

Topophilia or Topoporno? Patriotic Place Attachment in International Football Derbies*

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ABSTRACT: *A football team is dominantly regarded as an icon and a representation of a certain place. Especially when it concerns the national team, in which the best players of a nation are selected, the identification with the team results in striking imaginations and discourses on 'us and them' and 'here and there'. In international games, it is felt that the honour, the esteem, and the image of a nation is at stake. In order to understand the blatant and often extravagant identification of people with a national team, in this contribution we make an attempt to analyse and understand the production and reproduction of spatial competition of identities as uttered in derbies, that is, interurban or international football games between two neighbouring places. The analysis in this paper is particularly focused on why and how the tension between two neighbouring national football teams is constructed and how places are represented, symbolised, and flagged in these derbies. The argument is illustrated by a close scrutiny of the production of nationalism and conflicting identities in the derbies of the Netherlands vs. Belgium and the Netherlands vs. Germany.*

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Football is war.

Rinus Michels, former coach of the Dutch national team (our translation)

Millwall was like our home. You wouldn't let someone walk in through your front door without interrogating them, would you... Football's a man's thing, and fighting was a matter of pride, pride about your place, your ground. Our ground is pony little ground, but we love it. Brick for brick, slate for slate. I'd die for it.

Millwall FC fan, quoted by Lightbown (1992: 14)

For some people football is a matter of life and death; I do not agree: it is much more important than that.

Bill Shankley, former manager of Liverpool

Introduction: the Patriotic Circus of Football

If anywhere, nationalism rules in international football (soccer) games. Despite the standardisation of the game on a global scale and the international mobility of players, the national origin and worshipping of players and teams/clubs is still a dominant feature in today's football. The game of football, international as it is in its scope and contents, has become one of the most effective and seemingly neutral and innocent ways to imagine and represent the national community. In the words of Richard Giulianotti, in his ground-breaking study on the sociology of football, "football is one of the great cultural institutions, like education and the mass media, which shapes and cements national identities throughout the world" (Giulianotti, 1999: 23). National football teams are explicitly constructed and meant to represent the 'nation'. The best players born in an enclosed territory are selected and asked to serve a higher purpose than their self: the nation's honour. In the post-modern play on competitive differences and perpetual quests for traditions, images and identities, the popular game of football (millions of people watch televised games) has increasingly become an easy and attractive target for populist political and commercial making, marking and marketing of the 'own' territory, that is, the home-ground (Maassen, 1999). National media, businesses and politicians are eager to help lighting the populist fire of national pride and identification, each hoping that it will serve their own specific interest (see also Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). The achievements of the national team are presented as matters of national interest and pride. The struggle between nations, as played out on the football field, makes the 'own nation' more than merely a fantasy or imagination. It makes the imagined community real, an integral part of daily existence and practices. It makes the national identity graspable and meaningful, seen through the imagined eyes of the 'other' (Levinas, 1969). The

achievements of the team of South Korea at the recently held FIFA World Cup Championships (2002) in South Korea and Japan are a case in point in this respect. Most of the national teams at the World Championship already had experiences with the flagging of the nation when the national team is playing, but for the South Korean nation this experience was entirely new, at least on such a massive scale. The national football team of South Korea did surprisingly well at the last Championship, which filled the South Koreans with an overwhelming pride and caused massive national enthusiasm. Nationwide, millions of people enthusiastically followed the performances of the national team while overtly wearing the colours of the national flag. This gave the impression of a big outward show, a national coming-out, set off against the 'significant other', neighbouring North Korea. The team's Dutch coach, Guus Hiddink, became a South Korean national hero on a mythical scale. The love for him went as far as the organisation of excursions by and for South Koreans to his birthplace in the Netherlands. Politically, too, the performances of the team were (and are) well exploited. After one of South Korea's victories, the national Minister of Commerce, Shin Kook Hwan, rhetorically called for the major firms in South Korea, like Samsung and Daewoo, to "adopt the Hiddink style" in winning new foreign investments. The unexpected success of the national team was enthusiastically welcomed and incorporated by President Kim as well, who saw in it an excellent opportunity to reposition himself and the nation for the eyes of the world.

Noteworthy in this respect also is that the South Korean-Japanese organisation of the World Championship made use of what could be called '*stand-in fans*'. Hoping that the world, watching through the eyes of the camera, would think positively about the enthusiasm of the local people and their organisation, some South Koreans and Japanese were requested to be supporters for, and dress up in the national colours of other countries when going to the stadium.

The commercialisation and commodification of national identity during international football games often leads to what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as "cultural fast food" on TV and in newspapers and magazines. The 'fast food' in the media varies from unalloyed entertainment television, numerous interviews and conversations with players and coaches before and after the match in so-called 'serious' programmes, to the constant making of news about the health and well-being of players which goes as far as front-cover news in national newspapers on an ankle-injury of a player of the national team (Van Houtum, 2001a). The blowing up of strikingly useless details and soap opera-like accounts of the daily well-being of players and teams/clubs by television, magazines, sport pages and, increasingly, the Internet, produce an atmosphere

suggestive of weight and importance. It suggests the presentation of knowledge and news that is taken to be essential for the *being-present* in the community at hand. The constant updating and production of these 'facts' enhances the feeling of familiarity and belonging, as if players and teams/clubs are familiar, a part of our own private family. The players starring in this daily soap opera are functioning as enlightened self-made examples for the community. They are the living cases in point of the fulfilment of the capitalistic dream of attainable and self-producible stardom and richness. The young talented players exemplify what Giulianotti has described as the "ordinary yet special" men among us (Giulianotti, 1999: 118). They enter our homes and private lives as longed-for fantasies, seductive and accessible, yet distant. Through such blowing up of and zooming in on details and daily practices, the media produce a seductive *hyperreality*, a seemingly neutral and socially accepted emptiness that is appealingly easy to consume and communicate about with others – the "pornography of football" of Baudrillard (1990). We agree with Baudrillard that the overt banality of appealing *un-coverings*, exposures and representations – even representation by *stand-in fans* who unashamedly help to reproduce nationalism, is indeed striking and brazenly extends the more covert "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995). Why is it that football games can so easily be instrumentalised and can have such an appealing and fulfilling effect on people? And how and why is an appeal made to the *nation* in the international competition between teams? These are the questions that formed the basis for our study, which focuses on the representation and imagination of national identity in a competition between two neighbouring countries; in particular, the Netherlands and Belgium and the Netherlands and Germany. Our study on the patriotic circus in football derbies thereby feeds into an ongoing and growing critical debate on competing claims on territory through national identification and the use of performative flagging and discursive symbolisation in nationalistic rivalry in football games (see amongst others Giulianotti, 1999; MacClancy, 1996; Redhead, 1993; Wagg, 1995).

We realize that telling is making. It is we, two born and raised Dutch scholars, who tell this story about the neighbouring games in Dutch football. The reader, making a story out of this story, is free to interpret and contextualise our writing. By no means do we seek to avoid subjectivity. For it is precisely the rhetoric used in national boosterism, i.e., that the Dutch *would* be different from the Germans, which lies at the heart of our critical stance here. In competitive football games such differences are reproduced and enlivened in an unspeakably extravagant manner. Most of the performative flagging of the nation, at least in the Netherlands, is legitimised by referring to its innocent carnivalesque character as if it is pure, ordinary and has nothing to do with

politics (see also Giulianotti, 1991). We would argue here that football nationalism may be foolish or carnivalesque and can be exciting and fun, but it is by no means neutral or innocent. An international football game is never just a game. It is always ideologically and politically geared and used as well. The rivalry with the 'other' legitimises the reality and perpetual upgrading of the 'own' nation. It is not neutral or innocent because football nationalism feeds into the fiction that conformity on the basis of national identity or national space is self-evident, and that nations compete with each other. It aggregates international thinking in terms of nations as separate blocks and segregates people on the basis of passport-identity. It energises and bundles the aggression and violence of groups of people and leads to high costs in the use of police forces for security. Football nationalism is not harmless, pure or merely carnivalesque. For this reason, we believe that it is worthwhile to critically analyse and try to understand how and why the performativity that is played out in international football games is related to, and feeds into, the imaginary spatial construction that is the nation. In the following section we will try to shed light on the expressions and possible motivations for the (political) use of discourse, images and representations in international football games. In the third section, we particularly focus our analysis on the representation of the Dutch nation by supporters and media when the Netherlands is playing against its most significant others, that is, its direct neighbours Belgium and Germany.

Football and Representation of Place

In 1988, John Bale laid down a significant framework to account for the linkage between sports and the representation of place. His argument is that sports such as football are nowadays seen as major sources for place boosterism, which can be seen as a form of (local) patriotism: "There can be little doubt that it is through sport that current manifestations of localism (and regionalism and nationalism) are most visible" (Bale, 1988: 519). Football is a way to mark and claim territory, and to inscribe and communicate the (local) identity in space (see also Sack, 1986). Identifying with the football team expresses the wish to be recognised by the larger world. It is hoped and desired that the performances of the team will provide the justified means to be proud of the 'own' place. And pride of place, as Bauman (1997) has made clear, is merely a metonymy for the inclination towards beauty, purity and order of the territory one lives in.

Identification with a territory must hence be seen as a strategic act (Van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). It imaginatively purifies, beautifies and orders one's place in the mind. The obvious consequence of such positivism is the production of difference, competition and rivalry, all very typical of the game of

football. Football matches are literally being categorised as 'home' games and 'away' games: 'we' here versus 'them' there. Places are discursively rephrased as 'own' territory, such as the 'home ground' (i.e. the stadium), which is to be defended against the 'other' (see Figure 1, p. 248).

The dyadic character of how the game of football is played, which also applies to many other team sports, certainly adds to an atmosphere of territorial difference-making (see also Giulianotti, 1999). Two teams, the 'own' team and the opponent, the 'other', are playing against each other, each defending one side of the field. Each player on the ground is playing against a direct opponent wearing different colours, name and logo, but usually the same number on the back. There are attackers, strategy-setters, runners, and defenders in each team. The keeper is the last defender of the team, trying to keep the 'own' goal 'clean'. In the same league there is always a return-match, where the other team and its supporters are defending their home-ground.

In this competition between territorial claims, the scale of a place is physically not of significant relevance (see also Van Houtum & Lagendijk, 2001). Similar social mechanisms are at work at the local, regional and national level. Territorial identification is of paramount importance in football, but the spatial scale of such identification is easily exchanged for a lower or higher one. Localism, regionalism and nationalism can occur simultaneously. It is not scale as such that matters here, it is how and why the performance play on territorial identity is represented. What is at stake here is that 'our' territory does better than 'yours.' What the national level is imagined to add in a rivalry between territories is the representation it assumes to capture. More than clubs, that follow business considerations in buying talented people from everywhere to play for the club's honour, the national team is assumed to represent the 'true' and 'real' national strength. Hence what matters is the imagination of a collective home.

Constructing and Containing Supporters

The identification of people with their home-ground takes place both symbolically and materially. *Topophilia*, people's love for a place, is expressed in a number of ways in the case of football (see also Bale 1993; Tuan, 1974; Van Houtum, 2001a; 2001b; Wagner 1981). To begin with, the citizens who buy tickets to see the game are no longer mere citizens – once they enter the stadium they become *supporters* and as such they are categorised as supporting either the 'home' or the 'away' team. A supporters crowd could be perceived as an imagined community in the tradition of Anderson's well-known work (1983). Not all the persons of the 'we' know each other, but the aim for all is

clear: WE are HERE and this place is OURS. The symbolic appropriation and defending of the 'sacred' home ground is of crucial importance in football matches. Losing a match at home is considered to be shameful. Conversely, winning 'away' from home, on the home-ground of the other, is usually perceived as a true victory. The appropriation and continuous use of flags, hymns, anthems, colours, T-shirts and sometimes even tattoos contribute to the inscribing, communicating and symbolic marking and claiming of a place in space. The spatial identification with the football club or national team is worn like a personal *emblem* (Van Houtum, 2001b), making the imagined unity of the supporting group ostentatiously real and manifest. The social division between supporters is materially enacted as well through a gated separation of the two sides of supporters in the stadium, the prevention of physical contact between them and the keeping of an open 'empty' space between them. 'Neutral' visitors to the stadium who pay to see the game are scarce – 'neutral supporters' is a contradiction in terms.

A football stadium *contains* people. It brings people together in an arena to see a fight for honour and money on the playground. And it encloses them, not only through the closed shape of the stadium, but also through the vigorous attempts to control the decontrolling of emotions (Elias, 1982). The possibility of association and identification with a team in a closed physical setting has a strong cohesive and binding effect on the supporters of both teams (see Giulianiotti & Armstrong, 1997). Through the creation of excitement and amusement, feelings of local identity are sublimated and magnified. To enhance the feeling of a fight worth seeing and paying for, some stadiums are literally named Arena (as in the case of Ajax Amsterdam). People are allowed (and stimulated) to express their emotional attachment to the team, and the stadium works both as a catalyst as well as a controller (Foucault's *panopticon*) of this outlet (Foucault, 1980). Finding a balance between the controlling and decontrolling of emotions is seen as one of the most difficult yet important aims of the stadium management.

Topophilia or Topoporno?

In matches between national or regional rivals, antagonistic feelings between supporters can be very strong, especially with the party that perceives itself to be weaker or suppressed. For instance, 'regionalist' Catalanian FC Barcelona against 'statist' Real Madrid in Spain; or regionally poor Napoli against regionally rich clubs from the north of Italy; and clubs from regions striving for political independence, such as Athletic de Bilbao in the Spanish Basque country against the 'oppressor' clubs from Spain (Van Dam 2000a; Van

Houtum & Lagendijk, 2001). For some, the annual meetings between football clubs from the 'periphery' and clubs from the powerful economic and political 'core' are of supreme importance. Identification with a football club is a form of acknowledgement of the local by the larger world, a feeling of being someone, regardless of how small the club or city might be. In the search for acknowledgement by others, and for social cohesion within the 'own' community, some municipalities and businesses therefore instrumentalise, exploit and often subsidise the local football club as a platform to market the name of the city or firm to the outside world. It puts the 'own' city/firm on the rhetorical map (see Hague & Mercer, 1998). Supporters critically follow the media that enlarge the presentation of the 'own' club and local place for a wider audience. Too little attention or, worse, negative comments are considered nasty and unjust. In cases of negative publicity, scapegoats are often sought among the media.

The marketing of the identification to the outside world could be seen as an extravagant and paid form of *topophilia* and is certainly more than just banal nationalism. There is no shame or subtle manifestation at all; on the contrary, there is an overall pride to extravagantly wear, perform, exhibit, show and cheer, as well as commercially exploit the spatial identification. It is what we would like to call *topoporno*. Being seduced by the attractiveness of a collective outlet and collective identification, for most of the supporters the match is much more than just a game. For supporters it is an identity battle for honour, image and esteem of the 'own' place (city/nation). The 'own' place and especially the stadium are thereby worshipped and communicated as if they were sacred ground. Attaching oneself affectively to the 'own' place satisfies the need for wholeness, it fills an emptiness, a void that one seeks to fill when searching for one's identity. The evolution of the Internet as a way of communicating imageries, symbols and narratives about the 'own' team and place, has certainly stimulated the development of such *topoporno*. Places become translated into fulfilling and seductive prêt-à-porter images. Local specificities are thereby blown up and displayed for the eye of the other. As we discussed above, people in South Korea happily and proudly identify with the nation's football success, and politics and commerce re-imagine and exploit this success to a worldwide audience. But there are other, less obvious examples as well. See for instance the Internet page of London club Tottenham Hotspur, built by their fan club (Figure 2, p.248).

The Internet homepage opens with the text: *Welcome to the website of the Fanzine of the team who play at White Hart Lane N. 17 – the World Famous Home of Tottenham Hotspur*. Such worshipping and flagging of the home-ground is not uncommon for Internet-sites built by supporters of a club/team.

The Internet is perceived as an easily accessible public medium with a potentially large range to communicate and sell one's identification with a team/club to an imagined other. The explicit flaunting of the street and local postal code in this case can be explained by the fact that Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur's biggest rival, is located only a few miles away in the same city.

The club hymn of a Dutch professional football team, NEC Nijmegen, provides another illustration of the importance of presenting a wholesome and appealing local identity (Fig. 3, our translation).

Figure 3: NEC Nijmegen Club hymn (our translation)

Source: NEC (www.NEC-Nijmegen.nl)

NEC Nijmegen Club-hymn

Refrain: And again we go to fight, red, black and green

Fighting every time, NEC will be champion!

Fighting every time, NEC will be champion!

There, on the borders of the river Waal,

Lies the old city of emperors, that throughout the centuries,

Never forgot the language of the emperor,

That language of fighting for a cause, we learned from them,

With the right policy, the heads cool, fighting for NEC

(Refrain)

Come on men, keep those colours high, of Goffert, of club and City!

Keep on fighting, focus on the aim, even when the going gets Tough!

Take Nijmegen to a higher level, to which it is indebted

Take NEC to the top, the battle has been erected here

(Refrain)

And when the going gets tough, don't lose courage!

Keep the name of NEC high, in bad and good times!

Make the country aware, where NEC belongs,

And remember the sportive aspects, both in acts and word. (Refrain)

The hymn illustrates rather straightforwardly the imagined association between a football team and the city in which it is located, Nijmegen in this case. A direct link is made with what is seen as a historically essential characteristic of the citizens of Nijmegen in the face of past foreign invasion: the ability to fight. Through this latter rhetoric, an attempt is made to root the club and the city of Nijmegen in history and to ascertain faith in the continuity of its existence (cf. Hague and Mercer, 1998). It is clear from the hymn that NEC is seen as the representative team that is fighting for the image and honour of the city of Nijmegen. The image and honour are perceived and reflected in the eyes of the other (cf. Levinas, 1969), that is, other teams in the Netherlands.

The reproduction of a Derby

For many supporters, derbies are the most important and emotional matches in a football season. For the supporters of NEC Nijmegen for instance, the most important game of the season is undoubtedly that one held against Vitesse from Arnhem, the other big city in the province of Gelderland in the Netherlands. For the supporters of the Netherlands, the game of games is the match against Germany, the big neighbour-country and the Netherlands's significant other. More than any other game, matches against the spatially near neighbour reproduce a territorial categorisation that helps to identify the 'we' in the territory. In the process of territorial categorisation, three interconnected principles of spatial identification with a football team can be discerned, which may help to explain the dedicated significance attached to derbies (Van Dam 2000a; Van Houtum, 2001b):

1. *Symbolic othering.* The more people feel that they cannot be distinguished from each other by the outside world, the more they tend to distinguish themselves from others on the basis of other characteristics, such as being a supporter of a specific football team. In doing so, clubs/teams and their supporters communicate that it is *their* club/team and their club/team *alone* that represents the region/nation. The club/team is therefore expected to fight for the symbolic hegemony in the area. See for instance the slogan on the banner in Figure 4, which translates as "NEC, the number 1 of the province of Gelderland", which should be understood primarily in the light of the rivalry with the significant other in the region, that is, Vitesse from Arnhem.

2. *Mental distancing.* Alongside the process of symbolic othering for the outside world, the mental distancing between the two nations involved

increases. Put differently, when the physical distance between the home fields of two football teams is perceived to be small, the mental distance between them is more accentuated in order to make a difference in space.

3. *Emulative reproduction*: In the process of othering and distancing, (traumatic) historical events become rooted in the collective memory of the nation. Popular traditions, narratives, romanticising, stereotyping, symbolising and construction of myths all help to produce and reproduce the continuity of the nation and its antagonistic other in collective memory (cf. Sack, 1986; Paasi, 1996; Yiftachel, 1997). The other is thereby symbolically emptied from its richness and inner complexities and replaced by an *idée fixe* that is antagonistic to one's own identity and worth fighting against. The rooting makes the match between the two into a 'tradition'. Despite its arbitrary and often imagined character, this socially constructed difference is usually perceived to be immense and real (Van Dam 2000b). The rivalry between the two teams/clubs is imagined and mythicised according to various attributes that are hard to categorise and often overlap, such as appeal to the class society of feudal or industrial times, and/or has a religious and/or geographical dimension (see also Giulianotti, 1999). Looking at the club-derbies on the European continent, the region we studied and know best, the following examples of such constructed differences in derbies can be given: the difference between the working class and the middle class (for instance Lazio Roma–AS Roma; Benfica–Sporting Lisboa; Eindhoven–PSV, NEC–Vitesse); between the working-class and a bohemian crowd (for instance Hamburg SV–St. Pauli; Orlando Pirates–Kaizer Chiefs in South Africa); between tradition and modernity (Genoa–Sampdoria, Sheffield United–Sheffield Wednesday); between Protestants and Catholics (Glasgow Rangers–Celtic) or between clubs from different streets of the same city (Tottenham Hotspur–Arsenal, both located in London). In many cases derbies are also perceived to be a contest between small and large, between David and Goliath (for instance 1860 München–Bayern München; Sparta–Feyenoord; Manchester City–Manchester United, Notts County–Nottingham Forest; Espanyol–Barcelona; Belgium–The Netherlands; The Netherlands–Germany; Scotland–England; Wales–England). Supporters see these matches as battles where the small clubs/teams often get defeated by the bigger neighbours, but not always. Periodic victories help to keep the dream and rivalry alive.

Netherlands-Belgium: the Derby of the Low Countries

Zooming in on the Netherlands, we would argue that historically, the Netherlands vs. Belgium match has been *the* derby classic for both countries. *The derby of the Low Countries*, representing the matches between the Netherlands and Belgium, has in fact become a household word. In the 20th century the Netherlands and Belgium played 122 international football matches against each other. Until the middle of the 1960s, the match was even held twice a year (except during WWII). In the last 35 years of the century both teams met 'only' 22 times. In the first years of international football, most matches of the Dutch team were played against neighbouring countries, primarily Belgium, England, Germany and Sweden. In 20 of the 42 international matches the Dutch team has played before World War I, Belgium was the opponent. It was only after 1920 that the geographical radius of action of the Dutch team expanded.

Although the twice-yearly tradition has faded, the Netherlands–Belgium rivalry and emotional burden remained, whether or not boosted or polished by the mass media. The results of these matches were always unpredictable and that kept the duel exciting. Nevertheless, the Netherlands were always slightly favourite, feeding into an already existing stereotype of haughty Dutch and dumb Belgians. The antagonism between the two mostly stems from Belgium, and more particularly, from the Dutch speaking and largely Catholic part of Belgium, Flanders. The opposition here is especially directed against Holland (the western, largely protestant, political and economic 'core' of the Netherlands). In Belgium one therefore speaks of Holland–Belgium, which expresses these imagined differences. For Belgian citizens, 'Holland' is a nickname for the Netherlands. The Netherlands for them represents the former name of the Dutch state to which Belgium formerly belonged until 1830.

The extravagant flagging of the nation by the Dutch in international football games is something most Belgians find difficult to understand and accept. In large part this can be ascribed to the weak sense of a Belgian nation. In the linguistically and politically divided Belgium (into Walloon and Flanders) nationalism is not so much an issue at the level of the state. The two sub-states are considered to be much more important in daily life. Positive achievements of the national team are enthusiastically welcomed, yet with much more ambivalence and much more covertly than in the case of the Netherlands. The ostensive and blatant adherence to the performance of the Dutch national team in the Netherlands is perceived as blown up and over-the-top by the Belgians, enhancing the general sense of arrogance and explicitness of the Dutch even further. Ever since the separation of Belgium and the Netherlands, the cultural differences between the two countries – imagined and therefore real – have

become strongly sublimated, exaggerated and magnified. Football confrontations between the two countries in particular have become an important means to reproduce the belief in, and the value of maintaining these differences. Over the years however, in the Netherlands the antagonism has turned eastwards, towards Germany. The watershed of this orientational turn was in 1974, when the Dutch team lost in the final game of the World Cup Championship to West Germany. In his book *Football Against the Enemy* (1994), British-Dutch historian Simon Kuper goes as far as labeling the matches between the Netherlands and Germany as “the greatest grudge match in Europe”. We turn to this derby now.

Netherlands vs. Germany: the Football War

How could this have happened? Damn Germans. It is so unfair. I am so ashamed.

The most beautiful day of my life. My marriage was something special. But this is really the most beautiful day in my entire life. We finally have our revenge after 14 years.

Two football supporters uttered the reactions quoted above in the media. The first quotation was typically heard after the loss of the Dutch national football team in the World Cup Championships final against West Germany, held in West Germany in 1974.¹ The second comment was typical of the sentiments of Dutch people in 1988, when the Dutch national football team beat West Germany in the semi-finals of the European Championships, held in West Germany. On that latter occasion, almost the entire nation of the Netherlands (later estimated at about 9,000,000 of the 15,000,000 population) went out on the streets after the game and collectively celebrated that victory. Ask an average football fan in both the Netherlands and Germany to name the most important games between the two countries, and they will not hesitate to name 1974 and 1988, many remembering these games and their chronological events in great detail.

2 After WWII, West Germany and East Germany competed as separate teams. The reunification of Germany in 1989/1990 was followed by the reunification of a single national German team.

These two historical games have had and still have an immense effect on the bond between the two countries. It is not an exaggeration to argue that to be able to understand the uneasy relationship between the Netherlands and Germany, at least from the side of the Dutch, one must study the constructed importance of at least two things: first, the impact of WWII and most of all the reconstructions and reactions after that war, and second, the social significance of the football games between the two (and especially the two games mentioned above).

The two football games of 1974 and 1988 are used as icons in the history of the relationship between the two countries, instrumentalised as symbols of a not-forgotten past. Especially from the side of the Netherlands, which for a long time was economically largely dependent on and financially tightly linked to the economy of Germany, these events are rhetorically used in the national sports media over and over again. As stated above, the derby between the Netherlands and Germany became a tense game, at least for the Netherlands, only after what was later rhetorically labelled 'the mother of all defeats' against West Germany in 1974, when the Dutch made it to the final of a World Cup Championship for the first time in history, and lost to the hosts, West Germany. Only after that game in 1974 was the nationalistic (football) rivalry socially produced, and mostly from the side of the Netherlands. Given its dramatic historical experiences with nationalism, in Germany nationalism is a much more ambivalent and politically sensitive issue. In this continuous reproduction of rivalry between the two countries after 1974, references to WWII were frequently used from the side of the Netherlands. Yet, it is certainly not the case that in the celebration of the victory in 1988 at the European Championship, when the Netherlands beat West Germany in the semi-finals (and subsequently won the tournament), 43 years of hate after the end of WWII in 1945 found expression (see also Kuper, 1994). The traumatic experience of the war was an instrument, an extra alibi to defend and legitimise abject feelings of difference from, and of powerlessness and dependency towards the Germans. In this symbolic battle, the Dutch represent(ed) themselves as the good, the tolerant and friendly country against an unfriendly, evil neighbour.

It was expected that these feelings of powerlessness and abjection would subside after the triumph in 1988, but they did not. The ritual of argument and insult that accompanies most derbies continued (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 1997). Ever since that game in Hamburg in 1988, every confrontation between the Netherlands and Germany is still a special event, but no longer for the Dutch alone. Probably irritated by the constant Dutch discourse on the importance of winning against the Germans, nationalistic sly digs from the German side are now played out against the Dutch occasionally, although still more seldom.

The latest in this series is a German-made T-shirt one can buy via the Internet, illustrating a crying Dutch supporter with the text *Ihr seid NICHT dabei* (“you will NOT be present”), as a reference to the absence of the Dutch national team from the 2002 World Cup Championships in South Korea and Japan (see Figure 5).

Conclusion: Continuous Symbolic Gaming

By definition, the game of football involves a competitive match between two teams. It is not self-evident however, that the competition is played out on an international level between nations. That such competition between nations still takes place, and is widely accepted as the most important type of football games, is an interesting and remarkable phenomenon. Apparently, the nation, this arbitrary and imagined community of people, still plays an important role in ordering and bordering our daily lives, at least in football (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). The performances of the ‘own’ football team help to create a territorial identity that is fulfilling and satisfying the need for a collective and representative home. Attaching significance to having the same descent, the same ‘born-identity’ is seductively simple and appealingly ‘pure’. It constructs a kind of easiness, a legitimate and comfortable emptiness that helps to order one’s mind and one’s world. Even in our presumably post-modern world, the modern cutting up of territory into football nations has proven to be a persistent power. What is more, the post-modern craving for and commercial exploitation of tradition and ‘authentic’ difference have upgraded the national belonging to a more ostensive and flagrant uttering of football identity. As if it were a seductive dance on a stage, the constitutive eye of the other has become more important: Look at us, admire our beauty, our purity, sense our strength and fitness. Although certainly not equally flagrantly and manifestly uttered by all nations, the dominant pattern of international football games is nevertheless a more intense and conscious representation, imaging and commodification of the nation as the collective home in international football games, something which we have labeled *topoporno*. This dyadic game of exchanging images of sturdy, wholesome nations in international football games is strongly endorsed by the social division and symbolic demarcation of supporters of both teams. The supporters of the one national team manifestly and blatantly cheer, paint, flag and symbolically defend the home-ground against the main ‘enemy’, mostly the big neighbour. What is seen as the neighbour is not so much a matter of physical scale or physical distance. It is symbolic scale and symbolic distance that matter here. It is the power of the imagination of a collective home that

makes the nation significantly real for people. Winning the games of pride and honour against the big neighbour is a matter of symbolic justice and hegemony.

Losing these games does not weaken the nationalistic feelings. Losses are instrumentalised and heroically re-imagined in the search for future victory and revenge. It seems that international football games, and derbies in particular, are indeed, as is sometimes argued, the continuation of geopolitics by other means.

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Figure 1: Banner at NEC Nijmegen stadium

Source: <http://www.necfotosite.nl/>



Figure 2: Independent Tottenham Hotspur Supporters web-site.

Source: <http://www.necfotosite.nl/>



Figure 4: Banner at NEC
Translation: NEC, the number 1 of the
Province of Gelderland

Source: <http://www.necfotosite.nl/>



Figure 5: German T-shirt mocking
failures by the Duth team.

Translation: Football World cup 2002

–You will not be present

Source: <http://www.ihrseidnichtdabei.de>

