soon after WWII, as Britain's role as a world power started to decline'. This sense of confusion, however, is not so evident in the newspapers, particularly, but not exclusively, in the tabloids. For example, in examining the coverage of Euro 2012 by *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*, Vincent and Harris (2014: 229) observe that 'both newspapers drew on an outdated white, homogeneous imagery of Englishness, anchored in the "invented tradition" of the Second World War and the 1966 World Cup'. This was the case not only in the representation of fans, but also when reporting or commenting on the team. 'Despite England's changing multiethnic racial base, it focused on the white English players, and rather less on the eight men of colour in the 23-man squad' (Vincent and Harris, 2014: 227).

Inthorn (2010) looked at the coverage of Euro 2008 by two broadsheets, *The Times* and *The Guardian*, and found that also broadsheets make use of nationalistic tones. A similar point is made also by Maguire et al. (1999), in comparing British and German press at Euro 1996. However, Boyle and Monteiro (2005) compared the British and Portuguese press at the Euro 2004 and found that the British broadsheets paid more attention to the cultural dimension of the event compared to the tabloids. They conclude that, although there has been a remarkable growth of sports coverage in broadsheets and some overlapping in journalistic styles (Boyle, 2006), this has not brought a convergence of news values.

The nostalgic use of history, particularly military history, seems to be an element of continuity in describing the national men's team performances, while the ethnic and racial diversity of British society rarely comes to the fore. Vincent and Hill (2011: 199) examined the construction of English identity by *The Sun* during the 2010 World Cup and did not find 'one photograph of a black English football supporter'. They consequently argue that the newspaper's narrative 'was racially coded'. Not much seemed to have changed since the coverage of the Euro 1996, which according to Maguire and Poulton (1999: 18) was, both in tabloids and broadsheets, 'characterised by nostalgia and ethnic assertiveness/defensiveness'.

Garland (2004: 81) examined ideas of Englishness in tabloids during the 2002 World Cup. He found that much of the reporting was characterised by 'a kind of casual xenophobia that offered only limited and monocultural understanding of Englishness'.

Neither the *Sun* nor the *Daily Mail* published visual representations of ethnic diversity in relation to England football fans. However, the *Daily Mail* championed the cause of 'patriotic Englishness', highlighting that 'this World Cup has united people of every race, creed and class' (Garland, 2004: 86). The *Daily Mirror* reported that 'black, white and Asians had participated in supporting England and the Jubilee'. Taking stock of these contradictory patterns, Garland makes a point, which is also relevant to the analysis of the *Daily Mail* in 2021. He argues that, on occasion of the 2002 World Cup, 'it seemed that for minority ethnic communities, English identity was a temporary, contingent phenomenon, that could be given and taken away depending on the context' (Garland, 2004: 90).

A slightly different perspective emerges from the historical study conducted by Gibbons (2010), who looked at the 'contrasting representations of Englishness' during the FIFA World Cup finals between 1950 and 2006. For many decades, the Union Jack was the main national signifier exposed in the stands during England's games. This started to change at the 1990 World Cup, and more decisively at the Euro 1996, which took place in England with the participation of both the England and Scotland teams. From that event onwards, the St George's flag, the 'national' flag of England, became ubiquitous in the media coverage of England's games. As we will see, during the Euro 2020, the St George's flag was central to the representation of England fans by the *Daily Mail*. Gibbons (2010: 440) concludes that 'Englishness has never been depicted in one way, and it remains multifaceted'. His analysis pays attention to local and regional declinations of Englishness, and their relationship to Britishness, and despite referring to broader social processes, such as the influx of far-right political groups during the 1970s and 1980s and European integration, it fails to mention ethnic or racial diversity or ethnic minorities. This reinforces Crabbe's (2004: 70) view that 'in the imagination of English football (. . .) English fans are English and, with a few exceptions, white'.

Europe, nationhood and race

Is Europe 'white'? Is Europe, in popular discourse, institutional and media discourses, articulated as a 'non-black' (non-African non-Arab, non-Asian, etc.) continent despite the deep historical interdependencies with the rest of the world, brutally magnified by the histories of colonialism and imperialism (Loftsdóttir et al., 2018)? These questions may sound odd to some ears, but if we consider the growth of neo-nationalistic movements and governments in several European countries, some openly and unapologetically xenophobic and racist, they will appear less provocative (Stockemer et al., 2020). In many cases, the immigrant is a signifier for anyone who, even though born in the country, bears an African, Asian or simply non-European background (Balibar, 1991: 60). Children of immigrants in Europe, particularly those of darker skin, are made to feel that they do not belong (FRA-European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Such a discourse assumes a much visible and powerful dimension when national football teams are involved (Mauro, 2020). In August 2018, Mesut Özil, German footballer of Turkish descent, announced he would not play for Germany anymore, a country he had represented more than a hundred times. He explained that he was made to feel 'like a German when we win, but an immigrant when we lose' (van Campenhout and van Houtum,

2021). Özil was born in Germany, as was his father. In the eyes of part of German society, his 'immigrant' status goes back three generations. When does an immigrant stop being an immigrant?

Over the last few years, other prominent European players with an immigrant background have expressed similar feelings. This is the case, for example, of Romelu Lukaku (2018), Belgian player of Congolese background: 'When things were going well (. . .) they were calling me Romelu Lukaku, the Belgian striker. When things weren't going well, they were calling me Romelu Lukaku, the Belgian striker of Congolese descent'. The experience of Mario Balotelli with Italy's national team provides further evidence of such a discourse. 'Our captain has Italian blood' said a banner exposed during a game in which Balotelli was suggested could be the captain of the team. For those fans, a Black player could not be 'Italian'. The most recent case relates to the Euro 2020. After the final lost by England in a penalty shoot-out, three young Black players who had happened to miss their penalty were racially abused online. Jude Bellingham, another young Black England player, commented on these events as follows: 'We had players of all different backgrounds, from all different countries in the team. And then as soon as they missed the penalty, they're not English, they're just black' (Peach, 2022).

All these examples testify of the necessity to include 'race' in any discussion of national identity in Europe. Elgenius and Garner (2021: 215–216) argue that 'race constitutes an integral part of nationalism and national identity in Europe . . . a structuring element neglected by much social science writing on nationalism'. Their perspective resonates with that of Goldberg (2015: 7) who believes that 'race established the lines of belonging and estrangement for modern European life'. With 21st century Britain in mind, Paul Gilroy (2004: 13) argues that

> A refusal to think about racism as something that structures the life of the postimperial polity is associated with what has become a morbid fixation with the fluctuating substance of national culture and identity.

Reading European nationalism and national identities through the lens of 'race' allows us, at least temporarily, to step aside from much of the prevalent debate about the characteristics of 'nationhood' in the European context. In the face of racialisation and the othering of minorities, it becomes hermeneutically irrelevant to discuss what constitutes a 'nation'; at least in public and media discourse around sport events, the nation is what it is perceive *not to be*. By marking someone as the 'other', albeit with distinctions and hierarchical constructions determined by the different cultural contexts, the effect is to discursively define nationhood as a cohesive entity that needs to be guarded to protect its imagined uniqueness.

As the examples presented above show, it is through the individuation and the marking of difference(s) that the nation discursively comes about as an imagined community (Anderson, [1983] 2016). Stuart Hall (1992: 318) argues that the discourse of 'the West and the Rest' played a central role in the formation of the modern idea of Europe by opposing it to the ancient populations of Africa, Asia and America. In his view, far from being a formation of the past, the discourse of 'the West and the Rest' is still producing its effects in contemporary times. Achille Mbembe (2019: 162) takes this line of thought

further, by contending that 'liberal democracy has always needed for its own self-legitimation a constitutive other who is and is not at the same time part of the polis'. These processes are common to many Western European countries, which share a pervasive negative discourse on immigration, epitomised by the concept of 'Fortress Europe' (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

What nation?

The UEFA European Championship (the Euro) is often considered among the small group of 'sport mega-events', alongside the Olympics and the FIFA Men's World Cup (Müller, 2015). This edition of the men's Euro took place in extraordinary circumstances: it was planned for 2020 but because of the Covid pandemic, it was moved to 2021. It was also a different event from all previous ones, as games were hosted in 11 cities in 11 countries to celebrate the 60 years from the first edition. The England squad included several players who were also eligible to represent another country. It was not only the case of players born abroad, such as Raheem Sterling (born in Jamaica), but also a number of players whose family roots are in other countries. The case of Jack Grealish and Declan Rice is particularly significant as both represented the Republic of Ireland at youth level, before opting for England at senior level. Even the captain, Harry Kane, could be eligible to represent Ireland through his father, who was born in Galway. In light of this, the England team can be considered a fair reflection of the fluidity of belongings and national backgrounds characterising contemporary British society (Hall, 2018: 213). Over the last decade, the England men's team has experienced a string of positive results, which have created a positive feeling around the team managed by Gareth Southgate (Ronan, 2018). This fact, combined with the 'progressive' stance of Southgate about the ethnic diversity of his team, amid a renewed nationalistic discourse related to the decision to leave the European Union in 2016, represents the background to the type of framing articulated by the *Daily Mail* during the Euro 2020.

As said, Italy's team did not include players of immigrant background or ethnic minority players in the squad. At the same time, it included three Brazilian players with distant Italian ancestors, a subtle indication of the prevalence of *jus sanguinis* over *jus soli*, which is reflected in the country's legislation (Tintori, 2018).[1] To this day, children born in Italy to foreign nationals can only apply for Italian citizenship at the age of 18. There is no generational limit to acquiring Italian citizenship by descent (*jus sanguinis*); descendents of Italian emigrants can apply for a passport even if the emigration from Italy had taken place four or five generations before. Italy's Central Office of Statistics states that about 11.2 percent of the population is made of people with an immigrant background (including foreign nationals and those who have acquired citizenship); 13 percent among the under 18 and 15 percent among children aged 0–5 (ISTAT, 2020). Over the last two decades, a public and media discourse on immigration has coalesced in Italy, which reflects and reinforces the normative framework highlighted above. With specific attention to the media, Maneri (2011: 77–78) points to 'a monophonic discourse where the voice of a subpopulation, despite constituting a considerable portion of the working population, is practically absent. This discourse always operates from the perspective of an "us" which defines "them" as the problem'. These contextual elements

influence the kind of narrative about national identity articulated by the *Corriere della Sera* about the men's national football team, but they are also contributing to their construction. As Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) argue, 'the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them'.

Media discourse analysis

This article examines the discourse on nationhood and race articulated during Euro 2020 by two major national newspapers, one British, the *Daily Mail*, and one Italian, *Corriere della Sera*, chosen for their level of popularity and historical influence in political discourse in their respective countries. Both media outlets express conservative ideologies, although the *Daily Mail* is more prominent in its support for far right-wing policies, particularly in the areas of immigration and multiculturalism. The *Daily Mail* is a middle market newspaper that caters for an audience broadly placed in between those of the 'quality press' and the sensationalistic tabloids. The newspaper has often presented itself as the 'Voice of Middle England' (Bingham, 2013). *Corriere della Sera* is traditionally considered the voice of the establishment and more moderate on social issues, but over the past 20 years, it has often embraced anti-immigration narratives (Montali et al., 2013). *Corriere della Sera* has the highest circulation among Italian newspapers and is the most visited news website in the country, with about 500.000 digital subscribers (PrimaOnline, 2023). Based on the last available comprehensive figures, the *Daily Mail* has the third highest circulation among UK newspapers after *Metro* and *The Sun* (Mayhew, 2021). The digital partner of the *Daily Mail*, the *MailOnline*, is the second most-read online news media in the United Kingdom after the BBC (Majid, 2023). Our analysis focussed on the print editions of the newspapers, paying attention to the combination of texts and images used in the construction of the stories to capture their rich multimodal articulation of meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998). Albeit limited to two newspapers, this type of analysis provides a wealth of observations and insights into public and media discourses on race and national identity. Further research could consider how the digital environment impacts on the articulation of discourse. In fact, what the reader gets from the digital version of the *Daily Mail* is arguably different from what readers get in print, and not only because of the physical characteristics of the media. On a weekly day, the print edition of the *Daily Mail* contains between 90 and 100 stories. The number of articles published on the *MailOnline* during the 24 hours is generally ten times more.[2]

The observations presented in this article are based on the analysis of the coverage of the six games played by each team between 11 June and 11 July and the final, 13 games in total, looking at articles published the day before of the game, the same day and the day after. Furthermore, the analysis includes also other selected articles published just before and during the tournament. The focus is on the ways the two newspapers represented nationhood and ethnic diversity in their national teams and in their fans, rather than the ways they represented the opponent. This was done with the aim to highlight commonalities and differences in the representation of race and national identity. The articles were read with three codes in mind, whose selection was informed in part by previous studies of the British press: the representation of nationhood and

national identity; the representation of 'fans'; and 'taking the knee'. The last theme was prominent during the Euro 2020; England was just one of the two teams taking the knee before each game in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.[3]

The methodological approach adopted here is a combination of CDA and theories of race and racialisation. Stuart Hall (1996: 613) contends that 'a national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves'. CDA adds a problem-oriented perspective to discourse analysis, with power as its central concern, alongside potential strategies for social change. Texts, such as those produced by newspapers are seen as 'sites of struggle . . . that . . . show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance' (Wodak and Meyer, 2016: 12). Understandably, media are particularly fertile sites in which to observe the articulations of discourse (Fairclough, 1998; van Dijk, 1998). Furthermore, as argued by van Dijk (2001: 145), 'in contemporary information societies, discourse lies at the heart of racism', making it a necessary field of sociopolitical investigation for those interested in the articulation of race and racialisation.

Wodak and Meyer (2016) outline different versions of CDA, emphasising that CDA cannot be considered a uniform method or a theory, and this article concentrates mainly on the social semiotic analysis of multimodal discourse as employed, among others, by Bishop and Jaworski (2003) and Jancsary et al. (2016). Headlines, images, the composition of pages and the content of articles, are the main analytical elements utilised here to examine 'how the newspaper constructs a sense of collective national engagement with the events being reported and in so doing constructs the nation as a homogeneous collective that the (implied) reader is positioned as being a member of' (Bishop and Jaworski 2003: 244). This construction, however, comes with fissures, gaps, such as forms of othering and exclusion that will be evidenced with the help of some examples.

'Us' and 'them'

The use of the pronouns 'us' and 'them' is a key rhetorical strategy to create ingroup and outgroup feelings. De Cillia et al. (1999, p. 163) argue that 'the use of the personal pronoun "we" – including all its dialect forms and the corresponding possessive pronouns – appears to be of utmost importance in the discourses about nations and national identities'. This point is reinforced also in Wodak et al.'s (2009) comprehensive discussion of the discursive formation of national identity, while van Dijk (2001: 146), in his analysis of discourse and racism, contends that 'discriminatory practices . . . always presuppose socially shared and negatively oriented mental representations of Us about Them'. As showed in the literature, pronouns, such as 'we' and 'us' are widely used by the press when covering the national football team. In the words of Bishop and Jaworski (2003: 251), they allow 'us' as the readers to see 'the football team to stand in metonymic relationship for the whole nation'.

The case of the Euro 2020 confirms this trend, but the comparison between the *Daily Mail* and *Corriere della Sera* also evidences some significant differences between the two newspapers and within the *Daily Mail* itself. The *Daily Mail* makes abundant use of these pronouns in the headlines, but not in the articles; match reports, for example, maintain an objective tone, at least in declining the protagonists' person, while articles about

the fans and opinion pieces are more subjective. The Italian newspaper takes a distinctive approach: they make use of the pronoun 'we' in the headlines and throughout the articles, be they match reports, commentary and articles about the fans' celebrations. The identification between the men's national team and the 'nation' appears ubiquitous, unequivocal. At the same time, in both newspapers, the use of 'us' contributes to the othering of those who are not deemed deserving to 'fully' belong (such as children of immigrants and people of colour, and 'bad' fans).

The final game is the moment in which the discursive construction of nationhood reaches its climax. The emotions are highest, and journalists, commentators and editors are more prone than ever to show what the national team means for them and the nation they assume to represent. It is therefore pertinent to start the analysis from the end, as the final epitomises the argument being made. More observations will be drawn from a selection of articles about the event published during the Euro and in the weeks leading to its start. In the following examples the pronouns have been italicised.

Daily Mail, 12 July 2021

Even in defeat *our* footballers have given a lesson in unity and dedication that should inspire *us* all

So England's race of glory is run. Some will say *they* fell at the final hurdle. Or that when it came to the crunch, *they* were found wanting.

(. . .) In reaching the final, *they* achieved what no other men's team has for more than half a century. And although the trophy eluded *their* grasp at the last, *they* can walk tall, heads held high. Football may not quite have come home. But at least *we* have rediscovered the map.

The use of pronouns in the headline and in the article creates a sense of closeness between the newspaper and its audience with the team, but the two remain separate entities. This is clear from the title, where the players are defined as 'our footballers', which 'should inspire us all'. In the first line of the article, the players are always referred with the pronoun 'they'. Only the last sentence of this excerpt includes the 'we', arguably referred to the media outlet and its public (the nation). The front-page article reinforces this framing of the national team as representing the nation but having its own identity, being at the same time 'one of us', possibly the best face of the nation, but still just a group of young talented man. As we will see, the distinction is not irrelevant in comparison with the Italian case.

Daily Mail, 12 July 2017

It all ends in tears. Lionhearts to the last, Southgate fall to heartbreaking penalty shootout loss – AGAIN

It just had to be penalties. England's Three Lions, who had united the nation with *their* run to the final, saw *their* Euro 2020 dreams shattered by Italy last night.

The players are elected 'England's Three Lions', epitomes of the nation, embodiment of one of the oldest symbols of the English monarchy, the coat of arms with the image of three lions, which over time has become a symbol of the nation of England. It is a common trope in the media coverage of the national team. At the same time, in this type of representation, the team maintains a distinct identity within the nation. It is '*their* Euro 2020 dreams'. The coverage of *Corriere della Sera*, on this day like in other matches, articulates a different representation of the team, and of the nation. The front page shows a picture of the team holding the trophy with the headline '*We* are the champions'. At page 2, the main report of the match exemplifies the particular use of pronouns adopted by this media outlet.

> *Corriere della Sera* 12/07/21
>
> This is *our* new time, the proof that *we* are still capable of winning and to be happy: tears of joy at last, and unrestrained happiness, beautiful thoughts, and the super sweet awareness of feeling strong and united.
>
> *We* miss a couple of cross kicks (. . .) For a few minutes *we* are stunned, Sterling is everywhere, Kane does a great job in support, but then – slowly – *we* reorganise.

The team is not only the epitome of the nation; it is its embodiment. The reporter identifies with the players using the pronoun 'we' when talking about actions taken by the players on the pitch. As said, this style of representation, a way of framing the story, characterises all types of articles, including also match analysis and opinion pieces, like in the headlines below published the day Italy beat Spain in the semi-final.

> *Corriere della Sera*, 7 July 2021
>
> ***We are in the final***
>
> *We* seduced luck. *We* beat a team that played better.

The coverage of the event by the *Corriere della Sera*, has generally a more dramatic tone, and refers more often than the *Daily Mail* to the Covid pandemic, arguably reflecting the harder restrictions imposed on Italy by its government. 'It's a year and half that *we* all do bad things, think bad things, that *we* all live in fear. But now, *we* have this feeling of having finally ended up in something beautiful' (17 June 2021).

But who are exactly these nations differently articulated by the British and the Italian press? As noted, the use of the pronoun 'we' is an essential tool of the discursive strategies employed by the press in covering the national team. According to Wodak et al. (2009: 33), constructive strategies 'attempt to construct and to establish a certain national identity by promoting unification, identification and solidarity, as well as differentiation'. The coverage of the *Daily Mail* during Euro 2020 presents many examples of all these dimensions, highlighting a positive representation of a team made of players of different ethnic and national backgrounds, including a significant number of Black players. Taking stock of the positive feeling created by the team led by Southgate, one may

argue that the *Daily Mail* is aligning to the prevalent sentiments, but the reality is more nuanced, as evidenced in the type of framing of ethnic diversity and immigration that traditionally characterises this media organisation. On the day before the final, former BBC presenter turned columnist John Humphrys makes a direct connection between the team and the 'nation'.

> ***Mail on Sunday 10 July 2021***
>
> I'm no football fan or monarchist . . . but even I can celebrate these two faces of patriotism

The image accompanying the article shows England's black star player Raheem Sterling and Prince William, both celebrating a goal, one on the pitch, the other in the stands. However, just a few weeks before, on the second day of the tournament, Humphrys had used his column to share quite a different view about 'multiculturalism'. In that occasion, he aimed criticism at the England players that took the knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, while figuratively expressing the view of 'the majority' of England fans.

> *Daily Mail*, 12 June 2021
>
> **I won't be a foot soldier in the woke war**
>
> But there will be many in that stadium who will not boo. Nor will they applaud (. . .) They 'don't like seeing statues being pulled down, buildings renamed, heroes shamed and feeling they should apologise for having a white skin.

In his analysis of opinions and ideologies in the press, van Dijk (1998: 25) emphasises the social and cognitive dimensions of ideologies expressed in opinion pieces. He argues that 'the main cognitive function of ideologies is to organize specific group attitudes'. By claiming that England fans 'should not apologise for having a white skin', Humphrys articulates a specific attitude about (white) identity, and about social relations in British society, while also drawing on a prominent racist trope in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests (West et al., 2021). The apparent contrast between this view and the one expressed the day before the final encapsulates the broader discourse on nationhood and race emerging from the pages of the *Daily Mail*. On the same day in which Humphrys published his rebuttal of Black Lives Matter, a full page celebrated the diversity in the England team by interviewing the Football Association diversity chief Paul Elliott, with the headline: 'Unity of black and white players is strongest it's been in 30 years' (*DM*, 12 June 2021). Along similar conflicting lines are the thoughts of Greg Dyke, former chairman of the FA, published on the day after the final. On one hand, Dyke celebrates nationhood and diversity ('football remains the crucible of our nations' emotions and our shared identity . . . a crucial unifying philosophy that brings together lads who have come from a myriad of different teams and backgrounds'). On the other hand, he marks the boundaries of belonging in the way he describes the two most prominent players in the team, Sterling ('a young man whose father was murdered on the streets of Jamaica') and Kane ('who seems to echo something of 1966 and our more modest footballing

past'). One is defined by his (negative) connection to Jamaica, the other, whose paternal roots are Irish, is seen as the testimonial of pure Englishness in football, epitomised with the link to a pivotal event in national sports memory.

The reporting of England's games at Euro 2020 by the *Daily Mail* is generally supportive of the team's ethnic diversity. Black players, such as Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rushford are often portrayed in enthusiastic tones. For example, the last friendly game played by England before the Euro is presented with this headline: 'Magic Marcus is England's Captain Fantastic' (*DM*, 7 June 2021). The positive framing continues as the team progresses through the tournament. The day after England beat Germany to reach the quarter finals, Sterling is hailed in the subheading as 'the toast of a nation and the attacking heartbeat of Three Lions team' (*DM*, 31 June 2021). However, both Rashford and Sterling are portrayed by the same newspaper in a different light when away from the game, with the use of discriminative stereotypes about Black people in British society.

Daily Mail, 15 November 2020

What a result! Campaigning football star Marcus Rashford has bought five luxury homes worth more than £2 million

Daily Mail, 30 June 2016

'That's a lot of Sterling! £180,000-a-week England flop Raheem shows off blinging house he bought for his mum – complete with jewel-encrusted bathroom – hours after flying home in disgrace from Euro 2016

Based on these examples and the analysis of the articles published during the Euro 2020, it appears that the coverage of the *Daily Mail* makes visible a tension between conflicting ideas of nationhood: one pertains to the 'sporting nation', embodied in the national (men's) football team, which happily welcomes people of different nationalities and skin colour as long as they bring success and prestige to the country; the other is the civic nation, English society at large, in which a different set of rules apply. This resonates with what Garland (2004: 90) evidenced in his analysis of the British media during the 2002 World Cup: 'English identity was a temporary, contingent phenomenon, that could be given and taken away depending on the context'. On a broader, social and political level, this type of media discourse foregrounds the formation of a hierarchy of belonging in British society, where, according to Back et al. (2012: 140),

> [M]inority communities are positioned differently within what we can term a new hierarchy of belonging. Here, the fantasy of white restoration is replaced by a racial reordering, a differential inclusion that is selective and conflict-ridden.

Popular sports, such as football have the power to magnify hierarchies of belonging and tensions within the representation of the nation. This is reflected in the personal experience of Liverpool FC and England legend John Barnes (2022), 'in one moment, a kid from Jamaica can be a celebrated symbol of an English city; in another, we can be told

that we do not even have the right to be here'. In fact, this is precisely what happened to the three young Black English players who missed the penalties in the Euro 2020 final: they were subjected to 'a storm of online racist abuse' (Holden and Phillips, 2021).

During the tournament, the Italian press seemed oblivious to the fact that no player of immigrant background was included in the squad, despite the increasing diversity in Italian society, where 11.2 percent of the population have an immigrant background. However, the issue was indirectly raised when the selection was announced, about a month before the start of the tournament. On that day, *Corriere della Sera* published an interview with Angelo Ogbonna, Italian player of Nigerian background signed to West Ham in the English Premier League. Ogbonna openly criticised Italy's manager Roberto Mancini selection criteria, which, according to him, were not based on merit (*CdS*, 31 May 2021). Some media also questioned the exclusion of Moise Kean, another Black player of immigrant background, who despite a good season had not been selected.[4] Over the past decade, the Italian Football Federation have approached several South American players whose ancestors were from Italy, inviting them to apply for Italian citizenship and to represent this country. This practice recalls what the Italian federation did in the 1930s, during the Fascist regime, when they selected players born in South America to Italian parents (Martin, 2004). Stuart Hall (2018: 105) argues that 'practices always have a meaning, and meanings organise practices and produce real effects'. We can argue that the practice of favouring the selection of players linked to Italy through *jus sanguinis*, rather than players born in Italy to foreign nationals (*jus soli*) is part of a discourse on nationhood, which is pervasive across Italian institutions, including the media (Maneri, 2011). This discourse is active in creating feelings of non-belonging among children of immigrants (Antonsich, 2022). During the tournament, the *Corriere della Sera* published stories about the South American players celebrating their distant Italian roots, while indirectly acknowledging that their selection, although legitimate, may have not been void of political implications, considering the tense debate about citizenship rights for youth of migrant descent (Milan, 2022).

> *Corriere della Sera*, 14 June 2021
>
> **The irreplaceable Jorginho at Euro 2021: grown up thanks to his mother's football lessons**
>
> We should bless the day when Tite, Brazil's coach, decided he could do without Jorginho (. . .) Jorginho took notice and remembered to have a very distant relative on his father's side in the province of Vicenza: paperwork, Italian citizenship, Devis Mangia calls him for Italy Under 21, Antonio Conte gives him his debut with the senior national team. History is written.

In the case of Emerson Palmieri, a former Brazil youth international who acquired Italian citizenship at the age of 23 and the same year was selected for Italy's senior team, the media framing includes the powerful code of 'motherhood', which reinforces the connection to an imagined 'Italianness': 'Brazilian by birth, with *mamma* Eliana originally from Rossano Calabro, where the ancestor Alfonso was born' (CdS, 6 July 2021).[5] Furthermore, the country of birth of the players with Italian ancestry (oriundi) is not problematised or charged with negative connotations, as it sometimes happens in media

narratives of Black Italians whose family roots are in Africa. The oriundi are automatically accepted because they are Italians by blood. On the contrary, throughout his career with the national team, Mario Balotelli's was constantly reminded of its conditional inclusion in the 'nation'; an inclusion that was also exclusive (Mauro, 2020).

The discursive naturalisation of *jus sanguinis*, its constant reproduction as commonsense by the media, particularly in relation to major sport events, feeds into a dominant discourse that places 'immigrants', especially those of darker skin, outside of the nation. A regime of truth (Foucault, 1977: 23) comes to the fore that constructs the immigrant as the outsider, 'people who by virtue of their characteristics are "naturally" different in a rigid and permanent way' (Maneri, 2011: 81).

Who are the fans?

The representation of 'nationhood' and 'race' in relation to the Euro 2020 needs necessarily to also include the coverage of fans. Since the 1980s, supporters of the (men's) England team have been a reason of concern for British media, worried by the 'national shame' often caused by travelling fans, the 'hooligans' (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003; Maguire and Poulton, 1999). Consequently, the press has historically given much attention to the behaviour of fans. In the case of the *Daily Mail*, the visual element plays a key role in the representational process through the large use of photos of England fans. What emerges is a visible distinction between 'good' and 'bad' fans, with some remarkable differences from previous accounts provided by the literature.

After each England's game, the *Daily Mail* usually places the coverage of fans' celebrations before the articles about the game. This editorial decision shows an order of importance, a hierarchy (van Dijk, 1998), which is reflected also in the amount of space given to the fans in the pages. The day after the final, four pages are about the 'good fans', which include primarily young women wearing the jersey of the national team or emblazoned in the St George's Cross flag. Medium shots and close-ups take much of the space. Visibly, they are almost all 'white'. In the coverage of the seven matches played by England, 'non-white' fans are almost completely absent. This 'racial' selection of fans echoes the findings of previous studies on the tabloids' coverage of the Euro 2000 (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003), the 2010 World Cup (Vincent and Hill, 2011) and the Euro 2012 (Vincent and Harris, 2014). However, what is remarkably different is the specific focus on young female fans, which were not prominent in newspapers coverage in the past. What has changed? Over the last decade, and particularly since the Women's Euro 2005, women have become more visible in the game, both as players and spectators in women's and men's football alike (Bell, 2019). Arguably, the *Daily Mail* aims to responds to this trend, although overemphasising the presence of women, essentially young and white, in the visual representation of fans celebrations. Such editorial decisions are understandably not 'innocent'. In media discourse, 'the combination of modes suggests particular versions of social reality that are not neutral with regard to power: they serve some interests while marginalizing others' (Jancsary et al., 2016: 185). It should also be considered that, according to the *Daily Mail*, 54 percent of its readership is made of women (Ponsford, 2023).

The 'bad' fans are those engaging in disturbances and violence, which the press have historically tried to marginalise applying discursive strategies, such as homogenisation (they are all the same) and minorisation (they do not represent the majority) (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003). They are given less attention compared to the 'good' fans; their stories usually appear at the bottom of the page. There are no medium shots or close-ups for them; they are showed in large groups (the crowd), without their faces being visible. The headlines reinforce the negative framing; for example, on the day after the final, the article about the fans who clashed with the police in Leicester Square is placed at page 10, with the headline: 'The fans who let us down' (*Daily Mail*, 12 July 2021). Here, the use of the pronoun 'us' operates as a form or othering and minorisation of the 'bad' fans, which is in opposition to the way the other fans are framed.

The case of the Italian press is strikingly different. The fans receive remarkably less attention compared to the British press. On the day after the final, the coverage of the celebrations across Italy is placed at page 12 of *Corriere della Sera*; all the previous pages are about the game, including match reports, analysis and opinion pieces. As in all previous games played by the Italian side, the flag is the dominant signifier in the media representation. All images include multiple flags; the tricolour is everywhere. Young people are prominent in the pictures; at the centre of the first of the two pages dedicated to the fans there is a close-up of a young woman with her face painted green, white and red. The importance given to the flag is testified by the fact that on 2 July *Corriere della Sera* invited his readers to purchase Italy's flag alongside the newspaper, at an extra cost of €2. During the Euro, the visual representation of the fans gathering in Italian cities to celebrate the success of the national team includes exclusively 'white' faces. Similarly to the team, there is no trace of ethnic and racial diversity in this framing of Italian society. How do the young Italians whose parents are originally from another country relate to all this? Fans are never problematised, like in England, or made the focus of special attention. Their identity and their identification with the winning (men's) team are uncontested. Despite the historical cultural differences, exemplified by the presence of 12 recognised linguistic minorities, its colonial past and the significant proportion of people with an immigrant background, the coverage of the men's national football team, and its fans, is monolithic in its articulation of the idea of Italian identity based on the right of blood (*jus sanguinis*).

Conclusion

One of the leading arguments of this article is that debates about nationalism, within and outside media studies, tend to overlook the role of 'race' in the history of European nationalism. Reading media discourses on nationhood from this perspective allows to better distinguish common patterns and contextual differences across countries. The centrality of 'immigration' in political discourse in Western Europe makes such comparative approaches particularly useful, if not necessary. Both the *Daily Mail* and *Corriere della Sera* use the men's national football team as a key projection of the 'nation', but there are differences in the way they do it. On one hand, the *Daily Mail* articulates a hierarchy of belonging between the sporting nation and civic nation, which at the same time includes and excludes Black players. On the other hand, while making ample use of pronouns 'we' and 'us', tends to frame the team as having its own identity *within* the nation, functioning

as a sub-category. The Italian newspaper creates a complete identification of the 'nation' (journalists, columnists and the readers) with the team. This sense of unity, however, tends to exalt the principle of *jus sanguinis* as the dominant marker of national identity, while obliterating the ethnic and cultural diversity that characterises Italian society.

These observations resonate with and reinforce certain patterns evidenced in studies across Europe on the role of sports media in the articulation of race and national identity (Almeida, 2022; Fischer and Mohrman, 2021; Longas Luque and van Sterkenburg, 2022; Mauro and Martínez-Corcuera, 2020; van Sterkenburg, 2019). Mass media play a significant role in the (co)construction and dissemination of exclusionary understandings of national identity; by doing so, they foreground hierarchies of belonging, which place Black and ethnic minority players and fans under a form of conditional, temporary inclusion. At the same time, this study shows that such hierarchies of belonging take distinctive forms depending on the contexts, the different histories and definitions of nationhood. Specific to the Italian case is, for example, the media framing of naturalised players with Italian ancestry (oriundi), who are perceived to be *more* Italian than players born in Italy to immigrant parents.

The comparative analysis has confirmed the importance of popular sports such as football in imagining the 'nation', and the key role of newspapers as prism through which to observe these dynamics. It also showed that social processes can influence and be influenced by what mass media do. For instance, while the England team, over the last 20 years, has visibly grown in diversity, and the coverage has become more inclusive and responsive to issues of racism in sport, the representation of 'fans' still emphasises a monocultural idea of the nation, as evidenced in literature more than a decade ago (Vincent and Hill, 2011). The changes occurring in mass communication, and particularly the adaptation of newspaper to different digital forms of news dissemination and consumption, will arguably impact the study of media discourse in the future. This is a venue for further research.

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Data sharing not applicable to this article as no data sets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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Notes

1. In legal theory, the jus soli (Latin: 'right of the soil') is

   > 'the rule or law that provides that citizenship is acquired by birth within the territory of the state, regardless of parental citizenship (. . .) It differs from jus sanguinis ("right of blood"),

which grants citizenship on the basis of the citizenship possessed by one's parent or parents'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/jus-soli

2. For example, on 11 July 2021, the day of the Euro 2020 final, the *MailOnline* published 981 articles, 11.7 percent of which were about the Euro.
3. Taking the knee is a symbolic gesture against racism originated by American football player Colin Kaepernick on 1 September 2016, in protest for the lack of attention given to issues of racial inequality and police brutality in the United States.
4. Football Italia (2021).
5. Alfonso Palmieri was born in Italy in 1853.

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