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# 'I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose'. Theorising on the deservedness of migrants in international football, using the case of Mesut Özil

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**ABSTRACT**

'I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose'. With this powerful statement Mesut Özil resigned from Germany's national football team. His resignation act not only highlights growing controversies and uneasiness around the representation of the football nation by players with migration backgrounds, but also marks the fragility of national belonging. In this article, we deconstruct in detail Özil's powerful resignation elaborating upon Norbert Elias and John Scotson's (1994 (1965)) 'established–outsider model'. With this, we will analyse the power dynamics underlying the processes of national belonging. Moreover, we extend the established-outsider approach by using the fluid and contextual borders between *formal* and *moral* deservedness of citizenship. In our conclusion, we revisit Özil's statement and recapitulate our theoretical explanations on the sensitivities of this case as well on how to navigate a way out of the contested competition between nationalities in the context of international football.

## 'I have two hearts, one German and one Turkish'

For years, the talented Arsenal-midfielder Mesut Özil was one of the key players in the German national football team. Özil, born, raised, and schooled in the German city of Gelsenkirchen as a third-generation Turkish immigrant,[1] is a practicing Muslim who recites from the Quran when he enters the field (Merkel 2014) and who considers himself to be a blend of both of his cultures; 'Whilst I grew up in Germany, my family background has its roots firmly based in Turkey. I have two hearts, one German and one Turkish' (Özil 2018). Because Özil is a German-born of Turkish descent, he was eligible to play for both national football teams. After long considerations with his family, being torn back and forth between the two countries, he finally decided to play for Germany (Özil 2017). What is more, to make this possible, he had to legally renounce his Turkish passport, which, arguably, can be considered as an ultimate act of formally distancing himself from Turkey and, simultaneously, expressing his formal - and arguably moral - belonging to the state of Germany.

Soon after, probably also because of the high societal status of the German national football team, Özil was regarded as one of Germany's 'model minorities' (Kalman-Lamb 2013). To illustrate, he won a so-called Bambi Award[2] in the category 'Integration' in 2010 (Martin 2010; Özil 2017; 2018), and was publicly voted *German* footballer of the year five times between 2011 and 2016 (Freemantle 2018).

Yet, the take on Mesut Özil radically changed from a 'German Bambi' to an imagined 'Turkish grey wolf' when he, together with his German-Turkish teammate Ilkay Gündogan, posed with Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in front of the media a month before the start of the 2018 football World Cup (Freemantle 2018; Hirsch 2018). Suddenly, Özil's 'Germanness' became topic of big national dispute. Where many Germans saw in Özil's action 'support for an increasingly autocratic ruler' (Freemantle 2018), for Özil it was a matter of paying respect to highest office of his family's country (Özil 2018). Things, however, really came to a head after Germany's early knock-out in the group stage of the 2018 football World Cup when, especially, Özil, one of the stars of the team, became the convenient scapegoat for the disappointing results of the entire 'Mannschaft' (Hirsch 2018; Özil 2018). While football connoisseurs seemed to comment on Özil's football performances only, the criticisms in the public debate went beyond this and were also directed at his cultural allegiance with Turkey and the Turkish nation. As a consequence of all the controversies around him, Özil resigned from the German national football team on July 22, 2018 by placing a three-parted statement, in English, on his Instagram and Twitter profiles (figure 1). In this statement, Özil marked out the precariousness of national belonging by claiming 'I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose' (Özil 2018).[3]

Özil's statement for us is a most interesting case to question not only who belongs to which (football) nation, but also who deserves to represent the football nation. 'With deserve we not necessarily point to football qualities per se. For in many ways, this deserving question seems a no-brainer for the average football fan, as we are, as the answer would be the best players of the nation, obviously. To answer that question, it is of importance to verify which players are considered the best in terms of football capabilities, which is and will obviously be a big topic of debate, and it requires verifying which football players are (*formally*) eligible to play for which national football team. But, as Özil's example clarifies, this is not where it stops. The question of deserving also seems to be a *moral* issue. Players with dual citizenship or footballers with migration backgrounds, seem to carry the extra burden of having to prove to unquestionably belong to the nation, to be the model-citizen, at the risk of being seen as untrustworthy or even a traitor if not.

Using Özil's case as an example throughout this paper, we aim to understand who, under what conditions, are accepted as representatives of the football nation and are recognised as (*conditionally* and *temporally*) belonging to the nation. To this end, in the first part of the paper, we sketch the regulations and its implications of national representation in international football, and how this complicates the debates on national belonging of players with migration backgrounds. In the second part, as a prelude to discussing *moral* belonging to the (football) nation, we will introduce and critically engage with Elias and Scotson's (1994 (1965)) established–outsider model, to shed light on the power dynamics between the established and outsiders in the representation of the football nation. In the third part of the paper, we will extend this establish-outsider framework to discuss the dynamic *moral* negotiations around the acceptance and recognition of players with migration backgrounds. We will end by going back to the main character of our plot, Mesut Özil, and reflect upon,

with the theoretical insights gained, how this painful rupture, in which there seem to be no winners, only losers, could have happened, and maybe could be prevented in the future.

## 'Who did I want to play for if the possibility ever came about?'

It has been argued in the literature that one of the reasons why the issue of national belonging in international football 'is so sensitive is because international sporting competitions, such as the Olympic Games and the football World Cup, have become a 'magnifying lens through which critical elaborations of the idea of the nation come to the fore' (Mauro 2020, 5). The competition between nations, including the coinciding performativity of cheering for 'your' nation, with all its theatrical elements of a stadium, flag-waving, winners and losers, (*temporally*) provides 'a uniquely effective medium for inculcating national feelings' (Hobsbawm 1992, 143) and for one's patriotic place attachment, one's topophilia (Van Houtum and Van

**I / III MEETING PRESIDENT ERDOGAN**

The past couple of weeks have given me time to reflect, and time to think over the events of the last few months. Consequently, I want to share my thoughts and feelings about what has happened.

Like many people, my ancestry traces back to more than one country. Whilst I grew up in Germany, my family background has its roots firmly based in Turkey. I have two hearts, one German and one Turkish. During my childhood, my mother taught me to always be respectful and to never forget where I came from, and these are still values that I think about to this day.

In May, I met President Erdogan in London, during a charitable and educational event. We first met in 2010 after he and Angela Merkel watched the Germany vs. Turkey match together in Berlin. Since then, our paths have crossed a lot of times around the globe. I'm aware that the picture of us caused a huge response in the German media, and whilst some people may accuse me of lying or being deceitful, the picture we took had no political intentions. As I said, my mother has never let me lose sight of my ancestry, heritage and family traditions. For me, having a picture with President Erdogan wasn't about politics or elections, it was about me respecting the highest office of my family's country. My job is a football player and not a politician, and our meeting was not an endorsement of any policies. In fact, we spoke about the same topic that we do every time we have met - football - as he too was a player in his youth.

Although the German media have portrayed something different, the truth is that not meeting with the President would have been disrespecting the roots of my ancestors, who I know would be proud of where I am today. For me, it didn't matter who was President, it mattered that it was the President. Having respect for political office is a view that I'm sure both the Queen and Prime Minister Theresa May share when they too hosted Erdogan in London. Whether it had been the Turkish or the German President, my actions would've been no different.

I get that this may be hard to understand, as in most cultures the political leader cannot be thought of as being separate from the person. But in this case, it is different. Whatever the outcome would've been in this previous election, or the election before that, I would have still taken the picture.

**Figure 1.** Mesut Özil's statement on his resignation from Germany's national football team (Özil 2018).

## II / III MEDIA & SPONSORS

I know that I am a footballer who has played in arguably the three toughest leagues in the world. I've been fortunate to receive great support from my teammates and coaching staff whilst playing in the Bundesliga, La Liga and the Premier League. And in addition, throughout my career, I've learnt to deal with the media.

A lot of people talk about my performances - many applaud and many criticise. If a newspaper or pundit finds fault in a game I play in, then I can accept this - I'm not a perfect footballer and this often motivates me to work and train harder. But what I can't accept, are German media outlets repeatedly blaming my dual-heritage and a simple picture for a bad World Cup on behalf of an entire squad.

Certain German newspapers are using my background and photo with President Erdogan as right-wing propaganda to further their political cause. Why else did they use pictures and headlines with my name as a direct explanation for defeat in Russia? They didn't criticise my performances, they didn't criticise the team's performances, they just criticised my Turkish ancestry and respect for my upbringing. This crosses a personal line that should never be crossed, as newspapers try to turn the nation of Germany against me.

What I also find disappointing are the double standards that the media has. Lothar Matthaus (an honorary German national team captain) met with another world leader a few days back, and received almost no media criticism. Despite his role with the DFB (German national team), they have not asked him to publicly explain his actions and he continues to represent the players of Germany without any reprimand. If the media felt that I should have been left of the World Cup squad, then surely he should be stripped of his honorary captaincy? Does my Turkish heritage make me a more worthy target?

I've always thought that a 'partnership' infers support, both in the good times and also during tougher situations. Recently, I planned to visit my former school Berger-Feld in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, along with two of my charitable partners. I funded a project for one year where immigrant children, children from poor families and any other children can play football together and learn social rules for life. However, days before we were scheduled to go, I was abandoned by my so-called 'partners', who no longer wanted to work with me at this time. To add to this, the school told my management that they no longer wanted me to be there at this time, as they "feared the media" due to my picture with President Erdogan, especially with the "right-wing party in Gelsenkirchen on the rise". In all honesty, this really hurt. Despite being a student of theirs back when I was younger, I was made to feel unwanted and unworthy of their time.

In addition to this, I was renounced by another partner. As they are also a sponsor of the DFB, I was asked to take part in promotional videos for the World Cup. Yet after my picture with President Erdogan, they took me out of the campaigns and cancelled all promotional activities that were scheduled. For them, it was no longer good to be seen with me and called the situation 'crisis management'. This is all ironic because a German Ministry declared their products have illegal and unauthorized software devices in them, which puts customers at risk. Hundreds of thousands of their products are getting recalled. Whilst I was being criticised and asked to justify my actions by the DFB, there was no such official and public explanation demanded of the DFB sponsor. Why? Am I right in thinking this is worse than a picture with the President of my family's country? What does the DFB have to say about all this?

As I said before, 'partners' should stick with you in all situations. Adidas, Beats and BigShoe have been extremely loyal and amazing to work with in this time. They rise above the nonsense created by the German press and media, and we carry out our projects in a professional manner that I really enjoy being part of. During the World Cup, I worked with BigShoe and helped get 23 young children life-changing surgeries in Russia, which I have also done previously in Brazil and Africa. This for me is the most important thing that I do as a football player, yet the newspapers find no space to raise awareness about this sort of thing. For them, me being booed or taking a picture with a President is more significant then helping children get surgeries worldwide. They too have a platform to raise awareness and funds, but choose not to do so.

**Figure 1. Continued**

## III / III DFB

Arguably the issue that has frustrated me the most over the past couple of months has been the mistreatment from the DFB, and in particular the DFB President Reinhard Grindel. After my picture with President Erdogan I was asked by Joachim Low to cut short my holiday and go to Berlin and give a joint statement to end all the talk and set the record straight. Whilst I attempted to explain to Grindel my heritage, ancestry and therefore reasoning behind the photo, he was far more interested in speaking about his own political views and belittling my opinion. Whilst his actions were patronising, we came to agree that the best thing to do was to concentrate on football and the upcoming World Cup. This is why I did not attend the DFB media day during the World Cup preparations. I knew journalists discussing politics and not football would just attack me, even though the whole issue was deemed to be over by Oliver Bierhoff in a TV interview he did before the Saudi Arabia game in Leverkusen.

During this time, I also met with the President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Unlike Grindel, President Steinmeier was professional and actually was interested in what I had to say about my family, my heritage and my decisions. I remember that the meeting was only between myself, Ilkay and President Steinmeier, with Grindel being upset that he wasn't allowed inside to boost his own political agenda. I agreed with President Steinmeier that we would release a joint statement about the matter, in another attempt to move forward and focus on football. But Grindel was upset that it wasn't his team releasing the first statement, annoyed that Steinmeier's press office had to take lead on this matter.

Since the end of the World Cup, Grindel has come under much pressure regarding his decisions before the tournament started, and rightly so. Recently, he has publicly said I should once again explain my actions and puts me at fault for the poor team results in Russia, despite telling me it was over in Berlin. **I am speaking now not for Grindel, but because I want to.** I will no longer stand for being a scapegoat for his incompetence and inability to do his job properly. I know that he wanted me out the team after the picture, and publicised his view on Twitter without any thinking or consultation, but Joachim Low and Oliver Bierhoff stood up for me and backed me. In the eyes of Grindel and his supporters, I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose. This is because despite paying taxes in Germany, donating facilities to German schools and winning the World Cup with Germany in 2014, I am still not accepted into society. I am treated as being 'different'. I received the 'Bambi Award' in 2010 as an example of successful integration to German society, I received a 'Silver Laurel Leaf' in 2014 from the Federal Republic of Germany, and I was a 'German Football Ambassador' in 2015. But clearly, I am not German…? Are there criteria for being fully German that I do not fit? My friend Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose are never referred to as German-Polish, so why am I German-Turkish? Is it because it is Turkey? Is it because I'm a Muslim? I think here lays an important issue. By being referred to as German-Turkish, it is already distinguishing people who have family from more than one country. I was born and educated in Germany, so why don't people accept that I am German?

page 1

**Figure 1. Continued**

Page 2

Grindel's opinions can be found elsewhere too. I was called by **Bernd Holzhauer (a German politician)** a **"goat-f\*ker" because of my picture with President Erdogan and my Turkish background. Furthermore, Werner Steer (Chief of German Theatre) told me to "piss off to Anatolia", a place in Turkey where many immigrants are based. As I have said before, criticising and abusing me because of family ancestry is a disgraceful line to cross, and using discrimination as a tool for political propaganda is something that should immediately result in the resignation of those disrespectful individuals. These people have used my picture with President Erdogan as an opportunity to express their previously hidden racist tendencies, and this is dangerous for society. They are no better than the German fan who told me after the game against Sweden "Ozil, verpiss Dich Du scheiss Türkensau. Türkenschwein hau ab", or in English "Ozil, fk off you Turkish s\*t, piss of you Turkish pig".** I don't want to even discuss the hate mail, threatening phone calls and comments on social media that my family and I have received. They all represent a Germany of the past, a Germany not open to new cultures, and a Germany that I am not proud of. I am confident that many proud Germans who embrace an open society would agree with me.

To you, Reinhard Grindel, I am disappointed but not surprised by your actions. In 2004 whilst you were a German member of Parliament, you claimed that "multiculturalism is in reality a myth [and] a lifelong lie" whilst you voted against legislation for dual-nationalities and punishments for bribery, as well as saying that Islamic culture has become too ingrained in many German cities. This is unforgivable and unforgettable.

The treatment I have received from the DFB and many others makes me no longer want to wear the German national team shirt. I feel unwanted and think that what I have achieved since my international debut in 2009 has been forgotten. People with racially discriminative backgrounds should not be allowed to work in the largest football federation in the world that has many players from dual-heritage families. Attitudes like theirs simply do not reflect the players they supposedly represent.

It is with a heavy heart and after much consideration that because of recent events, I will no longer be playing for Germany at international level whilst I have this feeling of racism and disrespect. I used to wear the German shirt with such pride and excitement, but now I don't. This decision has been extremely difficult to make because I have always given everything for my teammates, the coaching staff and the good people of Germany. But when high-ranking DFB officials treat me as they did, disrespect my Turkish roots and selfishly turn me into political propaganda, then enough is enough. That is not why I play football, and I will not sit back and do nothing about it. Racism should never, ever be accepted.

*Mesut Özil*

**Figure 1. Continued**

Dam 2002). As Alan Bairner (2001, 17) argues: 'It [international sports] provides a form of symbolic action which states the case for the nation itself'. Moreover, it emphasises the enduring relevance of Eric Hobsbawm's (1992, 143) observations that 'sportsmen [*sic*] representing their nation or state' in international sporting competitions are 'primary expressions of their imagined communities', and that 'the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people'. The national make-believe show that a football competition between nations allows for, is a seductive phantasy-reality that comfortably borders and orders the at times chaotic world, even if it is only temporal, and creates an amusing and carnavelesque feeling of seemingly innocent togetherness (Van Houtum 2010; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002). It makes the imagined community (Anderson 1983), the 'we' of the nation feel 'real' (Hobsbawm 1992), at least for some time, provided of course that the national football team performs well, as the ecstasy of national togetherness works best on success (Van Houtum 2010).

But who is included in this 'we'? Who or what defines the *formal* borders of the football nation? It seems that within the nationalistic context of international football these borders are of an inflexible, dichotomic nature. Fluidity in terms of multiple nationality does not seem to exist. It really is either-or: 'one can either be Dutch or Surinamese, or French or Moroccan, but not both' (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 10). The regulations of the, the regulations of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) around the eligibility of players to play for representative teams forces footballers with dual nationality to *choose* a national football team (Iorwerth, Hardman, and Jones 2014; Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019). Having dual nationality, also Özil (2017, 42) had to address this issue and struggled with making his decision: 'Who did I want to play for if the possibility ever came about? For the German national side or the Turkish one? It wasn't a decision I made in a couple of minutes, just in passing'. Deciding on one's sporting nationality is often hard for players with dual nationality as it feels like choosing between 'your' two countries. Moreover, being permanent, it is a decision that fundamentally shapes their whole career in football (Özil 2017, 42), and one that will, regardless of the outcome, upset people. Özil experienced the impact of this *forced* decision first-hand after he chose in favour of Germany and, against his will, 'publicly became a bone of contention between Germany and Turkey' (Özil 2017, 46).

It could be argued that to organise international sports competitions, like the football World Cup, solely around the principles of (legal) nationality, is principally sustaining a rigid 'inter-state world view' (Mauro 2020, 2); something that Wimmer and Schiller (2003, 576) refer to as 'methodological nationalism' and John Agnew (1994) has referred to as' the territorial trap'. FIFA's eligibility regulations are, arguably, not only insensitive to the growth of internationalisation overall but also seem to camouflage that, on average per edition of the football World Cup since 1930, nearly 10% of the players can be counted as 'foreign-born' (Van Campenhout et al. 2018, 1079); meaning that these players compete for another national football team than the one of their country of birth. The 23-headed selection of Morocco's 2018 national football team, for example, existed of 17 foreign-born players (74%), with the majority of these players born in European countries like France and the Netherlands (Van Campenhout and Van Sterkenburg 2019). Further, a review of the 2018 victorious 'French national football team's roster reveals its multiculturality, as 19 out of the 23 players had a 'genuine connection' with a country other than France' (Van Campenhout and Van Sterkenburg 2019, 2); most of them with roots in one of France its former African colonies. In a similar vein, England's prospect players such as Declan Rice (Republic of Ireland), Callum Hudson-Odoi (Ghana), Dele Alli (Nigeria), and James Tarkowski (Poland) all have genuine migration backgrounds and, therefore, could have opted to pledge their sporting allegiance to another country (Ronay 2019). The strategic implication of the increasing numbers of (young) football players with dual nationality is, as can be expected, that national football federations increasingly attempt to select these talented prospects as young as possible and to secure their sporting nationality by letting them play in an A-status match of their national football team (Iorwerth, Hardman, and Jones 2014; Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019).

The consequence of this nationalised perspective on international football is that the decision on national deservedness then is not only a sportive one but by and large also a political one. And is made to depend on formal regulations as well as on a range of arbitrary and invisible moral norms and (cultural) markers, which are socially constructed by the

established 'insiders', that 'outsiders' have to accumulate (Hage 1998; Jansen 2020, 101; Loyal 2011; Pratsinakis 2018, 6; Monforte, Bassel, and Khan 2019; Skey 2011). To this power struggle in defining insiders from outsiders, we turn now.

### 'I am still not accepted into society. I am treated as being 'different''

In their canonical work *The Established and the Outsiders*, Elias and Scotson (1994 (1965)) studied the uneven balance of power between dominant ('established') and subordinate ('outsider') group(s) within a community near the English city of Leicester in the 1960s. They found that the power ratio between the established and outsider groups was based on the notable distinction in 'length of residence' in the area; whereby the former were (long-term) residents while the latter were relatively new to the area (Black 2016; Dunning and Hughes 2014; Hughes and Goodwin 2016; Pratsinakis 2018). In addition, Elias and Scotson pointed to the importance of understanding the mutual entanglement processes between natives and newcomers, and argued, drawing on Elias' earlier figurational approach, that human relationships should be seen as interdependent and in a constant state of flux and transformation (Dunning and Hughes 2014; Hughes and Goodwin 2016; Loyal 2011). Borders between people, in other words, as also recent literature in border studies has made clear, are not to be seen as fixed and permanent lines, but as discursive power struggles, with room for interpretation, negotiation and hence also as a window of opportunity (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). Borders, Orders and Others should therefore be seen as processes, rather than ends, and hence as verbs rather than nouns: b/order*ing* and other*ing* (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002).

Despite, or maybe even because, of its rather straightforward established-outsiders dichotomy (Bloyce and Murphy 2007), the established-outsider model has proven to be a conductive framework to analyse these processes of 'b/ordering' and 'othering' (Black 2016; Pratsinakis 2018; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002). The established-outsider framework has been used to study a wide range of social phenomena, also within sport studies, to illustrate unequal power balances related to processes of globalisation (Maguire and Falcous 2011), race relations (Black 2016; Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019), gender inequalities (Liston 2005; Black and Fielding-Lloyd 2019), and (national) identities (Engh, Agergaard, and Maguire 2013; Jansen 2020).

A key element in the model is the explanation of processes of domination and discrimination, that together continuously (re)construct the differential in the power ratio between groups (Loyal 2011, 188). The most powerful groups are able to (re)construct 'understandings of self that posit them as having superior human value' and in doing so (implicitly) define the characteristics to those of the outsider groups (Engh, Agergaard, and Maguire 2013, 783). The dominant position is mainly upheld by the established group's social cohesion and is displayed through subtle or not so subtle acts of exclusion – in example setting (invisible) norms of standard behaviour (Duemmler 2015) – and forms of shame and stigma – like daily gossip and (public) humiliation – directed at various outsider groups. Often, such acts of 'othering' can be seen as a response by people belonging to the dominant group to subjective feelings of threat from (national) outsiders (Pratsinakis 2018; Skey 2010, 2011). It is through these everyday 'b/ordering and ordering' practices that the dominant group (re)constructs the (cultural) boundaries of belonging.

Still, in today's world, the determination of who is 'we' and who are 'they' and who are 'in' and 'out' is dominantly bordered along national lines (Yuval-Davis 2011; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). It is not that (national) identities can (still, if it ever could) only or foremost be grounded on a supposedly naturally existing world of mutually exclusive nation-states (Skey 2010, 2011; Wimmer and Schiller 2003), but what matters here is that these national identities are still imagined to dominantly define the conditions of belonging (Skey 2010): they are imagined and therefore real communities (Anderson 1983). As Benedict Anderson (1983, 6) famously has put it, a nation 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. The thus socially constructed cultural boundary-makers are prescribed as the national normality, as real and existing model norms and tested among the newcomers (in example through citizenship exams) (Duemmler 2015; Skey 2010). The newcomers, such as foreign-born footballers, in their turn, precisely because the conditions of national belonging are 'continuously negotiated, since social actors engage in struggles over social categories and distinctions' (Duemmler 2015, 4), may 'negotiate their position by presenting and adapting their behaviour in particular ways in order to gain access to established domains' (Black 2016, 984). Interestingly, as Elias earlier had made clear in his writings (Elias 1978 (1970)), an everyday indication of power struggles on belonging and representation is self-identification. How and when personal pronouns – such as 'I', 'you', 'he', she', 'we' and 'they' – are used, could be giveaways of figurative acts of b/ordering and othering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002).

In his resignation letter, Özil (2018) implicitly refers to his experiences of the power struggles between (ethnic) groups of people within German society arguing – and also explicitly using personal pronouns to illustrate the power figurations – that 'I am still not accepted into society' and it feels that 'I am treated as being 'different''. Özil wonders whether his family's country (Turkey) or the fact that he is a practising Muslim might be reasons to 'other' him from the German nation. Moreover, Özil (2018) seems to be amazed that his position in German society has changed over time and that he recently has become positioned as an outsider to the German nation by proclaiming: 'I was born and educated in Germany, so why don't people accept that I am German?'

What these statements on national belonging illustrate is the inability of (individual) outsiders – even those who previously had the power to negotiate their position into established domains like Özil – to become or remain accepted and recognised as 'fully' belonging to the nation. Some outsiders might, depending on the *situational conditions*, be accepted as 'established-outsiders', yet in other contexts or for other people, some of their personal characteristics will still mark them as outsiders to the imagined (comm)unity of the nation (Black 2016; Dunning and Hughes 2014; Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019). Or as Michael Skey (2010, 718) has argued, we 'must attend to the different ways in which membership categories are contextually negotiated and transformed over time, [and] we must also acknowledge the degree to which distinctions continue to be drawn between different groups, with some seen to be more national than others'. So, what Özil's case alludes to, is that there seems to be a crucial difference between *formal* and *moral* citizenship that can vary over time as well over different kinds of outsider groups that needs to be studied further (Schinkel 2017), an insight that could further enrich the established-outsider approach. To this, we turn next.

## 'I had to ask myself what I was, or what I wanted to be, on paper at least'

In a *formal* sense, legal nationality or citizenship can be regarded as a political relationship between an individual and a state in which a 'citizen' has certain duties and obligations to a state and in return enjoys certain rights within the legal borders of that state. In terms of power figurations, it is a state's government that decides on a country's citizenship regimes and therefore holds the power to grant citizenship to individuals (Iorwerth, Hardman, and Jones 2014). '*Formal* citizenship', according to Ghassan Hage (1998, 50), 'can reflect a practical mode of national belonging'. This, however, only occurs 'in the ideal situation where the formal decision to include a person as a citizen reflects a general communal will' (Hage 1998, 50). Besides its *formal* dimension, citizenship suggests that citizens of the same state are members of the aforementioned (imagined), socially constructed, political community: the nation. This idea of an imagined-and-therefore-real nation reflects the *moral* dimension of citizenship which can be considered as a personal and collective form of identification with people who perceive themselves as part of the same group. And imagined communities will often be, then, communities of value in which some members are considered to be of higher value, more deserving its membership than others (Anderson 1983; Schinkel 2017).

In a similar vein, Hage (1998, 51) analytically distinguishes between *institutional-political* national acceptance of belonging, referring to legal membership of a state, and *practical-cultural* national acceptance of belonging relating to derivatives of the nation like (practical) nationality. Where the former refers to the power of the state to legally accept and recognise outsiders as belonging to the state [related to *formal* citizenship], the latter can be understood as – in line with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'social and cultural capital'– 'the sum of accumulated nationally sanctified and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions (national culture) adopted by individuals and groups, as well as valued characteristics (national types and national character) within a national field: looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour, etc.' [related to *moral* citizenship] (Hage 1998, 53).

The idea of *moral* citizenship, that what we bring forward here, is helpful in making clear that '*formal* citizenship alone', to use the words of Joost Jansen (2020, 102), 'is often not a sufficient prerequisite for immigrants, or even the children of immigrants, to be recognised as fully 'integrated' members of the (national) society'. Being born on the nation's territorial soil seems to be an insufficient criterium then for second, third, or even fourth generation immigrants to be accepted as fully belonging to the nation (Jansen 2020). So, while *formal* 'recognition and acknowledgment of one's rights and one's belonging become pivotal for the final grounding of one's belonging' (Kryżanowski and Wodak 2008, 104), '"citizenship" in a highly *moralized* sense has become a marker to identify membership of society' (Schinkel 2017, 197). It also implies, that using the notion of citizenship simply as a synonym or in association with national belonging would thus not do justice to capture this *moral* dimension and the inherent 'subtleties of the *differential modalities of national belonging* as they are experienced within society' (Hage 1998, 51). Both dimensions of national acceptance of belonging, the *formal* and the *moral*, are thus important in understanding power figurations between the established and outsider.

As *formal* German citizenship law did not (yet) allow dual nationality, and Özil stood on the brink of an international football career, 'I [Özil] had to ask myself what I was, or what I wanted to be, on paper at least' (Özil 2017, 42). By giving up his Turkish passport

in order to acquire a German one, Özil (2017, 44) *formally* expressed his (national) belonging to the German state and nation and, as a consequence, decided in favour of Germany's national football team. Özil's decision on his *formal* and sporting nationality was, according to himself, 'not an explicit rejection of Turkey. Just because I'd chosen to play for Germany didn't mean that Turkey wasn't close to my heart. I wasn't shutting myself off from Turkey and its people' (Özil 2017, 47). Özil 'changed' his nationality mainly because FIFA's eligibility regulations forced him to make a decision between his two countries (Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019): 'I had to make the decision about whether I wanted to play for Germany or Turkey. Logically I had to opt for one or the other; there was no way around it' (Özil 2017, 50). This in itself, should not necessarily be a problem. However, as we have seen, it is precisely the *moral* dimension of national belonging that has become pivotal in the whole discussion on Özil's 'Germanness', and which in the end has caused the rupture between him, as a native German, and his performances for the German national football team.

Özil's case is by no means an exception, but rather the rule. Many football players with migration backgrounds are, or have been, subject to public value judgments regarding their eligibility and loyalty to the (football) nation (Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019). In the eyes of Özil (2018), several German newspapers crossed a personal line ('one that should never be crossed') when 'they didn't critique my performances, they didn't criticise the team's performances, they just criticised my Turkish ancestry and respect for my upbringing'. Further, by repeatedly asking questions directed at specific *practical-cultural* markers of belonging, such as loyalty, pride, and affection, the media – as both part and representatives of the established – try to tacitly 'other' players with migration backgrounds thereby simultaneously 'b/order*ing*' an imaginary of the 'true' nation (Pratsinakis 2018; Skey 2010). As a consequence of these mutual processes of b/ordering and othering, players with migration backgrounds need to constantly prove their allegiance to the nation – something native players never have to – and show that they deserve to become or remain accepted and recognised as part of the nation (Hage 1998; Pratsinakis 2018).

## 'Are there criteria for being fully German that I do not fit?'

The (increasing) discrepancy between *formal* and *moral* citizenship can be indicative of 'the crucial link between recognition and belonging and the unequal relations of power that exist in the attribution and acceptance of identity claims' (Skey 2010, 718–719). In recent debates, in the processes of marking out 'insiders' from 'outsiders', particular attention is paid 'to the continuing power of gendered, racist and classist categories to define who counts as truly national' (Jansen 2020, 100), resulting in 'powerful distinctions between different social groups within the nation' (Skey 2011, 2). Whether outsiders are seen as 'proper' nationals thereby 'remains largely dependent on the judgements and (re) actions of others' (Skey 2010, 719). Interestingly, certain outsiders are 'able to position themselves (and are recognised) as unconditionally belonging to the nation' (Hage 1998; Skey 2010, 718), which largely seems to depend 'on the positions a person is assigned on various markers of difference and sameness, most notably those of race, ethnicity, culture, nation and religion' (Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019, 208). As these markers of difference and sameness differ per country, differences in hierarchies of national belonging exist between countries. Whereas, for example, in Germany, the

(German) Turks are, arguably, at the bottom of this hierarchy (Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019), this dubious honour seems to fall to (British) Asians in Great Britain (Clarke 2020). Further, as not all outsider groups have the power to accumulate enough (but when is enough?) national cultural capital, rankings of national belonging can also change over time. The result is that we are witnessing continuously shifting hierarchies of national belonging ranking different immigrant groups in relation to the dominant one (Clarke 2020; Skey 2011). And how this, consequentially, has led to a competition for national acceptance and recognition between individuals and these groups (Pratsinakis 2018, 13–14). For example, whereas the (Dutch) Surinamese were placed low bottom in terms of belonging to Dutch society in the 1970s/1980s, they have arguably moved up this hierarchy due to an increased recognition of the colonial linkages between the two countries (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk 2006). In terms of ethnicity and nationality, although this is not uncontested, the (Dutch) Surinamese, are now dominantly seen as more 'properly' Dutch than the (Dutch) Moroccans and the (Dutch) Turks, indicating an overtime re-ordering within this hierarchy of national belonging in the Netherlands (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk 2006; Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019). Moreover, in most (West) European countries, non-western immigrants are quite often 'less accepted and their categorization as culturally different burdens their interaction with the dominant society on many occasions' (Pratsinakis 2018, 15). 'Even in German elite football', according to Klaus Seiberth, Ansgar Thiel and Ramón Spaaij (2019, 788), 'the treatment of German national players with a Turkish background also appears to still be different compared to members of other immigrant groups'.

Özil (2018) also explicitly addresses the issue of hierarchy among outsiders when he complains about the fact that 'he is still labelled as a 'German Turk' even though he has been playing for Germany since the age of 17' (Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019, 788), whereas his foreign-born former-national teammates Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski were never referred to as 'German Poles' (Özil 2018; Seiberth, Thiel, and Spaaij 2019). Apparently, indeed, not all markers of national belonging are practically acquirable for every outsider or outsider group(s) at every moment or in any situation.

In today's (international) football, in Western Europe but also elsewhere, obvious acts of stigmatisation mainly seem to happen to players whose 'race/ethnicity' – being easily identifiable markers – differs from the one of the dominant group. Besides German-Turkish players like Özil, similar forms of othering have been directed at black German football players, most of them having roots that can be traced back to different African countries, such as Gerald Asamoah (Ghana), David Odonkor (Ghana), and Patrick Owomoyela (Nigeria). It was, in particular, Hamburg-born Owomoyela who in 2006 became subject of 'right-wing backlash' as a calendar was produced showing 'the national shirt with Owomoyela's squad number on it and the slogan: "White: not just the colour of the shirt! For a real National team!"' (Merkel 2014, 246). Although biologically informed racism is 'officially' accepted to be not accepted, and other hidden forms of in/exclusion such as references to nationhood or religion have become more 'accepted' (Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019, 198), Owomoyela's case does imply that race/ethnicity still remains one of the distinctive markers in determining who is 'in' or 'out'; arguably, even overtaking someone's place of birth in Western countries.

## 'You can definitely belong to two cultures. And you can certainly be proud of two cultures'

We come to a conclusion, after our close theoretical reading of Özil's powerful resignment, by going back to his painful rupture with his 'Germanness' once more and then try to look ahead. Born in Germany as a child of second-generation Turkish immigrants, and since the age of seventeen only in the possession of *formal* German citizenship, Mesut Özil felt that he was *morally* excluded from the German national football team after its dramatic 2018 football World Cup. Özil's resignation was a good example of the widespread tendency to portray the complex issues of citizenship and national identity in dichotomies; an 'us versus them', and a 'here versus there'. Özil's exemplary painful rupture has made clear that the arena of international football should come to terms in recognizing that feelings and experiences of national belonging of players with migration backgrounds are – at the very least – dual in the sense that they, in most cases, identify themselves with both their country of birth and the country of their family: 'You can definitely belong to two cultures. And you can certainly be proud of two cultures' (Özil 2017, 51). In addition, Özil's recent public performances outside of football, especially the photo-posing with the Turkish leader Erdoğan which in itself may indeed be seen as politically clumsy given Erdoğan's spiteful anti-western and autocratic leadership, did not necessarily have to backlash on his football affiliation. That it did, and to this extent, is telling for the power of *moral* deservedness for outsiders in the social construction of imagined communities.

Deservedness to represent the (football) nation seems to depend on the accumulated national cultural capital by players with migration backgrounds and the relentless demonstrations of their loyalty, pride, and affection that would mark them as being 'in', as 'one of us'. Further, as the established have the power to (re)construct and maintain the borders of national belonging, they are also powerful in deciding who *morally* deserves to belong to the (football) nation. Obviously, as both the established and outsiders are a constitutive part of the power balance determining national belonging (Pratsinakis 2018), then, arguably, both have the ability to, at least to a certain degree, and also the potential to change the borders of national belonging. What, however, then should be kept in mind is that Özil, like many other, especially non-Western, immigrants, will never be able to fully meet the current, prevailing conditions of Germany's national belonging, which seem to be biased towards Western, Christian and White characteristics (Van Sterkenburg, Peeters, and Van Amsterdam 2019). This highlights the conditional and temporal character of national belonging. It is therefore that many individuals belonging to the second, or even third or fourth generation of non-western immigrants within their country of birth experience that 'their presence and acceptance as legitimate members of the nation remains contested' (Kyeremeh 2020, 1137). The result is, that the acceptance and recognition of players with migration backgrounds will crucially be a matter of *moral* deservedness then, in the sense that their (national) belonging lasts as long as their performances on the field and in public are on (or above) the expected (invisible) norms set by the established: Only 'if "we" win…'.

What Özil's intriguing as well as most smarting case, above all, thus marks out is the fragility of national belonging for multiple generations and naturalised migrants, even for players who have been selected, accepted and recognised as key persons to represent 'the' nation in international football. We would, therefore, argue that more research is needed towards the

power (re)figurations of the (invisible) norms of national belonging, and how these norms are experienced in practice by (various) outsiders and between different outsider groups. Further, we would be in favour of loosening the bounds of football nationality and to allow for more flexibility and interchangeability of football players in the context of international football. The current rather fixed eligibility regulations for players to play for representative teams (FIFA 2019) are out of touch with the growth in international migration, the diversification of societies, and the increasing acceptance of dual citizenship (Castels, de Haas, and Miller 2014; Iorwerth, Hardman, and Jones 2014). In this respect, we provocatively postulate here, it would be worthwhile to investigate to what extent international football could become (more) like club football, where footballers of different origins are, in most instances, accepted and (morally) recognised as 'one of us', as long they play – and perform well – for 'our' team.

Mesut Özil played for various teams in his life, also clubs who are competitors of each other in either domestic and international leagues, like FC Schalke 04, Werder Bremen, Real Madrid CF, and Arsenal FC. Barely ever did he have to show his undivided *formal* and *moral* belonging to the clubs he played for to the extent that he had to do for his selection to the German national football team.[4] Never were there discussions on Özil's assumed 'Schalkeness', or whether he would be an Arsenal' Wolf, or anything like it. Whether the team Özil played for won or lost, they would be in it together. As a team. Maybe, it is time, to rethink if we are winning really as a national football team, when the battle is not only or no longer an 'us *versus* them', 'our national football team *versus* the other national football team', but also an 'us *versus* us' within our national football teams.

## Notes

1. While Özil's father grew up in Germany, his ancestors are from Devrek, located in the province of Zonguldak in Turkey (Özil 2017).
2. The Bambi Awards are Germany's most important media prizes and have been awarded to 'people with vision and creativity, whose outstanding successes and achievements have been reported in the media' (Martin 2010).
3. Although this statement received a lot of media coverage, Özil's remark is certainly not unique. There have been other players in international football and athletes in other international sports who said similar things, like the French striker Karim Benzema, who has Algerian roots, in 2011: 'Basically, if I score, I'm French. And if I don't score or there are problems, I'm Arab' (Rosenthal and Conrad 2014).
4. Just recently, on October 21st 2020, Mesut Özil placed a statement on his Twitter account expressing his disappointment of not being registered as an Arsenal player for the Premier League season in which he literally pledges his loyalty and allegiance to the club he loves, Arsenal (Özil 2020).

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