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**“half the team’s Afro-Caribbeans”: How a simple ball game opens space for the negotiation of national identities**

This paper treats the local negotiation of concepts relating to national identity such as “Englishness” or “patriotism”. It is based on a corpus of transcribed talk-in-interaction by non-immigrant Englishmen and –women watching the FIFA World Cup on television in their homes.

Such demarcations concerning national identities surface again and again in the viewers’ talk triggered both by the pictures on television and by the sports announcer talk, i.e. the institutionally sanctioned BBC commentary. We will see that some concepts have to be reassessed, whereas others may simply be confirmed while the viewers watch the different national teams in this international encounter. Although the football fans defend their simple ball game from overinterpretation by the media, paradoxically it concurrently causes them to (re-)negotiate some of these vital concepts in the light of the games.

For example, in one scene literal flag waving by the England supporters in the stadium provokes a stock-taking of some of the symbols of England by the viewers including the question how English St. George, the Queen, and the English national football team really are (cf. “half the team’s Afro-Caribbeans.”) In this case, an apparently mundane scene on television sparks the negotiation of a more realistic, fact-based idea of Englishness among the over seventy-year-old viewers. However, the televised games are also often simply used as ‘proof’ for stereotypical character traits assigned to the different nationalities by the viewers.

Another topic that forces itself upon the viewers is the relation between politics and sports, especially in the game England vs. Argentina. The paper illustrates how the viewers resist being drawn into a reading of the game as an extension of the Falkland war which seems to be advocated by the media (cf. the blurting “it’s just a GA::ME”).