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### “GOOOOOAL!”: An Exploration of the Dutch-Moroccan Footballer Experience

Kate J. Freeman  
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“GOOOOOAL!”: An Exploration of the Dutch-Moroccan Footballer Experience  
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### Abstract

This study seeks to explore how fans of the Dutch national football team, Oranje, engage with the portrayal of Dutch-Moroccan footballers who are navigating between the paradigms of “success story” and “problematic immigrant.” In the climate of the seemingly tolerant country of the Netherlands, we hypothesize that fans of Dutch football interpret and perpetuate the concept that minoritized men have to maintain a flawless performance based on conditions determined by the majority in order to ascertain a higher position in society. By employing Krippendorff’s theory of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), we explore the language used to describe three Dutch-Moroccan footballers (Sofyan Amrabat, Hakim Ziyech, and Mohamed Ihattaren) in two different types of sources: a) news articles on the Football Oranje website, and b) an international fan group for Oranje on Facebook. Results indicate support for three major themes that appeared in the literature: Othering, transnationality, and globalization, which indicated varying levels of “Dutchness.” The qualitative findings indicate that Dutch-Moroccan football players are considered successful Dutch citizens when they perform their role as a football player perfectly, enabling them to escape their minority group stereotypes. However, if they do not perform this flawlessly, they are immediately Othered as an outsider. Limitations and future directions of this research are discussed.

*Keywords:* sociology, dual-citizen, football, othering, transnationality, globalization

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## “GOOOOOAL!”: An Exploration of the Dutch-Moroccan Footballer Experience

### 1. Introduction

Recently, the story of Mohamed Ihattaren headlined both Moroccan and Dutch news. At only age 17, the young prodigy that currently plays for PSV Eindhoven had caught the eye of the head coaches of Morocco, his “country of origin”, and the Netherlands, his “birth country” which had sparked a serious debate between the countries (Koundouno, 2019). Additionally, the coach of Oranje, the Dutch national team, strongly suggested that Ihattaren stay in the Netherlands, even going so far as to threaten the player with formalized paperwork which has not been dictated by FIFA and is often only a player’s last resort to leave a team. The heated debate over Ihattaren’s career is indicative of the narrative playing out in football culture today. It draws into question the stabilization of constructs such as nationality and masculinity (which are often intertwined) for dual-national football players seemingly torn between two cultures.

This work will focus on the intersections between masculinity, nationality, and football by exploring the confines of each through the portrayal of Dutch-Moroccan players on the Dutch national team in the media and through the eyes of the fans. Researchers intentionally chose to examine these portrayals from a Dutch perspective. This is not to minimize this issue to a solely western viewpoint; globalization and Othering of players is a complex issue and exists throughout the world. Specifically, we ask: how do fans of the Dutch national football team engage with the portrayal of Dutch-Moroccan footballers who are navigating between the paradigms of “success story” and “problematic immigrant”?

In the first section, the introduction, we have presented the case study of Mohamed Ihattaren, which will later be examined further in the methodology. Ihattaren represents the

struggle of dual-citizen football players across the world. In this introduction, we include the research question that this paper addresses. The second section speaks to the current literature surrounding the position of dual-citizen male athletes by situating them in a toxic environment where failing to perform normatively would immediately destroy their reputation in society. This also includes a subsection to contextualize the current work. After examining the literature, the third section justifies the methodology of conducting a qualitative content analysis based on various media sources as well as the public's response to these sources as seen in the comments left on them. Finally, in the last section, we move into a discussion of the themes that emerged in the language in the media and the public reactions in order to gauge the implications that these results may have. Limitations, implications, and future directions for work regarding dual-citizen males and sports are discussed.



## 2. Literature Review

This section will start by outlining the role of the dual citizens in societal structures, drawing from work centering on ultimate inclusion or exclusion resulting from their performance in the new country. Then, we focus further on the man with a migration background who is often Othered as a dangerous criminal that perpetuates both petty crime and violence, particularly towards white women. This framework makes it possible to examine situations such as Ihattaren's through a gendered lens where the need for a flawless demonstration of masculinity creates an additional hurdle. It then culminates in a discussion of football culture as we examine why men with a dual citizenship are able to transcend the stereotypes surrounding their immigrant background in this environment specifically. We end the literature review with a final discussion of the conditions of the current study, including the researcher's hypotheses based on the literature and how this work fills the current gaps in the research.

### 2.1 The Role of The Dual Citizen

We begin by defining some key terms used in migration literature, before going on to explore concepts that work against the people that are Othered by nativist views, including stereotype threat. We also examine how the success (or lack thereof) of their performance of transnationality ultimately leads to their social inclusion or exclusion.

For the purposes of this work, it is important first to define who qualifies as a dual citizen and who does not, as there are a growing number of transnational identities that one can hold. Transnationality refers to the balance of maintaining one's identity in a new country, including how they retain relationships with communities in their country of origin (Vertovec, 2004). However, defining this is easier said than done as the definition varies based on many factors

including country of origin and destination country. Here, we expand the meaning of transnationality to include partaking in more of an active balancing of multiple identities, which can often lead to disregarding one part of the identity entirely.

Migrant is usually an all-encompassing term used to include anyone moving country to country, which also applies to refugees or asylum seekers as well (Vore, 2015). Yet, while “migrant” is typically associated with people that move to find jobs, refugees are individuals that have to flee their country because of persecution. Another vague term that is often used in migration literature in “diaspora.” There are three criteria that underlie most definitions of a diaspora: a) dispersion in space, b) orientation to the homeland, and c) boundary-maintenance, or preserving a distinctive identity from what the researcher describes as the “host country” (Brubaker, 2005). Finally, the term “immigrant” implies “moving with the intention of settling” (Vore, 2015). Often, this word is not used within the international literature only because immigration has a legal meaning in the United States and is often connected to other labels such as “illegal” or “undocumented.”

Based on these definitions, the researchers chose to only use “dual citizen” in this work as none of the other terms accurately represent the feelings of integration and social belonging that we argue dual citizens are seeking. It is also important to note that much of the literature regarding dual citizens refers to the country that they live in as a “host country”, which is disadvantageous as well because it others people in what may be the only culture they have ever known. Many individuals with dual identities have families with a migration background, but also have a strong association with their current country’s culture, which creates friction between the majority and minority cultures in the country that they live in (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). For

example, in order to declare the Dutch nationality, you must renounce all other nationalities, unless you fall into an “exception” category (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). Dual citizenship is considered an exception, but only for certain cultures. One of these noted exceptions is Morocco, as the Dutch government states that it is “not socially acceptable to renounce the Moroccan nationality.” This makes being a Dutch-Moroccan citizen even more of a minoritized group, creating a more difficult path to integration for these individuals.

### *Proving Yourself*

A nativist approach is typically adopted when discussing whether someone is actually a part of one’s culture. This theoretical framework is especially poignant in the Netherlands as the country is split into “autochthones” and “allochthones”, where “autochthonous” individuals refer to white Dutch citizens have been constructed as native (Mepschen, 2016). As Mepschen explains in his work, “autochthony has implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) functioned as the unreflexive norm, a neutral category, a natural fact without a history or relational context. It functions, like whiteness, as a ‘reference category’ against which deviant cultures can be measured, or as a cultural ‘whole’ into which minoritized and racialized Others can be reasonably expected to ‘integrate’” (2016). This nativist distinction makes Dutchness seem like it is able to be visibly measured, which creates the need for those Othered as “allochthones” to constantly prove themselves. Not only that, but it also makes Dutchness seem like a stable, developed category, and not something that is dynamic and changing. This provides a scapegoat for people to fall back on traditional stereotypes instead of evolving their own definitions of what it means to be Dutch.

Because dual citizens are Othered from the majority, one of the major obstacles facing them is stereotype threat. Much of the existing literature regarding dual-citizens focuses on the benefits of having a dual nationality, including the ability to adapt and increased social support networks (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). However, stereotype threat refers to the idea that individuals may feel an increased pressure to behave in socially acceptable ways according to the majority in order to avoid confirming stereotypes about one's group in the minority (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). This reveals an additional pressure that dual citizens may have to cope with as they attempt to navigate the attitudes of the other citizens.

### ***Inclusion or Exclusion?***

Factors such as stereotype threat are important because the individual's performance of the majority culture determines their ultimate acceptance or rejection from that culture. There are four dimensions of integration that are measured in migration literature: a) socio-economic, b) cultural, c) legal and political, and d) attitude of recipient societies (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003). Often, these are interconnected: for example, low socio-economic status may impact career development or interaction with the "recipient" community. The focus for this work is mostly the second and fourth dimensions, which are indicated by standards such as language skills, perceptions of the majority and minority cultures, and reports of discrimination (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003). If each of the indicators are met, the migration is considered "successful." However, integration is not as simple as merely ticking boxes to indicate whether or not one feels as though they belong in their country.

Research findings show that Dutch citizens still feel that dual-citizens are threatening their symbolic sense of group (Vink, Schmeets, & Mennes, 2018), even though many dual-

citizens have been born and raised within the country. Thus, when these dual-citizens are Othered as immigrants, it can be even more hurtful as they do not connect with either nationality that they are associated with. Assimilation is often considered “successful” when the dual-citizens entirely adopt the country that they live in, which often means disregarding the culture of their ancestry (Waters & Jimenez, 2005). This creates a scenario in which dual-citizens can never fully embrace both of their cultures: they must choose to fully accept the culture in their country (and reject their country of ancestry) or admit their other nationality’s culture and risk rejection from their country.

## **2.2 “Dangerous Criminals”: Being a Man of Migration**

In 1975, David and Brannon produced work on the four “rules” of masculine behavior, which solidified the foundation of masculinities work for years to come. The rules were: 1) “no sissy stuff”, 2) “be a big wheel”, 3) “be a sturdy oak”, and 4) “give ‘em hell.” While more than 40 years have passed since the work has been distributed, these pillars of manhood still stand firmly as what is believed to be the epitome of masculinity. The construct of masculinity is also founded in the westernized idea that it is “hegemonic” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The theory of hegemonic masculinity asserts that there are dominant and subordinated masculine traits. For example, white men are dominant, while all men of color are hierarchically below them. Because of this, black and brown men are automatically at a disadvantage in their performances of masculinity. In this section, we explore the major archetype of men with a migration background (the “dangerous criminal”) and two of its major dimensions: a) minor crimes and b) violence against women. We explore this representation as a negative label that

implies a level of threat, and note the consequences that this stereotype may have for men with a migration background.

### ***Minor Crimes***

It is a common stereotype that men with migration backgrounds are responsible for low-level crimes, such as burglary and theft. In work by Veen, Stevens, Doreleijers, and Vollebergh (2009), adolescents of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands were incarcerated more often, for more offenses, and at a younger age than “native” Dutch adolescents. Yet, findings show that while Dutch-Moroccan adolescents did account for most property crimes, Dutch adolescents perpetrated the other three types of crime (violent, sexual, and arson crimes). These findings imply that Dutch-Moroccan adolescents commit more minor crimes, while other groups commit higher level, more dangerous crimes, which is a stereotype represented throughout media and popular culture. Thus, while the idea of this group being “dangerous” is often unfounded, this maintains the stereotype that migrant men are delinquents that commit petty crimes. This is often attributed to the lower socio-economic status they are also stereotyped for (Bovenkerk & Fokkema, 2015).

### ***Violence Against Women***

Men with migration backgrounds are also stereotyped in how they interact with women. Although no migrant is typically regarded in a positive light by media sources, the images portrayed of migrant men, women, and families are decidedly different (de Hart, 2017). Women are typically viewed as victims of a patriarchal, sexist, and rigid society, while men are shown as the ones wielding this ultimate power. Because of this, many crimes of sexual assault are attributed to men who “looked like migrants”, drawing on the masculine stereotypes and the

nativist frameworks that exist. Media sources such as magazine covers portray images of migrant and non-migrant women being terrorized by brown male hands (de Hart, 2017). Because of this rhetoric, there is a widespread fear of men with migration backgrounds as they are believed more often to perpetrate the sexual assault of white and non-white women. This creates an added level of stereotype that must be overcome in order for these men to be accepted in society.

### **2.3 What Makes Sports Different?**

In the last section, we established the men with a migration background have a specific stereotyped position in Western society. Yet, this archetype changes somehow within sports culture. Recent work has shown that that even watching the World Cup on Dutch TV with others that are ethnically diverse creates a sense of “national bonding” (van Sterkenburg, 2013). While there was still evidence of microaggressions, viewers felt a sense of pride watching the Dutch national team with other Dutch citizens. In this section, we will outline the foundations of sports and the groupism that exists due to the presence of clubs. We also discuss the impacts of the globalization of the sport to emphasize its impact on nationality. Finally, we examine how men of migration are able to overcome their stereotypes in this particular space.

#### ***History and Development***

Football is the most popular sport in the world. Known as “soccer” in some parts of the world, it was thought to be invented around the 13th century but did not become recognizable as the sport we know today until the 19th century (Goulstone, 2000). There are many theories as to the game’s true origins, but the public school system in England is often thought to have organized the game into what it is today with rules, regulations, matches, and positions. Because

it was accessible and easy to play anywhere, it became a game that men of any socioeconomic status could play. The perception of football as a working-class game propelled it to wild popularity with the everyday man, and it has remained much admired since then (Goulstone, 2000). These paths of development have led to the game of football as we know it today.

### *Clubs and Hooligan Culture*

One element that makes football distinct is the existence and popularity of football clubs and their devoted hooligan fans. While these clubs exist throughout the world, some of the most globally known are located in western Europe. A club is seen as a community of people that share cultural and social values, while supporting a specific football team (Oppenhuisen & van Zoonen, 2006). The formation of clubs is important as it illustrates the recognition of formalized spaces. In line with the theory of groupism (the idea that groups form as relative to other groups; Brubaker, 2004), because these clubs have intentional target populations, they may also have ideas of who is not a part of their group in comparison. This could be anything from opposing values, to associating other groups with moral failings and bad judgment. Additionally, the clubs are viewed in opposition to one another merely because of their associations (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Thus, clubs represent more than just a love of the game: they are clearly defined, exclusionary, and particular to a certain target. Football clubs are a crucial part of contextualizing the interactions between nationality, masculinity, and football because one's chosen club can shape the way that a fan experiences the sport, which can reflect their values and sense of nationalism.

The often violent, intense fans of these clubs are known as "hooligans", and although they were made up of historically working-class individuals, they are now are a heterogenous



group of many educational and socioeconomic backgrounds (Spaaij, 2007). Similar to the “ultras”, which are similar hardcore fans originating in Italy, hooligans are motivated by the “buzz” of football and many have been engaged within the hooligan culture since its early growth. Hooligans are particularly relevant to this discussion because of their violent and often racist acts. Although this is not specific to the Netherlands, a prominent Dutch example took place in 1995 where there were protests of racist abuse against the black players on Amsterdam’s AJAX club team (Cerrahoglu, 2016). More recently, in November 2019, game play between two Dutch club teams was halted after the crowd chanted racist songs about the fictional Dutch character “Zwarte Piet” who has lately been a widely contested symbol of blackface in the Netherlands (Greze, 2019). This incident can also be connected to masculinity as the player targeted by the chanting was called a “pathetic little man” after walking off the field due to the abuse. There have also been many accounts of hate speech and racist slurs shouted by hooligans from other European countries. It is important to note how radical and outspoken hooligan discrimination is as we move forward in this work in order to contextualize the fan comments later on.

### ***Football Globalization***

As football grew in popularity, it became marketed internationally. This globalization allowed for a new sort of transaction: buying and trading players from other countries. Particularly, as Giulianotti asserts in his work (2014), the “core nations” such as the USA and Europe that dominate the global economy also dominate the structure of migration within sport. Essentially, this illustrates a cultural imperialist stance: the best players of “peripheral” countries existing outside of the core would be chosen in a selection that left the “peripheral” countries

without their most talented players. Some teams even go so far as to bribe or threaten players to choose their team, such as in Ihattaren's case at the beginning when he was threatened by the coach of the Dutch national team. Another Dutch-Moroccan player that will be discussed later, Hakim Ziyech, had to defend the Moroccan national team when they were accused of bribing many Dutch-Moroccans to play for Morocco instead of the Netherlands (Ennaji, 2019). Because of globalization, the team you choose now illustrates the nation that you are pledging allegiance to, yet we are left with players that have varying levels of association with their teams.

This is the root of the debate we have seen time and time again: is the decision to play for a team about the football team itself, or is it indicative of the country? For dual-citizens, these questions become even harder to answer because they have multiple nationalities. Yet, there are no questions raised regarding the loyalty of players that only have one nationality (Koundouno, 2019). The globalization of sports has shifted ideas of nationality and can be used as integration when accepting others into the group, but also as a dividing mechanism (Muller, van Zoonen, de Roode, 2008). Because of this trend, we can now reconsider migration and sport patterns to see how they are affecting stereotypes such as those associated with men of migration.

### ***Transcending Clichés***

As illustrated throughout this paper, men of migration are associated with stereotypes that represent them as poor delinquents that are not true Dutch citizens. However, this changes in the discussion of sports. This can be seen most directly in an examination of the Olympic Games, where "nationality swapping" (adopting a new nationality in order to represent a new country) is becoming increasingly common. (Jansen, Oonk, & Engbersen, 2018). Immigrants are called criminals, openly discriminated against, and accused of threatening culture until they bring a

talent in sports to the country. Research has even shown that citizenship can be obtained more easily if you are an athlete (de Queiroz, 2004), citing the case of Francis Obikwelu from Nigeria whose athletic career helped him to obtain Portuguese citizenship “without any hassles.” This literature implies that men of migration backgrounds are seen as negative outsiders unless they have athletic skill. Then, they are part of what makes the nation proud.

However, this idea of overcoming the stereotypes is not without conditions: you must perform your role flawlessly in order to succeed. This can be seen in the recent case of the footballer Mesut Ozil, a third generation Turkish-German citizen (BBC Sport, 2018). Ozil was part of the German national team that took part in a “disappointing” World Cup tournament that year. He was quoted saying: “I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose.” Thus, despite the success he has achieved as a footballer on the national team, he is immediately the first to be blamed when the team does not do well. This shows the perfection that players must constantly achieve in order to be valued members of the team.

#### **2.4 Dutch-Moroccan Culture**

The Dutch are known for their tolerant, progressive stance. However, this does not make them exempt from racism and discrimination. In the Netherlands, many “pillars” of culture have emerged that declare themselves to be separate, unassociated entities (Mepschen, 2017). This is indicative of the exclusionary culture within the country. The growing sentiment within the Netherlands is that Dutch culture is being eroded by globalization (Lechner, 2007b). One of the groups that has been framed in opposition to the Dutch is the Moroccans. In his work regarding tolerance politics in the Netherlands, Peter van der Veer (2006) describes the initial wave of

immigration from Morocco to the Netherlands: “In addition, the Netherlands faced a problem with the Turkish and Moroccan so-called guest workers who had immigrated in the 1960s. Most of these workers had remained in Holland but lost their jobs with the decline of manufacture and lived on welfare. Most had brought their families, and their children tended to marry native Turks and Moroccans, thus creating ethnic enclaves that were as much connected to their countries of ancestry as to the Netherlands. Immigrants developed a reputation for being criminals as a growing underclass of Moroccan youths, in particular, became involved with petty crimes like purse snatching and auto theft.” Because of this wave of immigration, Moroccans became more common in the Netherlands than they had ever been before. This marks the establishment of Moroccans as a group.

Work by Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Uitermark (2014) also illustrates the exclusionary politics that the Netherlands practices. In claiming a progressive in sexuality, the Dutch assert white innocence in regard to Othered groups. Essentially, the Dutch maintain a tolerant stance because they refuse to address any sort of racial politics. This creates a dichotomy for those immigrants or asylum seekers that have entered the country, such as the Moroccans.

After immigrating to the Netherlands, Moroccan immigrants were quickly branded as petty criminals. Thus, the Dutch-Moroccan identity was born out of stereotypes of the first wave of immigrants. Recent work has done more to explore the everyday experience of Dutch-Moroccan dual-citizens. When compared to both Dutch and Moroccan individuals, Dutch-Moroccans were the most proud of their culture (Azghari, Hooghiemstra, & Van de Vijver, 2015). Although they predominantly speak Dutch, their overall participation in “Dutch

communities” was found to be lower than the other groups. However, while it is commonly believed that increasing the density of one’s group would allow for better overall well-being, this was also not the case for Dutch-Moroccans (Schrier et al., 2014). This implies that socio-economics status and individual factors are more influential than neighborhood for one’s mental health. Additionally, gender and parenting within families may look different due to Muslim upbringing, however the roles of parents are more heterogeneous than previously assumed (Pels, 2000). The different roles that fathers play in the family structures impact Dutch-Moroccan dual-citizens as their traditional ideals of masculinity limit them from entering “feminine” spheres such as the home. This research creates a profile of Dutch-Moroccan dual-citizens as a group, which articulates that this group has specific and unique needs within the Netherlands while simultaneously Othering them from Dutch citizens.

## **2.5 Keywords**

In the current study, both the language used in the main post/article and the comments were analyzed in line with concepts from the literature. The three major theories that were examined were: a) Othering, b) transnationality, and c) globalization. In the data, the theme of “Othering” was present any time someone separated one group from another. This illustrates an “us versus them” mentality similar to groupism and it is clear in this type of comment that the person does not consider the player to be “one of them.” In accordance with Vertovec’s definition of “transnationality” (2004), we also analyzed how the sources characterized the identity and nationality of the players. As transnationality refers to reconciling one’s identity with the dominant norms, these comments mentioned the distinction between being Dutch and

not being Dutch. Additionally, some sources also mentioned the duality of identity, which was also noted. Finally, data was analyzed for the theme of globalization. This included mentions of teams trading players to illustrate the commercialization of football. Often these did not include remarks regarding player autonomy in career decisions. These themes were chosen from the literature because they revealed whether or not the media and the fans acknowledged one or both nationalities of the players.

### 3. Case Study

#### 3.1 Dutch and Moroccan Football

The case study revolves around three players choosing which national team they want to play for: Oranje, the Dutch team, or the Atlas Lions, the Moroccan team. The Dutch national team was created in 1905 with its first international match against Belgium on April 30th (“Nederlands Elftal: Historie,” n.d.). The team did well in its early years as it placed in tournaments and won Olympic medals in the early part of the 1900’s. After a slump in the middle of the century, the Dutch team defined a new strategy in 1974: “total football.” Invented by Johan Cruyff, total football describes the idea that essentially a player in any position can move to any other position as needed, which completely threw off competitors and put the team back on top (Troop, 2016). This is crucial to Dutch nationalism because it illustrates the development of a unique “Dutch style” of football that created a name for itself in the sports world. Because of this, Holland could now position its identity within the globalized world of football to construct new meanings of Dutchness (Lechner, 2007a). Before “total football”, Dutch fans were still proud of their team, but after the 1970’s they felt empowered as a football nation.

Not much information regarding the Moroccan national team is accessible in English, but the literature that is available implies that the development of Oranje drastically contrasts that of the Atlas Lions. After declaring its independence in the 1950’s, the Moroccan national team began playing internationally against other African countries (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019). After a successful start, they experienced a rough patch of international tournaments in the later part of the century after failing to qualify for most of the FIFA tournaments. They remain

hopeful for an ascent into success in the future, but unlike Oranje, they have not experienced a clear shift in their gameplay. Oranje fans have declared their Dutchness by creating their own strategy, which the Moroccan team has not developed yet. This could be in part due to the globalization of the game, as discussed earlier, that has seen the shift of players to larger football organizations in order to advance their careers. Thus, as illustrated by these histories, football holds a different power regarding culture and identity-formation in both countries. This may result in varying importance placed on football in these different parts of the world.

### **3.2 Players**

This study follows the media portrayals of three different Dutch-Moroccan football players: Sofyan Amrabat, Hakim Ziyech, and Mohamed Ihattaren. Because of their dual-citizenship, these players were eligible to play for both the Dutch and Moroccan national teams due to their Dutch birth rights and Moroccan origins. Once chosen, a player cannot choose a different national team to play for at any point in their career. However, while they have similar backgrounds, each player took a different path when beginning their international careers.

#### ***Sofyan Amrabat***

Sofyan Amrabat was born in 1996 in Huizen, the Netherlands (Transfermarkt, 2019). He began his football career in 2007 on various youth teams in the Netherlands with his brother Nordin, who is also a famous Dutch-Moroccan footballer. Not much is known about the Amrabats' childhood experience or personal lives. Sofyan played for Dutch club teams until 2018, when he switched to a Belgian club team (Transfermarkt, 2019). That same year, he also chose to continue his international career with Morocco's Atlas Lions. Amrabat is an interesting



case to examine because he had cultural pressures to succeed as a dual-citizen and pressures to make decisions relative to his brother, Nordin. He represents players such as Ismail Aissati that were raised in Dutch youth football and chose both clubs and national teams that were not Dutch.

### ***Hakim Ziyech***

According to his Wikipedia profile, Hakim is 26 years old. His family was originally from Berkane, Morocco, with his older brothers even being born in Africa, but Ziyech was born in Dronten, the Netherlands (Morocco World News, 2019). Growing up, Ziyech was held back by the lack of resources and support in his environment: “In interviews, his relatives often speak of the improbability of success despite the young Ziyech’s remarkable technical skills with the ball at his feet” (Morocco World News, 2019). In his youth, Ziyech began to resemble a stereotype of a young criminal, however, he shifted his focus to football and cut ties with negative influences in his life. Ziyech began playing for the Amsterdam football club AJAX in 2016 and is currently playing out his 5-year contract.

However, Ziyech faced controversy in 2015 when he chose to play for the Moroccan national team instead of the Dutch national team (Morocco World News, 2019). The controversy arose as he originally chose the Dutch national team, Oranje, but never debuted. Instead, after recovering from an injury, he chose the Atlas Lions. Ziyech is currently still playing for both teams and was selected as one of the top 20 best players in the UEFA Champions league for his performance last season. Recently, his performance has also created rumors that he will be traded to other European teams including Arsenal and Liverpool (Ha, 2019). Hakim Ziyech is

representative of other Dutch-Moroccan players such as Labyad and Mazraoui who also chose to play for a Dutch club team and the Moroccan national team simultaneously.

### ***Mohamed Ihattaren***

Mohamed Ihattaren is currently the most popular player being examined because his international decisions were within weeks of data collection for this work. Ihattaren was born in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, and is currently 17 years old (DutchNews.nl, 2019). There is not a lot of literature about Ihattaren because he is so young, and his adult career is just beginning. He has played for only Dutch youth organizations and clubs up until this point and committed to playing for the Dutch national team in November 2019. This decision was delayed because of the passing of his father earlier in the year, and in discussing his decision, Ihattaren makes it clear that his family was very involved in his decision to play for Oranje, the Dutch national team. Ihattaren is the only Dutch-Moroccan player in recent history that has chosen to stay in the Netherlands for his international career.

### **3.3 Hypotheses**

The current work explores the role of Dutch-Moroccan dual-citizens in the context of the national Dutch football team, Oranje. The literature shows that men of a migration background are Othered as dangerous criminals that need to prove themselves as “valuable” in order to transcend their “immigrant look.” The way that Amrabat, Ziyech, and Ihattaren have attempted to ascertain a higher position in society is through football. While past work illustrates these constructs in a variety of contexts, little research has been done regarding the Dutch-Moroccan population specifically. This is important due to the specific paradigms that these individuals that they must balance in the Netherlands. In this study, we hypothesize that fans of Dutch football

interpret and perpetuate the concept that minoritized men have to maintain a flawless performance based on conditions determined by the majority in order to ascertain a higher position in society. We argue that this is illustrated in various media sources and the online comments left in response to them.

## 4. Methods

This study explores the media portrayal of the three Dutch-Moroccan football players (Amrabat, Ziyech, Ihattaren), as well as how fans react to these portrayals. By employing Krippendorff's theory of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), we explore the language used to describe the players in two different types of sources: a) news articles on the Football Oranje website, and b) an international fan group for Oranje on Facebook. In this section, we also explore the advantages and disadvantages of analyzing media in this way and the ethical considerations that were taken into account in the development of the methodology.

### 4.1 Selection of Sources

On the Football Oranje website, the researchers found articles for each of the three players by typing their last names into the search function on the main page. Eight of the most recent articles for each player were examined. This website was chosen due to its popularity in the Netherlands. Additionally, researchers explored one Facebook fan group devoted to the Oranje national team, referred to only as "Fan Group" in order to maintain anonymity. At the point of data collection, the group had 7,300 members and posted upwards of 10 times per day. Player names were searched in the last year of posts, and five of the most recent posts were examined.

The articles on Football Oranje and the posts in Facebook group were all in English, so there was no need to translate these sources. However, because the sources reached international audiences, if any comments located on these sources were in languages other than English (such as Dutch, Spanish, or Portuguese), they were translated directly by Google or Facebook

translation software. Any time one of the players' character or decisions were discussed, the language was recorded in the coding analysis.

#### **4.2 The Online Forum**

Much research has been done regarding the online responses to illustrate how different they are than providing responses in-person. Typically, this is attributed to the anonymity of the Internet (Rosner & Kramer, 2016). However, the comments are found to be considerably more aggressive online even on social media sites where a name and often a picture can be associated with the comment. Additionally, findings show that if one user is aggressive, it opens the door for others to use the same tone. This is applicable to this study as all data will be collected from online sources with names attached. Yet, because of these findings, it is assumed that the anonymity and feelings of group attachment will lead to more candid and perhaps even less socially acceptable responses.

Additional research has shown that other user's comments also impact how commenters respond to a post. Work by Stylianou and Sofokleous (2019) revealed that other comments could even influence prejudice: positive comments regarding refugees were found to reduce prejudice among university students. This literature illustrates that although the commenters were not in any way pressured into leaving a response, other comments located on the post may alter the results.

#### **4.3 Ethics**

Many ethical considerations were taken into account when performing the data collection and analyses for the current work. The confidentiality and protection of the participants were the

highest priority throughout all procedures. Because of the public nature of the commentary, consent was not collected from any of the commenters. In the Facebook group source, names were typically presented as first and last names, but in the news articles sources, people could be presented as a first name and last initial or a username of their choice. However, no identifying information was collected from any of the participants; only their online names or screen names were visible, and these names were not included in the data collection at any point. The creators of the sources and the commenters were never coerced by the researcher into giving any opinions that they were uncomfortable with; the choice to leave a response on the Internet was entirely up to them, which created unbiased results. All comments were recorded and coded on all most recent sources so not to alter the data with researcher biases. More information regarding researcher positionality is reflected upon in the limitations section further in this paper.

## 5. Results

The news articles that were examined often did not have many comments attached to them. They were lengthier and described the players more in-depth. In contrast, the Facebook posts were shorter blurbs with more comments. Because of this, researchers were able to get a wide variety of sources and comments. The results in this section are separated by player in order to compare the differences in portrayals of and reactions to their different career decisions.

### 5.1 Sofyan Amrabat

Amrabat's data was the most negative of all of the players. Notably, the only sources that were not negative about Sofyan Amrabat were framed by the media posts as most of the comments were negatively connotated, but for varying reasons. Some commenters seemed to consider Amrabat one of them, and these people felt that he had abandoned his responsibilities to his country. Additionally, there were also members of the public that did not see Amrabat as a Dutch citizen. These individuals left remarks implying that he only lived in the Netherlands to use their resources and education: after he took advantage of them, he left. All three themes were illustrated within the data, despite a lack of posts mentioning him within the Facebook group. Finally, when compared to Ziyech and Ihattaren, Amrabat experienced the most instances of Othering.

### 5.2 Hakim Ziyech

While Amrabat seemed to face only negativity, the reactions to Hakim Ziyech were much more varied. Specifically, there was a noted change in tone before and after Ziyech made his decision to play for the Moroccan national team. The comments regarding him as "brilliant" and

“loyal” seem to fade into a chorus of claims that he was a dispensable member of the team. Additionally, in contrast to Amrabat, the posts and responses attributed Ziyech much more autonomy as a player. Many articles feature exact quotes from the player, as opposed to the trend of only presenting what the teams are saying about him. Ziyech was also the player that had the most posts and articles written about him, which is a testament to his popularity. This could also be due also to the controversies that he was involved in or the amount of time he spent in the public eye as a footballer. Again, all three themes appeared in the data regarding Ziyech, yet he was the only one that seemed to experience a shift in the public’s perception of him.

### **5.3 Mohamed Ihattaren**

Finally, the portrayals of and reactions to Mohamed Ihattaren were radically different from both Amrabat and Ziyech. This could be attributed to his decision, as he was the only player that chose to play for the Dutch national team in his international career. For Ihattaren, the themes of Othering were almost non-existent as the Dutch people seemed to embrace him as one of their own. Additionally, there were also many comments where people asserted not only his Dutchness, but also both of his nationalities. The acceptance of having dual identities and “allegiances” did not happen for the other players. Similarly to Ziyech, Ihattaren was attributed some autonomy in his career decisions, yet for Ihattaren, there was more humanity and empathy. People admitted the difficulty of his decision, which could be because they believed that he “chose correctly.” Finally, although he was not necessarily Othered by the sources and his transnationality was observed in a different way, there was still evidence of globalization indicated in the data.



## 6. Discussion

We begin this section with a discussion of the major themes that were analyzed in the data. Using the results for each player above, we elaborate on the importance of these comments in order to draw conclusions about how the footballers were perceived based on their experiences and decisions. We then move into a discussion of the limitations, including an acknowledgement of researcher positionality, followed by the implications of the findings. We end the paper by making suggestions for future work and making concluding remarks concerning dual-nationality players and football.

### 6.1 Major Themes

This section outlines the three themes explored within the data: a) Othering, b) transnationality, and c) globalization. They are broken up by theme but relate data regarding each player within each one in order to make meaningful connections between the various responses.

#### *Othering*

Othering was one of the most prominent themes that emerged within the data set. This is was important to examine as it revealed when the public believed that the player was not “one of them”, and thus, had not achieved a sense of Dutchness. Mostly, this theme was exhibited when discussing the Dutch resources and training, which draws a line between “Dutch” and “non-Dutch” by claiming that the player took advantage of Dutch resources without truly being a member of the Netherlands.

In regard to Amrabat, the public claimed that he used them and went home, saying that he “received all culture and learning from the Netherlands” and was “ungrateful”. One comment

went so far as to say that his parents offended country that “welcomes and educates their kids” as they let him choose Morocco over the Netherlands. The reactions to Amrabat were so extreme that multiple comments called for immigrant policies, claiming that the Netherlands needed more regulation, or that refugees should just be deported. In Ziyech’s case, his Dutch training was also mentioned multiple times. He was also Othered by his labels as multiple articles and comments asserted his Moroccan ancestry, calling him “the Moroccan” or saying he had “Moroccan blood”. This mechanism of Othering is very important because it strips the players entirely of their Dutchness and represents them only as an outsider.

For Ihattaren, however, there was no Othering present in the data. This could be because Ihattaren frequently referenced his loyalty to the country, making statements such as: “I owe a lot to the Netherlands”, and “They have done a lot for me”. Ihattaren seems to acknowledge the opportunity that he had to go through football training in the Netherlands and cites it as one of the reasons that he wants to play for Oranje: “I went through everything there and that makes it difficult to leave”. Notably, this does not mean the other players never mentioned this training, it just means it was never represented in the media.

Additionally, instead of pointing out Ihattaren’s Moroccanness, the sources emphasize his Dutchness. One commenter wrote: “If you grew up in the Netherlands and learned your football there, it doesn’t matter. He might not have Dutch blood but he has Dutch football in his veins.” In contrast to the reactions to the other players, this shows a total disregard of the Moroccan ancestry. Others agreed, saying that he because he was “born and raised in the Netherlands”, he is a “Dutchman” and citing that Morocco was “truly his original but did not contribute to the

formation of his talent”. Here, instead of Othering him, the public claims Ihattaren as one of their own because he is successful in football and because he fully embraced Dutch culture by choosing Oranje.

### *Transnationality*

As Othering exemplifies a sort of exclusion of the players from Dutchness, the theme of transnationality reflects when the players were enabled to hold both pieces of their identity in the sources. Transnationality was noted mostly when the players were viewed as Dutch citizens, however the reaction was still negative as the public felt that he was betraying the country. Holding transnationality identities is constantly balancing one’s identity with the dominant identity, which some players proved to be more successful at than others.

Sofyan Amrabat was depicted the harshest, with the language used to characterize him centering on words like “treason” and “traitor”. This is important because it shows that although they agreed that the Netherlands was part of his identity, yet still made negative comments implying that he abandoned them. The title of one article even declared that he “rejected the Netherlands” to choose Morocco, which represented the breach of trust that the Dutch felt they experienced. One remark stated that “[these players] are Dutch and have an obligation to represent the country”. Another stated that Amrabat “betrayed his homeland and chose his parents’ nationality for convenience”. This quote illustrates his Dutchness yet erases his Moroccanness by declaring it as only his parents’ country and not his. This reflects the narrow viewpoint through which the public regards nationality.

Ziyech experienced similar reactions, but because his media coverage spanned so much of his career, the sources show a clear shift as he goes from “loyal citizen” to “that Moroccan.” Ziyech even comments on it himself saying that after he complained about a Dutch club team’s professionalism, he was “no longer loved by the fans”. Before deciding to play for Morocco, responses applauded Ziyech’s skill and character, one commenter saying that “Ziyech is loyal” and would “only live for the right project.” However, after choosing not to continue his international career in Holland, the comments shift to those more similar to the ones about Amrabat. The most frequent comment that was made claimed that Ziyech “switched allegiances”, effectively declaring him a non-Dutch outsider. The most notable comment regarding Ziyech simply stated: “Be Dutch or don’t.” This perfectly exemplifies the lack of transnationality that the public admits when it comes to Ziyech’s identity: you are either one of us or you are not. And there is no way you can be both.

Similar to the Othering theme, Ihattaren’s identity is portrayed in a completely different way than the other players. Although the idea that Morocco is “trying to make him switch allegiances” is mentioned most frequently, Ihattaren is allowed to hold both of his nationalities. In his own words, Ihattaren says that an international career “would be nice in the Netherlands, but also in Morocco,” which acknowledges that he feels like he could be successful in either country. However, whereas Amrabat or Ziyech may be accused of betraying Holland, commenters are empathetic. One person remarks that even though it may seem simple, “his decision isn’t easy”. This illustrates an act of compassion and understanding toward Ihattaren

that is not granted to the other players. Again, this implies that Ihattaren is permitted to hold a more transnational identity because of his football success and commitment to the Netherlands.

### ***Globalization***

The theme of globalization refers to the buying and selling of players in the field of sports. This is crucial to include in the analysis because of the connections it has to nationality: globalization is harmful to the dual-nationality players as it acts as a catalyst for the other themes. Globalization is the reason that the industry of trading players for money was developed, and this theme was mostly illustrated in the language used to describe the players' decision. The process of trading players dehumanizes them and diminishes their value entirely to their success as a football player. For Amrabat and Ziyech, the Netherlands was often criticized for "missing out" or letting their players "get snatched". In regard to Ihattaren, he was considered a "great grab" or an example of the coach "retaining the talent". Oranje either "got their man" or were convinced that the player was dispensable: "We don't need him [because] we have others." This reflects the almost universal objectification of the players. In one article, Ziyech even remarked that "signing contracts is 'the game of the summer.'" The evidence in the data is that globalization affects all players, regardless of their nationality and which team they choose. This strips players of their autonomy, decision-making capabilities, and humanity. The career-defining decision is framed as a "tug of war", a battle of two teams, instead of one individual's decision. Globalization is significant here as this language makes players seem as though they are not human, enabling Othering and disregard for transnational identities seem easier.

## 6.2 Limitations

This study was not without limitations, including amongst the sources. Only one Facebook group of fans and one news source was examined. Although the researchers were not aware of any bias in either group, we cannot assume that they sources are representative of all media and fans. Also, both the sources from the news articles and those from the Facebook group contained less content focusing on Sofyan Amrabat. This may be because his decision was less recent than the other two people, so the public is no longer discussing him. However, this led to less data on this player than on Ziyech or Ihattaren. Additionally, there was an accessibility issue with the language barrier in some sources. While all sources were directly translated, sometimes these translations do not carry the same tones (negative or positive) as they do in the original language. Other sources, including ones about Morocco specifically, were also not accessible in English, making a breadth of primary sources difficult at times.

Finally, researcher positionality must be noted. I have no links to the Netherlands, Morocco, or the sport of football entirely. While this leads to unbiased research, it can sometimes be difficult to gauge sentiments of the public during these controversies. I am not a male, a dual-citizen, or an athlete and thus cannot speak for the experiences that these players face every day. This positionality is important to acknowledge and think critically about as I impress my own American values onto the literature and media sources.

## 6.3 Implications

The implications for this work cannot be understated. It contributes to the literature of a variety of disciplines, including migration studies, masculinities, and sports studies. However, it

is even more important to those dual-citizen football players that are making decisions that impact their careers and identities. There are social implications for choosing a side, and as evidenced, you cannot have both, even if you play for one country on a regional level and another on a national level. This study shows that in order to be accepted by a group, you must renounce a part of yourself to be fully embraced. The responses of the public show that having dual-nationality does not mean that your identity will be accepted in your country.

This work can also have implications for researchers and policy-makers. This data exposes the idea that the current climate is not supporting dual-citizens in the ways that it should. There should also be clarification regarding the globalization of football player trading. Because of the globalization of the sport, the line of citizenship and nationality have become blurred. These constructs may always be undefined, but it is important to match policy and practice as players continue to move toward “core” countries and away from “peripheral” countries.

#### **6.4 Future Directions**

In the future, it would be interesting to examine how Dutch-Moroccan footballers are portrayed in other sources, such as sports talk shows or Twitter posts. Because of the popularity of talk show programs, they could be very influential to the player representations. Much like news articles, they are also biased representations and depend on the ideas of one individual alone, but they are consumed by wider audiences than the news articles are online. Tweets would be interesting as they are shorter and more informal responses to the articles. Additionally, with this source, commenters can respond directly to players, which would add level of directness to the study.

Researchers could also explore the Moroccan reactions to the player's decisions. It would be interesting to examine how accepting they are of the players like Ziyech who were raised in the Netherlands yet now play for the Moroccan national team. Because of football's global popularity, it is clear the policing of nationalism is not specific to Holland alone, and this analysis would be interesting to compare to the current data.

Finally, the experiences of other dual-citizens in the Netherlands, such as Turkish players, could be examined to see if they experience the same reactions. This could also be compared to the current data to consider the differences between different minoritized groups in the Netherlands. This would have different implications regarding migration patterns and discrimination, and it would be interesting to see how these individuals make sense of their own identities within the Dutch context.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

As Dutch-Moroccan citizens become more prominent in Dutch society, we are led to question the cultural and social boundaries surrounding nationalism and belongingness in the Netherlands. Our findings show that Dutch-Moroccan football players are under pressure to perform their roles as men and football players perfectly in order to escape the stereotype of the young, criminal foreigner. It also illustrates that you must choose to fully embrace Dutch culture and renounce Moroccan culture in order to receive the most positive media representation and response. Sometimes players are Othered, sometimes embraced as Dutch, and sometimes, they are just an object to be acquired. This work is important not only to the Dutch-Moroccan football players like Amrabat, Ziyech, and Ihattaren who are forced to choose between their country of ancestry and birth country, but also to everyday Dutch citizens.



Ultimately, the players chose what they felt was best for them, whether it was the Dutch national team or the Moroccan national team. The reasons behind these decisions may be different for everyone and influenced by a number of factors including family and future career prospects. When we begin to shed light on these issues of national identity, then we can address the implications and inequalities that stem. From there, we can begin to deconstruct how Othering operates within these foundations to make football a more inclusive space for everyone. Until then, it seems that Dutch-Moroccan citizens only have two options: “Be Dutch or don’t.”

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## Appendix

*Dutch-Moroccan Footballers by Theme*

|                   | Othering                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Transnationality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Globalization                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sofyan Amrabat    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ He “received all culture and learning from the Netherlands”</li> <li>▪ His parents offended the country that welcomes and educates their kids.</li> <li>▪ Call for regulation of immigrants.</li> <li>▪ Idea that refugees should be deported.</li> <li>▪ “We should not invest in dual-citizens because they’ll just leave”</li> <li>▪ “Ungrateful”</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Treason”</li> <li>▪ Title: “rejects the Netherlands and chooses Morocco”</li> <li>▪ “Traitor”</li> <li>▪ “Betray homeland and choose parents’ nationality for convenience”</li> <li>▪ “They are Dutch and have an obligation to represent the country”</li> </ul>                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Netherlands: “missed out”, “been trying to convince him”, “got their man”</li> <li>▪ Morocco: “will not give up without a fight”</li> <li>▪ Amrabat: “It is difficult to choose between two countries that really want you.”</li> </ul>                                                |
| Hakim Ziyech      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Called “the Moroccan”</li> <li>▪ His training in the Netherlands is referenced 2+ times.</li> <li>▪ Moroccan blood</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Switch allegiances”</li> <li>▪ Assertion that he chose Morocco because “maybe it’s a ‘culture thing””</li> <li>▪ “Be Dutch or don’t”</li> <li>▪ Pre-Decision: “Ziyech is loyal and would ‘only live for the right project””</li> <li>▪ After He Complained: “I am no longer loved by the fans”</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ van der Vaart: “get him”</li> <li>▪ Ziyech: “Signing contracts is the ‘game of the summer’.”</li> <li>▪ “We don’t need him” because “we have others”</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        |
| Mohamed Ihattaren | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ihattaren: “I owe a lot to the Netherlands”, “They have done a lot for me”, “I went through everything there and that makes it difficult to leave”</li> <li>▪ “If you grew up in the Netherlands and learned your football there, it doesn’t matter. He might not have Dutch blood but he has Dutch football in his veins.”</li> <li>▪ “Born and raised in the Netherlands, which makes them Dutchmen”</li> <li>▪ Morocco: “truly his original but did not contribute to the formation of his talent”</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Career “would be nice in the Netherlands, but also in Morocco”</li> <li>▪ Morocco trying to make him “switch allegiances” is mentioned 3+ times.</li> <li>▪ His “decision isn’t easy”</li> </ul>                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “We don’t need him... Let him pick Morocco.”</li> <li>▪ Involved in “tug of war.”</li> <li>▪ Coach: “retained the talent”</li> <li>▪ “Being courted by Morocco”</li> <li>▪ “Great grab!”</li> <li>▪ The Netherlands should make sure their players aren’t getting snatched.</li> </ul> |