

Master's Thesis

Title of thesis: How do French Politicians frame the Racial Diversity of the French National's football team (1998-2018)?

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1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

“A country needs, at certain moments, to come together, around an idea that makes it proud of itself” Is what Jacques Chirac proclaimed after the 1998 World Cup win of France’s *Black-Blanc-Beur* team.¹ The idea that a nation as a whole can be embodied by eleven men playing football for ninety minutes has been fully embraced by politicians trying to make a point out of these results. As such, France’s three to nil win over Brazil at the 1998 World Cup represented so much more to French Politicians than the result of a football game. In the eyes of many, this win was the symbol that France’s efforts at integrating its immigration had been crowned by success.² The team that won the tournament was composed in a great part by the sons of immigrants, with their best player being the son of an Algerian immigrant, Zinédine Zidane. Nonetheless, twelve years after this win, at the 2010 World Cup a team composed of the same racial diversity that was celebrated then, did not manage to get out of the group stage. Along with the lack of on-field success, off-field issues also inundated French media as players went on ‘strike’ during the world cup. This led some French politicians to qualify this team of being made out of “*racailles*” (scum), with many

¹ Original Quotation: “Je crois qu'un peuple a besoin, à un certain moment, de se retrouver, de se retrouver ensemble, autour d'une idée qui le rend fier de lui-même”

Poivre D'Arvor and Jacques Chirac, other, Intervention Télévisée de Monsieur Jacques Chirac, Président de La République (TF1, July 17, 2017).

² Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, “World Cup France '98,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35, no. 3 (September 2000)://doi.org/10.1177/101269000035003006, 332.

considering that these critiques of the players had a racist undertone.³ However, just eight years later, at the 2018 World Cup, France won the tournament for the second time in its history, twenty years after the *Blanc-Blanc-Beur* generation, with a team composed of less than a third of white players. Yet, Emmanuel Macron, France's president at the time, avoided referring to the origins of the players and centered his comments around a celebration of France's republicanism: "This team is beautiful because it was united (...) and proud of France, don't change!"⁴

This thesis will be centered around these three tournaments using the comments of politicians all across France's political spectrum to look at how these actors use and frame the racial diversity of the team to pursue their own political agendas.

1.2 Research Question and its Relevance

The research question in this thesis is: "How did French politicians frame the racial diversity of France's national men's football team from 1998 to 2018?"

The intricate relationships between sport, politics, and societal identities in France is relevant for two interrelated reasons.

First, the way politicians frame the racial diversity of the national team reflects broader societal negotiations about race, nationality, and diversity. Football's ability to galvanize public attention makes it a dominant tool for political discourse.⁵ The prism of sport allows politicians to reflect on societal values such as questions of national identity and the construction of a nation. As Mignon asserts, "Soccer in France cannot be separated from the republican state; soccer and politics are both affected by the same crisis", underlining the link between sport and the social fabric of the nation.⁶ Football in France is also particularly interesting as it is linked to the concept of 'sporting nationalism' which demonstrates that

³"Bleus : 'Une Équipe de Racailles' (Lancar)," *Le Figaro*, June 30, 2010.

⁴ Original Quotation: "Ne changez pas, cette équipe elle est belle parce qu'elle a été unie et parce qu'elle a été forte et fière de la France, ne changez pas!"

Emmanuel Macron's Speech at the *Elysée* for the 14th of July 2018

⁵ Igor Martinache, "Le Football Au Prisme Des Sciences Sociales," *La Vie des idées*, October 17, 2010, <https://laviedesidees.fr/Le-football-au-prisme-des-sciences>.

⁶ Christos Kassimeris, "Black, Blanc and Beur : French Football's 'Foreign Legion'," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 17, 2011): 19.

sport is one of the few avenues where patriotism still is seen as positive, allowing for an opening on debates about nationalism and collective belonging.⁷

Secondly, France is interesting because it claims to be a ‘colorblind’ nation with its strong emphasis on civic citizenship rather than ethnic citizenship.⁸ France’s ‘colorblind’ approach is materialized by the absence of any mention of race or ethnicity in official data. This is the consequence of their concept of civic nationalism which means that their conception of citizenship is based on a common desire to live together and not on common ancestry.⁹

This period is chosen as it regroups three World Cups that each had both very different on-field results but that also generated divergent reactions. These World Cups do have in common that they all have been abundantly commented by French politicians. In addition to the World Cups, other events surrounding both the French team (such as the affairs of the ‘quotas’ and the France-Algeria game in 2001) and French society (the rise in prominence of the far-right, the riots in France’s *banlieue*’s) make this timeframe the most pertinent to analyze. Football, being an inexhaustible tool for politicians to engage and influence discussions on nationality, race and diversity gives an unique insight at the way politicians try to manipulate public opinion.

These three World Cups are the most relevant to work on the framing of the racial diversity of the team for multiple reasons. First, 1998 marks the emergence of the ‘*Black-Blanc-Beur*’ concept. The victory of France’s 1998 team created an euphoria surrounding integration that serves as an ideal starting point. 1998 also serves as a great starting point as it coincides with the rise of popularity of football in France. In fact, unlike countries like England or Brazil, France does not have a culture of football, until the 80’s and 90’s cycling and even boxing were more popular.¹⁰ The 2010 World Cup represents a contrasting moment of crisis for both the team and French society at large, the team completely underperformed

⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143.

⁸ Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 16.

⁹ Arnaud Richard, “Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l’ethnicisation” (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 226.

¹⁰ Didier Braun, “L’équipe de France de Football, c’est l’histoire En Raccourci d’un Siècle d’immigration,” *Hommes et Migrations* 1226, no. 1 (2000): <https://doi.org/10.3406/homig.2000.3544>, 51.

and accusations of ‘communitarianism’ as well as racist comments came to completely end the 1998 World Cup’s euphoria. Finally, the World Cup winning team of 2018 that was composed of the same racial diversity as the other marked a stark contrast to the others as the discourse surrounding the racial diversity transitioned from being overly discussed to being nearly completely omitted from politicians’ discourses.

By selecting these three World Cups, this work chooses to not address the World Cups of 2002, 2006, and 2014. Although all of these World Cups had notable events and were also discussed by the politicians, the importance they gave to them was less noteworthy. The main exception to this would be the 2006 World Cup with Zidane's infamous headbutt. Even though this event in itself generated an enormous number of reactions, it would deviate from the structure of this work. In fact, most of the reactions were centered around Zidane and less on the rest of the team. A lot of very interesting work has already been written describing and ‘explaining’ Zidane’s gesture but we find that it does not fully integrate to what this thesis is centered about. The World Cups of 2002 and 2014 were simply less discussed by politicians and there would therefore be less to analyze. In addition, the choice of selecting three different events is mainly aimed at having effective comparison points, while still allowing enough focus on each specific event.

France, with its long and complex history of immigration and integration, presents a compelling case study for exploring how sport can reflect and influence political and societal dynamics. This thesis also aims at focusing on certain research gaps, more specifically, the general literature surrounding the treatment of the national team restricts its focus on the race of players, whereas this work aims to also emphasize the *banlieue* dimension of the players’ identities. This dimension relates to the specific part of France they grew up in which are the poor, ethnically marked suburbs of France’s cities. In addition, this work aims at dividing the politicians’ comment by their political parties, allowing an isolated focus on political parties, rather than media coverage and framing, subsequently also allowing a comparative and larger analysis of political framing, without nitpicking specific politicians. In addition, the work focuses on including all of the most relevant parties at the time, not being limited to the party in power or the opposition.

2. Historiography

2.1. Historiography: the links between racism, immigration and the French Federation of Football (FFF)

Before delving into a theoretical discussion, it is vital to contextualize the French national team in its broader historical context, molded by France's history of immigration, integration and racism. France is a nation deeply marked by immigration, in which, according to the historian Gérard Noiriel, one-third of those living there in the 1980s had at least one parent or grandparent born abroad.¹¹ This means that the historiography of the inclusion of descendants of immigration in French football is going to be a major part of the national team's history. An important part of France's immigration can be traced back to their colonies, but there were other waves of immigration. In order to understand the influence of immigration in the team, here is a brief summary of France's main waves of immigration. The start of the 20th century saw a wave of immigration coming mainly from Italy, Poland and Spain that answered the needs created by industrialization. The interwar period was marked by a second wave coming from the same countries that was caused by the labor needs. The post World War II period of the 'Trente Glorieuses' attracted hundreds of thousands annually from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Europe. Decolonization from the 60's to the 80's meant an influx from the former colonies and especially from North Africa. Finally, from the 1990s to the present day, EU integration policies and globalization resulted in arrivals coming from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle east.¹²

The historiography between this immigration and football, traces its origins in the sport's introduction in French colonies, initially promoted as a means to physically prepare soldiers for war.¹³ This strategy facilitated the early integration of colonial subjects into the national fabric, setting a precedent for the inclusion of players from diverse backgrounds in

¹¹ Gérard Noiriel, *L'immigration Prise Aux Mots: Les Immigrés Dans La Presse Au Tournant Des Années 80* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1991)

¹² Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset Français: Histoire de l'immigration, Xixe-XXE Siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

¹³ Paul Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA Politics, Colonialism and Resistance* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

the French national team.¹⁴ Pioneers such as Raoul Diagne, who became the first black player to wear the French jersey in 1931, and Larbi Ben Barek, who came from Morocco to play for the Olympique de Marseille, were instrumental in showcasing the talent and potential of colonial subjects on the international stage.¹⁵ Their pioneering contributions laid the groundwork for future generations, underscoring football's capacity to act as a unifying force across racial divides. This was best demonstrated during the 1938 World Cup where nine players were either born out of France or had foreign origins.¹⁶

This was just the start of the inclusion of players of color and immigrants in the French football team. In fact, in France's World Cup squad of 1958 that was led by Just Fontaine, born in Morocco, 8 out of the 23 players had foreign origins.¹⁷ Later, in 1984 when France won its first European championship, 12 out of the 23 players had foreign origins and three more came from France's '*Outre-mer*' (overseas) territories.¹⁸ In addition to the numbers of immigrants, the most emblematic French players also came from France's immigration. In fact, France's first winner of the Ballon d'Or was Raymond Kopa, son of a Polish immigrant that worked in the coal mines of the north of France. Another icon from French football was Michel Platini, the grandson of an Italian Immigrant that captained France's national team from 1982 to 1987 and went on to win three Ballon d'Or in a row. All these examples serve to explain that the history of the inclusion of France's immigration in its football team did not start with Zinedine Zidane in 1998 and that it was just the continuation of a long tradition.¹⁹

The early inclusion of players of color in the French national football team, exemplified by Raoul Diagne and Larbi Ben Barek in the 1930s, contrasts with the later inclusion of players of colors in other countries that also had large empires as can be seen in countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, players issuing from postcolonial immigration are mainly comprised of players of Surinamese

¹⁴ Didier Braun, "L'équipe de France de Football, c'est l'histoire En Raccourci d'un Siècle d'immigration," *Hommes et Migrations* 1226, no. 1 (2000): <https://doi.org/10.3406/homig.2000.3544>, 51.

¹⁵ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 55.

¹⁶ Jonathan Ervine, "Football, Race and the Republic: A Study of Reactions to France's 1998 World Cup Victory," *French Studies Bulletin* 28 (2007): 65.

¹⁷ Ervine, "Football, Race and the Republic: A Study of Reactions to France's 1998 World Cup Victory," 65.

¹⁸ Ervine, "Football, Race and the Republic: A Study of Reactions to France's 1998 World Cup Victory," 65.

¹⁹ Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, "World Cup France '98," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35, no. 3 (September 2000): <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269000035003006>, 332.

descent, such as Ruud Gullit and Clarence Seedorf, they only became prominent in the late 20th century, with Humphrey Mijns being the first black player in 1960, nearly thirty years after France's pioneers.²⁰ In a similar manner, the United Kingdom's integration of players of color only began during the late 20th century, with Viv Anderson, of Jamaican descent, finally becoming the first black player to represent England in 1978.²¹ France's not only early but also sustained inclusion of players of colors and more generally of immigrants positions it as a leader in using football's unifying power across racial but also cultural lines, demonstrating the sport's potential to include diversity but also to enhance the competitiveness of the team on the international stage.

2.2. Black-Blanc-Beur

Having explained the particular history of France's inclusion of immigrants and players of color in their national football team, it is essential to define *'Black-Blanc-Beur'* as a leading concept which has been used since the 1990's in France's socio-political landscape to symbolize the team's diversity. The emergence of this expression within French societal and political discourse represents a crucial moment in France's engagement with questions of racial diversity and integration, which will be even more relevant to look at its football team's dynamics. It was coined in 1998 by a hip-hop dance group originating from Trappes, one of Paris's *banlieue*.²² This triadic formulation which is a derivation from France's original *'Bleu-Blanc-Rouge'*, gained significant traction following France's victory at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, as it symbolized a seemingly harmonious and integrated multicultural society. The phrase, which can be translated to 'Black-White-Arab' aimed to reflect the ethnic diversity of the French national team, with 'Black' representing players of African and Caribbean heritage, 'Blanc' for White players, and 'Beur' a slang for French citizens of North African descent. Notably, the expression employs euphemistic terms for 'Black' and 'Beur' while leaving 'Blanc' in its starkness, suggesting a nuanced attempt at navigating racial identities within France, as well as still a certain discomfort with the use of racial description in France's supposed "colorblind" country.²³

²⁰ "Black and White in the Orange," Football Makes History, December 8, 2022, <https://footballmakeshistory.eu/black-and-white-in-the-orange/>.

²¹ Laura Blenkinsopp, "Diversity and Inclusion in Football," Recite Me, May 21, 2024, <https://reciteme.com/news/diversity-and-inclusion-in-football/>.

²² Chloé Leprince, "'black-Blanc-Beur' : Petite Histoire d'un Slogan Ambigu," *France Culture*, July 12, 2019.

²³ Milo Kremer, *Peindre Le Bleu, Blanc, Rouge En Black, Blanc, Beur : Les Enjeux de l'immigration Postcoloniale En France à Travers Les Bleus*, 2018, 4.

The ascent of '*Black-Blanc-Beur*' was emblematic of more than just a celebration of diversity, it was utilized by politicians and the media to frame France's supposed success in forging a racially integrated society.²⁴ This narrative, which flourished in the late 1990s hit its culmination point after France's win at the 1998 World Cup, presented an idyllic vision of France as a beacon of 'post-racial' harmony, where the multicultural fabric of the nation was embodied by its football team.²⁵ The success on the pitch was thus politically and socially instrumentalized as a metaphor for societal cohesion and inclusivity.²⁶

However, the gloss of the '*Black-Blanc-Beur*' narrative quickly faded away in the years following the World Cup win, revealing the enduring racial fissures within French society.²⁷ The declining popularity of this expression was symptomatic of a broader disenchantment of France's society regarding its integrative model. The early 2000's were marked by high tensions in France's *banlieue*'s, highlighting the challenges of discrimination and the complexity of questions of identity and belonging in France. The idealistic slogan of 'Black-Blanc-Beur', once a symbol of being united in diversity, transitioned into an outdated emblem of the failed promise that integration represented. With all the crises (the far-right's surge in popularity, riots in the *banlieue*'s) that happened between 1998 and 2010, by the time the 2010 World Cup came, this expression was already nearly obsolete and the crisis that happened in the French team during the tournament marked the final blow to the BBB (*Black-Blanc-Beur*) ideal. This shift in France's society reflects a critical reassessment of France's multicultural policies and the recognition that symbolic achievements on the sports field could not fully compensate for the societal and structural issues of racial inequality.²⁸

The evolution of the expression '*Black-Blanc-Beur*' from the slogan embodying France's success at integration to a reminder of its failure provides a vital lens through which the limitations of France's approach to multiculturalism can be examined. It underscores the

²⁴ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 555.

²⁵ Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation", 555.

²⁶ Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation", 555.

²⁷ Hargreaves, Alec G. "Black, Blanc, Beur: Beyond the Myth of French Multiracialism." *In Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2007, 178.

²⁸ Hargreaves "Black, Blanc, Beur: Beyond the Myth of French Multiracialism", 178.

necessity of moving beyond symbolic gestures to address the underlying challenges of racial and ethnic division.²⁹

Having presented the historical relationship between France's diverse national football team, its history of immigration, racism and its subsequent instrumental use in the socio-political sphere, we now turn to the existing theories that have been used to help conceptualize and make sense of this complex relationship.

3. Theoretical Framework

The subsequent sections will define and delineate the central concepts identified by the existing literature relevant to conducting a structured analysis to tackle the research question.

3.1. Race General Definition

In the case of this work and also generally, national identity is confronted with questions of race. Using the term race proves to be particularly complex as the word itself has had different meanings and still has diverging meanings depending on the context.³⁰ Firstly, it is important to clarify that the term race has no inherent genetic or biological meaning.³¹ This clarification is necessary as there is some responsibility by using this term in any work, because an absence of clarification and setting of a context when using the term "race" could lead to an unconscious endorsement of human categorization, which is precisely what this work aims to fight. The term race is a "social construction based on common-sense perceptions of superficial differences of appearance (mostly of skin color)"-, this is the use of race that will be used here.³² The reason why this work will focus on race and not ethnicity is that ethnicity is linked to more than skin color and is often more closely related to cultural differences. Even though there is some overlap between these two terms we consider that

²⁹ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 361.

³⁰ Mervi Tervo, "Sports, 'Race' and the Finnish National Identity in Helsingin Sanomat in the Early Twentieth Century," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 3 (July 2002): <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00054>, 351.

³¹ Teun A Van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse* (Barcelona, 2003), 146.

³² Van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse*, 146.

because what politicians address most is skin color, we will stick with using race in this work. We do understand that the term race also encompasses cultural differences and social relations but ethnicity goes even deeper in this than race.³³ In addition, it is important to keep in mind that races are a dynamic concept, they vary with time, with places, races are constantly being contested and reinterpreted in different historical and geographical contexts.³⁴ Another important precision is that even though race as a human categorization does not exist it does not take away anything from the existence of racism which does exist and which derives from this human categorization. These precisions are central, which has been put forth by influential academics such as Van Dijk, who's work on racism underlies the importance of discourse in the "spread" of racism.³⁵ Van Dijk, defines racism: "as a social system of inequality, consisting of two main subsystems, namely a social system of discriminatory actions at the micro level and group dominance at the macro level, and a cognitive system of racist ideologies controlling specific ethnic or racial attitudes (prejudices)."³⁶ In this view this cognitive system of racist ideologies is racist discourse, which we will specifically be looking at.

3.2. Race in the context of France

In France, the general discourse surrounding race and also ethnicity, is extremely different from general norms. This is essentially due to the nation's adherence to republican values which are values that emphasize universalism and a supposed indivisible national unity over ethnic or racial distinctions.³⁷ This specific approach is shaped by French politics which are also tied to societal norms, that traditionally avoids using multicultural frameworks in favor of frameworks that aim at prioritizing for integration and the collective identity of the French people, making the term 'race' particularly controversial.³⁸ This vision has led France to call itself a 'colorblind' state, as racial statistics are forbidden in France, which also

³³ Elizabeth Higginbotham and Margaret L. Andersen, *Race and Ethnicity in Society: The Changing Landscape* (Princeton, N.J: Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2008), 48.

³⁴ Mervi Tervo, "Sports, 'Race' and the Finnish National Identity in Helsingin Sanomat in the Early Twentieth Century," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 3 (July 2002): <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00054>, 351.

³⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism," *Discourse & Society* 3, no. 1 (January 1992): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003001005>, 89.

³⁶ Teun Van Dijk, "New(s) Racism: A Discourse Analytical Approach," essay, in *Ethnic Minorities and the Media* (Buckingham, UK & Philadelphia, USA: Open University Press, 2000), 212.

³⁷ Jonathan Ervine, "Football, Race and the Republic: A Study of Reactions to France's 1998 World Cup Victory," *French Studies Bulletin* 28 (2007): 67.

³⁸ Kamban Naidoo, "Race, Ethnicity, Discrimination and Violence in 'Colour-Blind' France," *Fundamina* 25, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.17159/2411-7870/2019/v25n2a4>, 70.

means that France does not know the racial identity of its citizens. Interestingly, France also makes no reference to its citizens' religion or country of origin.³⁹

In response to the many problems the term 'race' raises, France has taken many efforts to erase the term from its legal and constitutional lexicon, rather putting the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of racial categories.⁴⁰ The amendment of the French Constitution in 2018 to eliminate the word 'race' and affirm the equality of all citizens underscores France's ideological stance against the biological or inherent notion of race.⁴¹ The french words of '*ethnicité*' and '*ethnie*' (ethnicity and ethnic group) are used instead, aiming to put a focus on the cultural, linguistic and historical links and in order to avoid the outdated biological connotations the term 'race' spreads, the aim of this amendment is to foster a discourse that leaves space for diversity to exist without perpetuating racial hierarchies.

The terms and the distinctions between race and ethnicity are perfectly illustrated in the field of sport and particularly in football. In fact, the French national football team, which has long been celebrated for its diversity, specifically embodies the nation's complex relationship with race and questions of identity and specifically national identity. The national team's successes during both the 1998 and the 2018 World Cups are often used as examples of successful integration, as they demonstrated how the inclusion of players of diverse origins can contribute to the emergence of cohesive and united national identity.⁴² Players representing diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds symbolize France's contemporary multicultural society and the challenges but also the successes that come with promoting unity and equality. But, as shown in this thesis, the French football team will also open up many debates on how France did in fact deal with this racial diversity. Even if, in France, the

³⁹ Article 1 of the French Constitution of 1958.

⁴⁰ Erik Bleich, "Race Politics in Britain and France & Ideas and Policy Making Since the 1960s," *Cambridge University Press*, May 26, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511615580>, 170.

⁴¹ Amendement n°199 (2ème Rect)

Déposé le mardi 3 juillet 2018

<https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/amendements/0911/AN/199>

⁴² Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, "World Cup France '98," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35, no. 3 (September 2000): <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269000035003006>, 332.

term race is not used, it is clear that in the eyes of many, differences in the players' skin color will lead to much debate about a supposed 'French race'.⁴³

France's use of the concept of race is not universally accepted. Many critics argue that the predominance of ethnic minorities in national sports can obscure the persistent social inequalities and discrimination these communities face in wider French society.⁴⁴ Therefore, while football and also other sports do provide a great arena for the celebration of diversity, they also heavily contribute to ongoing national debates about race, integration and questions of national identity in France. These discussions all highlight the tension between recognizing and valuing France's diversity while also adhering to the republican ideal of a united society that transcends both ethnic and racial differences. These criticisms also originate from France's supposed attempt to be 'colorblind'. The fact that sport is seen as the ultimate meritocracy 'without any distinction of color' leads to a denial of all the challenges faced by racial minorities. The same argument is used more generally against France's colorblindness, with many researchers arguing that color-blindness actually leads to an invisibilization of racism and discrimination.⁴⁵

3.3. Civic Nationalism

When discussing questions linked to belonging to the nation, it is necessary to explain the main concepts traditionally linked to nationalism i.e. ethnic and civic nationalism. Civic nationalism emerged from eighteenth century French philosophy and was largely influenced by the French revolution.⁴⁶ This conception of the nation is defined by a common desire to live together. The author that has best represented this view of the nation is Ernest Renan. He viewed the nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle, two things that make one (...). One is a common basis of strong memories and the other one is a mutual consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue valorizing the inherited heritage."⁴⁷ One of the implications of

⁴³ Geoff Hare, "Is French Football Still French? Globalisation, National Identity, and Professional Sport as Spectacle and Commodity," essay, in *Shifting Frontiers of France and Francophonie* (Bern: Oxford, 2004), 138.

⁴⁴ Joseph Downing, "Success of French Football Team Masks Underlying Tensions over Race and Class," *The Conversation*, July 13, 2018, 2.

⁴⁵ Helen A. Neville, Miguel E. Gallardo, and Derald Wing Sue, *The Myth of Racial Color Blindness: Manifestations, Dynamics, and Impact* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 8.

⁴⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: Univ. of Nevada Press, 1993), 91.

⁴⁷ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 226.

this view of the nation is the emergence of the concept of birthright. This French conception led the nation to being seen by French law as closer to the concept of fraternity, as a “true profound comradery.”⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson continues by explaining that fraternity is “a fundamental part of the imagined community.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, the French nation can be seen as a nation based on a social contract. This conception of national identity entails that it can be deemed necessary to change the basic ideological principles if a negotiated consensus between citizens indicates that such changes are desirable. Civic identity representations thus stand for inclusive boundaries, as everyone who is legally part of the nation and fulfills their citizenship obligations is considered as an in-group member, irrespective of ethnic background. Understanding the concept of civic nationalism is key as it is the one that is relevant in the case of France.

3.4. Ethnic Nationalism

The second main representation of national identity is ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism originates from early nineteenth century Germany with Gottlieb Fichte being one of its main founders.⁵⁰ This representation of nationalism considers that members of a nation have a common set of characteristics such as, language, religion, culture, history and ethnic origins.⁵¹ This set of characteristics therefore defines itself by its difference from other nations. The result of this conception of the nation is that in countries that have ethnic views nationality is usually acquired through *jus sanguinis* (blood ties). A particularity of the ethnic representation is that the static identity components such as traditions and symbols are seen as core aspects that need to be safeguarded.⁵² In this type of representation, being part of the dominant ethnic group is necessary to be legitimately part of the nation. Even though this view is traditionally not linked to the French nation, some parts of this view will be relevant to analyze the way in which politicians discuss the French players identity.⁵³

⁴⁸ Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 16.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*), 16.

⁵⁰ Oisín Keohane, “The Metaphysics of Nationalism: Fichte and the German Language as a National Philosophical Idiom,” essay, in *Cosmo-Nationalism: American, French and German Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 93.

⁵¹ Arnaud Richard, “Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l’ethnicisation” (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 226.

⁵² Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 202.

⁵³ Patrick Mignon, “La Coupe Du Monde et La Politisation Du Football En France,” *Football(s). Histoire, Culture, Économie, Société*, no. 1 (November 17, 2022): <https://doi.org/10.58335/football-s.102>, 43.

In conclusion, a strict interpretation of the ethnic national identity would focus only on common descent and would therefore be pre-political, ascriptive and exclusive. On the other hand, a strict interpretation of the civic national identity would mean that national identity is nothing but a purely political conception, open to anyone willing to adhere to certain universal values.

Now that this framework has been explained, it is important to consider the limitations of the ethnic-civic conception of national identity. Firstly, the ethnic-civic distinction describes two ideal-typical ways of considering national identity. But it is essential to consider the fact that those are the end of a continuum and that national identity will always mix both ethnic and civic elements. In addition to this, a part of the ethnic framework has now been discredited as the use of race and blood to establish national distinctiveness in Western Europe is now (mostly) obsolete.

3.5. *Banlieusard* as a dimension of identity

When studying the different forms of national identity and discussing its specificities in France, there is one additional dimension that is relevant to the framing of the national team by the politicians. This dimension is what we will refer to as the ‘*Banlieue*’ concept, the French definition of this word is defined by Le Petit Robert as “Agglomerations surrounding a large city”.⁵⁴ Its true definition in French society and in the language of French politicians has a different connotation, Dubet and Lapeyronnie define it more adequately as “the isolation of a poor, ethnically-marked population”.⁵⁵ The concept of *banlieue* has a clear link to the French national team as the team has in the last thirty years been dominated by young men who grew up in the *banlieue*.⁵⁶ The reason this work wants to underline the concept of *banlieue* is because it has often been overlooked when analyzing the links between sports and national identity in France. Authors such as Gérard Noiriel and Arnault Richard as well as many others that have extensively discussed the links between race and immigration and national identity in France have disregarded the concept of *banlieue* in their works. However, this concept is pivotal as the identity of the players that come from the *banlieue* adds another dimension to the concepts of race that are generally discussed. The reason why this concept is

⁵⁴ Définition banlieue, s.v. accessed May 1, 2024, <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/banlieue>.

⁵⁵ François Dubet and Didier Lapeyronnie, *Les Quartiers d'exil* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), 85.

⁵⁶ Stéphane Beaud, “Derrière La Condamnation Des Footballeurs de l'équipe de France, Un Racisme de Classe?,” *Informations Sociales* n° 187, no. 1 (June 5, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.3917/inso.187.0110>, 115.

relevant is because the inhabitants of these *banlieue* are considered as second-class citizens by the rest of France, they are discriminated based on their place of living.^{57,58} *Banlieue* citizens claim that they are not seen as fully French, worse even, their youths are seen as *racaille*.⁵⁹ The epitome of this discrimination against the youth from *banlieue* comes from Nicolas Sarkozy, in 2005 when visiting a *banlieue*, Sarkozy associated the youth of the *banlieue* with the term *racaille*. Sarkozy went as far as stating that he would clean those neighborhoods “*au karcher*”.⁶⁰ *Racaille* translates to “scum” in English but the translation does not represent the full weight of the word in French as there is a deeper socio-political implication, linking it directly to a negative portrayal of the “*banlieusard*” (a *banlieusard* in French, simply refers to an inhabitant of the *banlieue*, specifically a man).^{61,62} To come back to the link with the french national team, Lilian Thuram spoke about the fact that he took Sarkozy’s comment personally as he grew up in France’s *banlieue*. Thuram therefore explained that these football players representing France still qualify to a certain audience as *racaille*.⁶³ This concept of *banlieue* helps uncover an additional dimension of the framing that politicians will make of the team, as debates surrounding the state of France’s *banlieue*’s are a heated topic in French society, especially around the period of the 2005 riots that occurred in many of France’s *banlieues*.⁶⁴

Finally, a last nuance needs to be made, whilst it could be associated with classism, Beaud argues that the discrimination is not linked socio-economic status but to a (perceived) belonging to the *banlieue*.⁶⁵ This argument is central as the dimension the *banlieue* takes is not an opposition between rich and poor, but between citizens coming from the *banlieue* and from anywhere else. In the context of this work, it explains why players coming from the working-class background but not from the *banlieue* do not get mistreated like the one coming from the *banlieue* do.

⁵⁷ Didier Lapeyronnie, “Révolte Primitive Dans Les Banlieues Françaises,” *Déviance et Société* Vol. 30, no. 4 (February 8, 2007): <https://doi.org/10.3917/ds.304.0431>, 445.

⁵⁸ Lapeyronnie, “Révolte Primitive Dans Les Banlieues Françaises,” 446.

⁵⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 244.

⁶⁰ “*au karcher*”, a *karcher* is a tool that uses very high-pressure water to clean up dirt.

⁶¹ Didier Lapeyronnie, “Révolte Primitive Dans Les Banlieues Françaises,” *Déviance et Société* Vol. 30, no. 4 (February 8, 2007): <https://doi.org/10.3917/ds.304.0431>, 445.

⁶² “*Banlieusard*” simply means inhabitants of the *banlieue*

⁶³ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 249.

⁶⁴ Michel Kokoreff and Didier Lapeyronnie, *Refaire La Cité: L’avenir Des Banlieues* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 8.

⁶⁵ Stéphane Beaud, “Derrière La Condamnation Des Footballeurs de l’équipe de France, Un Racisme de Classe?,” *Informations Sociales* n° 187, no. 1 (June 5, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.3917/inso.187.0110>, 115.

3.6. Thick v Thin Citizenship

Having presented the four major concepts that compose the theoretical framework of this work, it is crucial to tie them to a central theoretical paradigm within the relevant literature such as Gijbert Oonk's concept of thick and thin citizenship. The role of sport in national identity and citizenship has been discussed by many authors. Benedict Anderson even wrote that when considering the nation as his famous 'imagined communities' it is possible to consider the winning athlete as a representation of the imaginary nation.⁶⁶ But he was not the only author that understood the relevance of sport in the building of national identity, to cite Eric Hobsbawm in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* "What has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings [...] is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young person's excelling [...]. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself."⁶⁷ The links between sport and national identity are numerous, one of them is the fact that international sport serves as a substitute for warfare, nations that once fought now redirect this aggressive energy into a struggle for victory on the playing field.⁶⁸ This means that athletes who compete internationally serve as ambassadors of their country with everything that it entails. In other words, it means that international sporting competitions become a "magnifying lens through which critical elaborations of the idea of the nation come to the fore."⁶⁹ These international competitions have a big significance as they are moments where the 'we' of the nation feels real.⁷⁰

In addition to this, in recent times, these sporting competitions have become some of the rare moments where patriotism is celebrated without being associated with negative

⁶⁶ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 16.

⁶⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143.

⁶⁸ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (Plutopress, 2010), 16.

⁶⁹ Gijb van Campenhout and Henk van Houtum, "'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," *Sport in Society* 24, no. 11 (January 11, 2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1865314>, 1924.

⁷⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm and David J. Kertzer, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today," *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 1 (February 1992): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3032805>.

visions of nationalism.⁷¹ On an individual level, sport has often played the role of pathway for integrating athletes, however, some scholars argue that this actually served to hide the reality of the failure of integration in the broader sense, with elite athletes being exceptions.⁷² On a national level, it has been argued that sport opens up nationalism to other races and countries as they can be integrated into national teams, however, a response to this has been that these national teams are only open to others because of necessity and interest.⁷³ Media representation also plays a significant role in letting sport shape the national identity, as media reinforce the us/them narrative which strengthens the feeling of national identity.⁷⁴ It is important to note that the sense of patriotism does not only come from national teams, for example, a French footballer winning a competition with an English club will bring pride to the French people as he acts as a representative of the French nation.⁷⁵ Finally, sport is interesting as it gives an idea of what it means to be from a specific country as the public expects to identify themselves with the national team.⁷⁶ Which means that national teams are supposed to act as the mirror of societies.⁷⁷

Within this larger body of literature addressing national identity and citizenship, Gijsbert Oonk's conception of thick vs thin citizenship offers a particularly fitting lens to help conceive the importance of race, ethnic and civic nationalism, and the banlieues in shaping French citizenship.⁷⁸ Consequently, employing thick vs thin citizenship as an analytical framework in relation to the four principal concepts (race, ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, *banlieue*) will help uncover the strategic discursive practices used by politicians to delineate different conceptions of citizenship and nation for their own political ends. Ultimately, this will help make sense of the role of the four concepts in the political

⁷¹ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 27.

⁷² Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset Français: Histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe Siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 355.

⁷³ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 2.

⁷⁴ David Rowe, "Stages of the Global: Media, Sport, Racialization and the Last Temptation of Zinedine Zidane," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45, no. 3 (August 9, 2010): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690210366792>, 361.

⁷⁵ Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnicisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 28.

⁷⁶ Pap Ndiaye and Marie NDiaye, *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 224.

⁷⁷ Ndiaye and NDiaye, *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française*, 229.

⁷⁸ Gijsbert Oonk, "Sport and Nationality: Towards Thick and Thin Forms of Citizenship," *National Identities* 24, no. 3 (October 8, 2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2020.1815421>, 198.

landscape as instrumental frames to construct a specific narrative and discourse depending on the time period and political actor.

As claimed by Jansen, it is impossible to discuss questions of sports and nationalism without discussing the ranging levels of ‘belonging’ to the nation that different players face.⁷⁹ It is clear that “formal citizenship alone”, according to Jansen, “is often not a sufficient prerequisite for immigrants, or even the children of immigrants, to be recognized as fully ‘integrated’ members of the (national) society”.⁸⁰ Some players that have both parents from their country and that were born in it have what is called a ‘thick’ level of belonging while a footballer representing a country because he’s lived there for five years and therefore had just received the nationality will have a ‘thin’ level of belonging.⁸¹ There is however, an ‘in between’ category which is unclear, where some players have been born and have the nationality of the country in which they play in but their level of ‘belonging’ is still doubted.⁸² Many players that are sons of immigrants have denounced this treatment as Ozil’s statement “I am German when we win but an immigrant when we lose” clearly illustrates.⁸³

After detailing the ways in which sport is linked to national identity and citizenship, it is necessary to discuss its limitations. Firstly, the scholars discussing sport underline the fact that sports are heavily biased towards a masculine nationalism as men’s sports are more popular.⁸⁴ This ultimately means that the impact sport has on national identity is more focused towards men.⁸⁵ In addition to this, scholars underlined that it is necessary to keep in mind that “sports can never really truly answer the questions it raises: “What is a nation? “Who are we?””⁸⁶ Nonetheless, it has helped create an opening for these discussions. Sport also has another limitation, it can only go as far as a society recognizes its significance, if a

⁷⁹ Gijs van Campenhout and Joost Jansen, “Foreign-Born Sportspeople in the Olympics and the Football World Cup: Migration, Citizenship and Nationhood,” *Research Handbook on Sports and Society*, May 18, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789903607.00026>, 229.

⁸⁰ van Campenhout and Jansen, “Foreign-Born Sportspeople in the Olympics and the Football World Cup: Migration, Citizenship and Nationhood,” 228.

⁸¹ Gijsbert Oonk, “Sport and Nationality: Towards Thick and Thin Forms of Citizenship,” *National Identities* 24, no. 3 (October 8, 2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2020.1815421>, 199.

⁸² Oonk, “Sport and Nationality: Towards Thick and Thin Forms of Citizenship,” 199.

⁸³ Özil, Mesut. 2018. “Özil’s Resignation Letter for the German National Football Team.” Twitter. Twitter @MesutOzil1088 (blog). 22 July 2018. <https://twitter.com/MesutOzil1088/status/1020984884431638528>; <https://twitter.com/MesutOzil1088/status/1021017944745226242>; <https://twitter.com/MesutOzil1088/status/1021093637411700741>

⁸⁴ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), 124.

⁸⁵ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 124.

⁸⁶ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 124.

society gives a lesser importance to sport, its relevance diminishes. In the same sense, another limitation of sport as a vector of national identity is the fact that it is limited to certain periods, a strong sense of national identity only happens during certain precise moments, its impact is not constant.⁸⁷

4. Methodology

4.1 Operationalization

Within this rich literature, the concepts of ethnic nationalism, race, civic nationalism and *banlieusard* stand out as the key markers to examine how French politicians have strategically framed and instrumentalized the diversity of the French national team over the three periods.

As discussed in the theoretical section, republicanist framing represents the inclusive end within the wider civic nationalist framing. On the opposite side of the spectrum, *banlieue* framing represents the exclusive form of civic nationalism. Therefore, when the political actor uses a civic conception of the nation and citizenship, he engages either in an inclusive (republican) or exclusive (*banlieue*) framing of the team.

The specific indicators to confirm or reject the existence of exclusive/inclusive civic nationalist framing are the following:

- a) inclusive civic nationalism: the political actor frames the Team and/or player(s) as an entity representing and endorsing republican values, contributing to the common desire to live together and improve the image and state of the French nation.
- b) exclusive civic nationalism: the political actor frames the Team and/or player(s) as an entity rejecting republican values and the common desire to live together, instead opting for communitarian values based on a socio-political vision restricted to the *banlieues*.

⁸⁷ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 124.

When the political actor engages in an ethnic nationalist form of framing, as argued in the theoretical framework, this will inherently lead to an exclusive form of framing, considering the context of France, and the hegemonic civic conception of the nation and citizenship. Furthermore, considering the ethnic diversity of the team, the use of ethnic nationalism inherently leads to an exclusive form of framing. Here it is crucial to point out that the ethnic nationalist framing will, in this context, be based to different degrees on a racist conception of the team.

Thus:

- a) exclusive ethnic nationalism: the political actor frames the team and/or player(s) as an entity foreign from his/her conception of the nation and citizenship. The political actor will on different degrees base his framing on the racial/ethnic character of the team, presenting the team and/or player(s) as a potential threat to French identity.

4.2 Methodology

In order to examine the ways in which politicians frame the team through an ethnic or civic conception of the nation and citizenship, this paper used qualitative frame analysis (QFA) as its methodology. Frame analysis has initially been predominantly used in media analysis in order to make sense of how mass media present information and structures the delivery of facts.⁸⁸ However, as pointed out by Matthes, political communication studies can also adopt an approach focused on the role of the political elite in the “construction of political information” as a “media-centered approach is incomplete because it neglects that political elites and strategic communicators drive the mass communication process.”⁸⁹ Whilst an integrative process in which both the media and the political elite are analyzed as actors of political framing would offer the most holistic assessment for the case study, this would transcend the empirical objectives of the paper, which aims to focus on the instrumental role played by the French political elite in the framing of the national football team. Hence, this paper restricts its understanding of framing as a dual process of frame building i.e. the

⁸⁸ Margaret Lindstrom and Willemien Marais, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology,” *Communitas* 17 (December 14, 2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38140/com.v17i0.991>, 21.

⁸⁹ Jörg Matthes, “Framing Politics,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (December 15, 2011): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211426324>, 248.

process of frame selection by the speaker and frame setting i.e. how framing influences thought, and how the issue at hand is subsequently discussed.⁹⁰

Therefore, this paper bases its understanding of framing on Entman's definition that it is the process of "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and constructing messages that highlight connections among them in ways that promote a particular interpretation."⁹¹ This paper relies on this understanding by putting specific focus on the strategic dimension of framing, tied to a process of instrumentalization which induces "target audiences to accept interpretations" favoring the interests and political agendas of the political actors that engage in the framing process.⁹² A central advantage here, as identified by Chong and Druckman is the capacity to analyze the existence of competitive frames between the different political actors, not only permitting to gauge the influence and persuasiveness of certain frames over others but to comparatively assess the variety of frames across the political spectrum and across time.⁹³

Having specified how QFA will be used to uncover the instrumental dimension within the political sphere, it is necessary to highlight the other analytical advantages tied to this methodology, showcasing how it fits with the research objectives. Beyond its strategic focus, Connolly-Ahern and Broadway emphasize how QFA does not merely involve a thorough examination of the selection of specific words and metaphors from its authors, but also a recognition of which words and facts were omitted in the framing process.⁹⁴ This is particularly relevant to this case study, considering its comparative dimension which will put specific emphasis on how certain frames can be omitted depending on the event and political actor. Furthermore, considering the comparative nature of the study, QFA can be effectively used to identify evolving patterns over time, differentiating between singular, isolated and marginal frames, from the recurrent and hegemonic frames from certain political parties and

⁹⁰ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "A Theory of Framing and Opinion Formation in Competitive Elite Environments," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (March 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00331.x>, 101.

⁹¹ Entman, "Nature, Sources, and Effects of News Framing," *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* January 13, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203877685-22>, 196.

⁹² Entman, "Nature, Sources, and Effects of News Framing", 196.

⁹³ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "A Theory of Framing and Opinion Formation in Competitive Elite Environments," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (March 2007): <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00331.x>, 104.

⁹⁴ Colleen Connolly-Ahern and S. Camille Broadway, "'To Booze or Not to Booze?' Newspaper Coverage of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders," *Science Communication* 29, no. 3 (March 2008): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547007313031>, 369.

actors.⁹⁵ This will allow a nuanced analysis of the influence of specific frames over others, avoiding over-conflating the importance of marginal frames.

Based on these advantages, this research project used QFA in a procedural manner which can be split into three major phases. The first phase involves an inductive analysis of the dataset in which the frames were identified. Subsequently, after the first level of analysis, these selected frames are conceptually tied to the existing literature, in order to provide operational definitions and clear theoretical grounds to analyze them.⁹⁶ The confrontation of the inductively produced frames with the existing literature allows them to be conceptually contextualized within the most relevant existing studies and concepts. Consequently, the frames are categorized which allows thirdly to engage in a comparative analysis of the competing frames between political actors and across time.

4.3. Data Collection

This paper extracted its data from three specific periods marking one month before the start of each respective World Cup until one month after the end of each World Cup to encompass the most mediatized moments in the build-up and aftermath of the tournaments. Thus, the chosen timeframe encompasses data from the:

- World Cup 1998: 1st of June until 31st of July
- World Cup 2010: 1st of June until 31st of July
- World Cup 2018: 1st of June until 31st of July

With regards to the data selection process, considering the methodological emphasis on the role of political actors, the primary dataset predominantly consists of direct speeches and statements of key political figures broadcasted either on television, radio, or at the French Parliament (Assemblée Nationale) and Senate. These mediums were selected owing to their wide reach, offering a means of analysis of how the political elite communicates its frame

⁹⁵ Jörg Matthes, "Framing Politics," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (December 15, 2011): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211426324>, 252.

⁹⁶ Margaret Lindstrom and Willemien Marais, "Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology," *Communitas* 17 (December 14, 2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38140/com.v17i0.991>, 30.

directly to the general public i.e. electorate. To complement the primary data, secondary sources were used to triangulate the dataset. This principally involves speeches from politicians quoted in the most relevant French newspaper articles.

Practically, the quotes were found through research using keywords on French Newspapers in Nexis Uni, while filtering the dates to match the specific period. In addition, research on Google to find more recent newspaper articles that retrieved and discussed politicians' quotes was done. The official websites of the *Assemblée Nationale* as well as the senate were also used. *Vie Publique*, the official website of the French government, also had a large database containing famous speeches from past and present members of the government.

The selection process was based on the relevancy of the quotes. First, the focus was on finding comments from the most important politicians of the country (President, Prime Minister, etc...). Secondly, the aim was to find the most relevant quotes i.e. directly addressing the players' skins, quotes that were most relayed. Thirdly, the need was to find quotes representing all of the most relevant political parties at the time. Finally, in the situation where politicians avoided discussing the racial composition of the team, the aim was to find quotes where this omission was also made clear.

The aim of this work was to separate politicians' following their side of the political spectrum. However, because of the evolving political landscape in France, the representation of the political parties evolved along the different World Cups. The result of this evolution of the political landscape meant that while in 1998 four different political parties were represented (far-left, left, right and far-right), in 2010 only three were represented (left, right, far-right), finally in 2018 four different parties were represented (far-left, left, center, far-right). When a side of the political spectrum is not represented it means that their political relevance in France's political spectrum at the time was low but also that there was not any quote that was found to be relevant or that brought anything new to our findings. While this work does acknowledge that voluntary omission is in itself a political statement, we found that the input of the non-represented parties would not have added anything substantial to our findings and would have added unnecessary information that would not have benefitted nor added something to the general conclusions this work aims to make.

The separation of the quotes by side of the political spectrum was done according to their political parties. This created a clear distinction which allowed us to separate the quotes from far-left and left but also between far-right and right. This was done as we recognize that right-wing politicians can make leftist remarks and vice versa. This distinction by political party aims at making clear distinctions between the different sides of the political spectrum in order to clarify the findings. We did however have to navigate the evolution of the political parties in France which meant that some parties affiliations were not always limpid i.e. placing *La France Insoumise* as far-left is debatable, but the aim was to make a distinction between this party and France's traditional left-wing parties.

5. Data Analysis

The following empirical section is divided into three main parts each focusing on one World Cup (1998, 2010, 2018) separately. An introductory contextualization for each event will be followed by the respective data analysis and theoretical assessment.

5.1.1 Context: World Cup 1998, France and Beyond

The 1998 World Cup was held in France, where the digitalization boom led to an overly mediatized event without precedent. With all eyes directed to France, the opening ceremony already introduced the theme of this work as it was centered around multiculturalism.

The political context in France was a political situation known as “*cohabitation*”, which, in France, means that the President and the Prime Minister belong to opposing political parties. In this case, the President was Jacques Chirac who was part of the RPR (rally for the republic) party, a conservative, right-wing party. Jacques Chirac was an advocate for a strong right and he had also taken on quite strong anti-immigration policies. He made an infamous declaration in 1991 when discussing the life of a “typical” French family in a *banlieue*, where he referred to the immigrant families adding “the noise and the

smell” to the arduousness of life in the *banlieue*.⁹⁷ His Prime Minister on the other hand was Lionel Jospin, a socialist who became Prime Minister in 1997 following the legislative elections. This special situation was already an interesting context for the state of France’s politics at the time. The 1990s in France were also notable for the rise of the far-right political party, the “*Front National*” (now renamed “*Rassemblement National*”), led by Jean-Marie Le Pen. This party significantly influenced French public discourse by focusing on national identity, maintaining a strong anti-immigration stance. Interestingly, before 1998, Le Pen had already made comments about the players of the national team and his interest for the racial diversity of the national team as epitomized by his claim after the qualification of France to the semi-final at the 1996 European championship “it’s a bit artificial to bring in foreign players and talk about the French team (...) The other teams sing their national anthem...the French don’t because they don’t know how.”⁹⁸ In the context of debate about national identity and immigration, the multiculturalism of the French team thus became a relevant way to discuss the success of France’s integration model. Additionally, France was in a complicated socio-economic situation, with high unemployment rates and a difficulty to adjust to the post-cold war neoliberal era. All of this meant that the national team’s results were perceived by the politicians in power as a great opportunity to raise morale in France at the time.

The national football team however was only in a reconstruction phase when the 1998 World Cup started. This same team did indeed fail to qualify for both the 1990 and 1994 World Cup and the team was composed of many young players who were still lacking experience on the global stage. However, the trainer Aimé Jacquet had been building this team and it started to come together as shown by their great results in the friendly games before the World Cup as well as the fact they had already reached the semi-final during the 1996 European Championship. By 1998, Jacquet had therefore already developed many players such as its captain (and future trainer of the team) Didier Deschamps as well as Zinédine Zidane who was already a superstar at the time, but many other players such as Thierry Henry, Lilian Thuram and Marcel Dessailly had already showed all of their potential at the club level. This prominence of talented young players as well as the fact the World Cup was on their own soil meant that the pressure on the national team to perform was strikingly

⁹⁷ Jacques Chirac, “‘Le Bruit et l’odeur’ de Jacques Chirac,” *INA*, 2022, https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclairage-actu/video/s1152333_001/le-bruit-et-l-odeur-de-jacques-chirac.

⁹⁸ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Le Pen/Foot,” *INA*, 1996, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclairage-actu/video/cab96036067/le-penfoot>.

high. The diversity of the team was also striking as half of the 23 players selected were players of color. France's team ended up winning the World Cup beating Brazil three to nil in the final thanks to two goals by France's legend, Zinedine Zidane. This win represented the first World Cup victory for France which led the entire country to erupt in joy, all the different communities went to the streets together to celebrate the victory of this multicultural French team.

5.1.2. Analysis World Cup 1998

Based on the 22 relevant documents, the framing of the French National Team ranged greatly depending on the political party. The comments of politicians will be divided by four different sections on the political spectrum: far-left, left, right and far-right.

The far-left frames the racial diversity of the team in an inclusive civic way, as this quote from the Minister of Youth and Sports Marie-Georges Buffet (PCF; French Communist Party) demonstrates "On peut construire une nation comme on construit une équipe avec des hommes et des femmes d'origines diverses" (you can build a nation just as you build a team with men and women from different origins).⁹⁹ This highlights the common will to live together from citizens of diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the far-left also highlights in a positive way the racial diversity of its team as Christian Piquet (PCF; French Communist Party) states "c'est le peuple « blanc black beur » qui s'est pleinement manifesté, cela suffit pour être remarquable" (it's the '*blanc black beur*' nation that has come out in full force, and that alone is remarkable).¹⁰⁰ However, the far left nuances the impact of the World Cup on France's society and is against any political recuperation from the event as Buffet warns "il serait déplacé d'utiliser les victoires de l'équipe de France et la passion du public à des fins politiques" (it would be inappropriate to use the victories of the French team and the passion of the public for political ends).¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Marie-George Buffet, "Interviews de Mme Marie-George Buffet, Ministre de La Jeunesse et Des Sports, Dans 'L'Événement Du Jeudi' Du 9 Juillet 1998, 'Le Parisien' Du 10 et 'L'Humanité' Du 14 Juillet 1998, Sur Le Bilan de La Coupe Du Monde de Football 1998 Notamment l'avenir Du Stade de France et l'implication Des Jeunes Dans Les Fêtes Autour de La Coupe Du Monde, et Sur Son Opposition à Une Cotation En Bourse Des Club de Football.," Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/214926-marie-george-buffet-09071998-bilan-de-la-coupe-du-monde-de-football-1998>.

¹⁰⁰ Yvan Gastaut, "Milieux Politiques, Immigration et Coupe Du Monde 1998 de Football: La Parenthèse Enchantée," *Migrations Société* N° 110, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): <https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.110.0141>, 145.

¹⁰¹ Marie-George Buffet, "Interviews de Mme Marie-George Buffet, Ministre de La Jeunesse et Des Sports, Dans 'L'Événement Du Jeudi' Du 9 Juillet 1998, 'Le Parisien' Du 10 et 'L'Humanité' Du 14 Juillet 1998, Sur

Similarly, the left puts emphasis on the racial diversity in the team as an element fitting and endorsing civic republican values, as shown by Prime Minister Jospin's (PS; Socialist Party) enthusiastic claim "Et quel meilleur exemple de notre unité et de notre diversité que cette magnifique équipe (...) à l'image de la France tout entière, plurielle dans ses origines, mais une et indivisible dans son être. Dimanche soir, toute la France sera derrière les Bleus" (what better example of our unity and diversity than this magnificent team? (...) a reflection of the whole of France, plural in its origins, but one and indivisible in its being).¹⁰² Strong focus is placed on the racial features of the team, as pointed out by Deputy Marcovitch (PS; Socialist Party) in his affirmation that "le bleu blanc rouge colorié sur les peaux noires, jaunes ou bistres c'est aussi la France" (black, yellow or brown skin is also France).¹⁰³ The constructive effects of this racial diversity are substantiated by Delegate Minister for the City Claude Bartolone (PS; Socialist Party), who claims that the *black-blanc-beur* character's "donne envie à bon nombre de nos concitoyens de chasser leurs idées racistes et de montrer que, lorsqu'on a la volonté, on peut gagner" ("inspire many of our fellow citizens to dispel their racist ideas" shifting towards a united France that "can win").¹⁰⁴

Analogously, the right also underscores the integrative force of France's republicanism as Jacques Chirac's (UMP; Union for a Popular Movement) famous speech at the Elysée demonstrates "la France a été le pays qui a le mieux ressenti, compris, la nécessité de l'intégration. Et aujourd'hui, c'est vrai, cette équipe à la fois tricolore et multicolore donne une belle image de la France" (France was the country that best felt and understood the need for integration. And today, it's true, this tricolor and multicolored team gives a beautiful image of France).¹⁰⁵ This recognition and appraisal of the team's diversity is also

Le Bilan de La Coupe Du Monde de Football 1998 Notamment l'avenir Du Stade de France et l'implication Des Jeunes Dans Les Fêtes Autour de La Coupe Du Monde, et Sur Son Opposition à Une Cotation En Bourse Des Club de Football.,” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/214926-marie-george-buffet-09071998-bilan-de-la-coupe-du-monde-de-football-1998>.

¹⁰² Lionel Jospin, "Interview de M. Lionel Jospin, Premier Ministre, Dans 'La Dépêche Du Midi' Du 10 Juillet 1998, Sur La Performance de l'équipe de France de Football, Intitulée 'Toute La France Derrière Les Bleus' .," Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/218453-lionel-jospin-10071998-performance-de-l-equipe-de-france-de-football>.

¹⁰³ Yvan Gastaut, "Un Écho de La Marche Pour l'égalité : La Victoire 'Black-Blanc-Beur' de 1998 Ou Le Football Comme Avantgarde Du Débat Sur La France Plurielle," *Africultures*, January 16, 2014, <https://africultures.com/un-echo-de-la-marche-pour-legalite-la-victoire-black-blanc-beur-de-1998-ou-le-football-comme-avantgarde-du-debat-sur-la-france-plurielle-12012/>.

¹⁰⁴ Gastaut, "Un Écho de La Marche Pour l'égalité : La Victoire 'Black-Blanc-Beur' de 1998 Ou Le Football Comme Avantgarde Du Débat Sur La France Plurielle,"

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Chirac, "Intervention Télévisée de Monsieur Jacques Chirac, Président de La République, à TF1 et France 2 Le 14 Juillet 1998, Sur La Victoire Française Dans La Coupe Du Monde de Football, La Cohabitation,

corroborated by Philippe Séguin, president of the RPR that goes as far as saying “Je crois sincèrement que cela fera des racistes en moins” (I sincerely think that it will lead to less racists).¹⁰⁶ Both these quotes highlight the importance that the right grants to football. The event will go as far as to change Charles Pasqua’s (UMP; Union for a Popular Movement) political perspectives. He, who advocated and spearheaded the passing of the anti-immigration ‘Pasqua laws’ in 1993, completely came around and declared “Le Mondial a montré aux yeux de tous que l’intégration est réussie à 90 % dans ce pays. Il a aussi renforcé les Français dans le sentiment que la France existe par elle-même. Dans ces moments-là, quand la France est forte, elle peut être généreuse, elle doit faire un geste” (The World Cup showed everyone that integration is 90% successful in this country. It also reinforced the French people's feeling that France exists on its own. At times like these, when France is strong, it can be generous, it has to make a gesture).¹⁰⁷ The gesture he is referring to is the legalization of many illegal immigrants in France. This example shows the major impact the victory has had on French politicians at the time.

Contrastingly, notwithstanding the homogeneous framing from across the rest of the political spectrum, the far-right adopts a unique stance. Whilst President of the FN (National Front) Jean-Marie Le Pen affirms that his party “a toujours reconnu que les citoyens français peuvent être de races (...) pourvu qu’ils aient en commun l’amour de la patrie et la volonté de la servir” (always recognized that French citizens can be of different races (...) as long as they share a love of their country and a willingness to serve it) alluding to a civic nationalist conception, the team’s racial diversity is either heavily downplayed or even completely omitted from the framing process.¹⁰⁸ As is shown in an interview Le Pen gave to *Le Figaro*

La Baisse Du Chômage, Les Politiques Familiale et de Santé, La Réforme de La Justice et La Modernisation de La Vie Politique, Paris Le 14 Juillet 1998.,” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/155096-intervention-televee-de-monsieur-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-repub>.

¹⁰⁶ Philippe Séguin, “Interview de M. Philippe Séguin, Président Du RPR, Dans ‘Le Point’ Du 18 Juillet 1998, Sur La Victoire de La France Au Mondial de Football et Les Capacités Mobilisatrices et Fédératrices Du Football.” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/217089-philippe-seguin-18071998-victoire-de-la-france-au-mondial-de-football>.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Pasqua, “Interviews de M. Charles Pasqua, Conseiller Politique Du RPR, Dans ‘Le Monde’ Du 17 Juillet 1998, ‘L’Événement Du Jeudi’ Du 23 Juillet, Sur Sa Proposition de Régulariser Tous Les sans-Papiers Identifiés et La Stratégie Politique à Droite.” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/217658-charles-pasqua-17071998-regularisation-des-sans-papiers>.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Articles de M. Jean-Marie Le Pen, Président Du Front National, Dans ‘Présent’ Du 14 Juillet 1998 et Tribune Dans ‘Français d’abord’ de La 2ème Quinzaine de Juillet, Sur Les Valeurs Véhiculées Par Le Sport, Notamment Lors de La Coupe Du Monde de Football et Sur La ‘Survie’ de La Classe Politique, Intitulés ‘L’Élan National, c’est Donc Possible !’ Et ‘Et Si l’on Parlait Enfin Du Dopage Politique...’” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/216054-jean-marie-le-pen-16071998-valeurs-vehiculees-par-le-sport>.

about his perception of the youth stemming from immigration celebrating France's win using Republican symbols such as the *Marseillaise*, he diverts from discussing the internal ethnic composition of the country, prioritizing the discussion on the victory of France over other countries.¹⁰⁹ This downplaying of the success of integration shows that even though, publicly, he has to embody republicanist values of civic nationalism, he still pursues his ethnic nationalist conception of the French nation. In addition, as the far left did, he tries to downplay the significance of this win, notably by denouncing political recuperation “J’ai trouvé le Président de la République avait atteint des sommets de démagogie puérile. Il a confondu gaullisme et « goal-isme »” (I found the President of the Republic had reached the heights of childish demagoguery. He confused Gaullism with ‘goal-ism’).¹¹⁰

5.1.3. Theoretical Analysis 1998

The 1998 World Cup winning team created a euphoria from (almost) all of the political parties regarding France's success at integration. Nonetheless, when contrasted using our theoretical framework and historiography some analyses are extremely relevant regarding the way the French politicians framed the team. Firstly, politicians made it seem as if the 1998 team was the starting point of immigration in the French football team, with BBB being the ultimate embodiment of this emergence. This view is particularly striking as the historiography demonstrated that the inclusion of people of color and more generally of (sons of) immigrants had already been present in the team since the 1930's.¹¹¹ What happened is that politicians framed this appearance and success of this racially diverse team in a positive way in order to capitalize on the team's popularity. Left wing parties celebrated the victory of the team as it gave legitimacy to their stances on immigration and assimilation values. Right wing parties also made use of this victory and changed their discourses about immigration

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Interview de M. Jean-Marie Le Pen, Président Du Front National, Dans ‘Le Figaro’ Du 20 Juillet 1998, Sur La Candidature Du Front National Aux Élections Européennes, La Régularisation Des Immigrés Clandestins, La Mobilisation Du ‘Sentiment National’ Pendant La Coupe Du Monde de Football, l’intégration Des Jeunes Issus de l’immigration et La Préférence Nationale.,” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/216056-j-m-le-pen-20071998-immigration-elections-europeennes>.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Interview de M. Jean-Marie Le Pen, Président Du Front National, Dans ‘Le Figaro’ Du 20 Juillet 1998, Sur La Candidature Du Front National Aux Élections Européennes, La Régularisation Des Immigrés Clandestins, La Mobilisation Du ‘Sentiment National’ Pendant La Coupe Du Monde de Football, l’intégration Des Jeunes Issus de l’immigration et La Préférence Nationale.,” Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/216056-j-m-le-pen-20071998-immigration-elections-europeennes>.

¹¹¹ Didier Braun, “L’équipe de France de Football, c’est l’histoire En Raccourci d’un Siècle d’immigration,” *Hommes et Migrations* 1226, no. 1 (2000): 50.

and communitarianism in order to profit from the euphoria of public opinion. Both right and left parties gave an important place to football in society which confirms the claims made in our theoretical framework linking sports and national identity.¹¹² In addition, except FN, no party treated the players as having a ‘thin’ level of belonging to the nation. Even though some players are of foreign origin and/or foreign born. Furthermore, there was no mention by any political party of the *banlieue* dimension of the players.

Only the far-left and far-right parties that are part of the opposition nuance the importance of this victory as they both argue for different reasons that this victory on the field cannot be translated to a significant impact on French society. Which confirms the instrumentalization of football for political parties to pursue their own political agendas. As the parties in power benefit from the emphasis of the success of the team as it supposedly correlates to the success of France. While the parties in the opposition avoid giving significance to the team as they do not benefit from France being seen as successful as long as they are not in power.

Even though politicians heavily used France’s republicanist values, the celebration of the racial diversity is in stark contrast to France’s traditional ‘colorblindness’. Race and not ethnicity or even nationality are at the center of every discussion, which is in opposition to the ‘republicanist’ values and which could show how this ‘integration’ is still far from being done.¹¹³ Interestingly, the party that put the least emphasis on the race of the players is the FN, as they avoided the celebration of diversity and had rather put the focus on the resurgence of patriotism that the World Cup created.

In sum, the victory of France’s football team in 1998 had a powerful impact on France’s politics at the time. French society viewed the victory of the team as a symbol of post-racial harmony and politicians (except FN) joined along this wave of optimism. However, while celebrating this unity, a big focus was still placed on the different races that composed the team. The fact that race was still central in all discussions even from the left surrounding the team’s victory is in itself a sign that France was not as united as it thought it

¹¹² Igor Martinache, “Le Football Au Prisme Des Sciences Sociales,” *La Vie des idées*, October 17, 2010, <https://laviedesidees.fr/Le-football-au-prisme-des-sciences>.

¹¹³ Milo Kremer, *Peindre Le Bleu, Blanc, Rouge En Black, Blanc, Beur : Les Enjeux de l’immigration Postcoloniale En France à Travers Les Bleus*, 2018, 16.

was. In fact, the traditional republicanist values would have meant that this diversity would not even have been remarked as much as it was.¹¹⁴ The fact that this diversity was underscored showed that French society was still battling with an ethno-nationalist and racist view of its nation. Moreover, the visible success at integration that the team represented served to hide the reality of French society, as it was still a long way from having integrated all the different waves of immigration. As shown in our literature, the victory of the ethnic minorities in the team obscured the persistent social inequalities and discrimination these communities face in wider French society.¹¹⁵

In conclusion, the fact a racially diverse team won led political parties to frame the racial diversity of French society in a positive way. With hindsight however, by observing how much there was an underlining of the players' skin color we can deduce that France was still a long way from being at peace with its country's racial diversity. What will follow both in French society, its political realm and even the football team will show that France still had a long way before truly embracing its republican 'colorblind' values.

5.2.1 Context: World Cup 2010, France and Beyond

The 2010 FIFA World Cup was held in South Africa, it aimed at showing FIFA's inclusion of all continents as it was the first World Cup held in Africa. This tournament's mediatization also reached new heights as it took place during the emergence of social media as an essential tool of communication.

The political and footballing context in France at the time was tough. Firstly, from a political standpoint, the president at the time was Sarkozy who was part of UMP (now named *Les Républicains*), UMP was a right-wing conservative party, which was anti-immigration and in favor of economic liberalization. This government followed the presidency of Chirac where he was confronted by Jean-Marie Le Pen at the second round of French elections. The fact that Le Pen got to the second round was a shock in France as he represented the Far-right in France, and his racism and xenophobia was limpid. His recognition as an important actor

¹¹⁴ Kremer, *Peindre Le Bleu, Blanc, Rouge En Black, Blanc, Beur : Les Enjeux de l'immigration Postcoloniale En France à Travers Les Bleus*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Joseph Downing, "Success of French Football Team Masks Underlying Tensions over Race and Class," *The Conversation*, July 13, 2018, 2.

in France's politics four years after France's BBB team won the World Cup depicted accurately the state French society was in at the time.

During the period leading up to the World Cup, France was going through a huge period of social unrest. In fact, numerous riots happened in France's *banlieue*'s and there were a lot of political tensions regarding anti-immigration laws as well as debates about the integration of these immigrants in France.¹¹⁶ In particular, the deaths of Zyed and Bouna, two kids of Clichy Sous Bois after fleeing from police, were the start of terrible riots that took over (nearly) all of France's *banlieue*'s.¹¹⁷ Sarkozy was thus heavily criticized by a huge part of French society as he dealt with this social unrest by a vast deployment of police force and by giving more power to its police.¹¹⁸ Which led to many cases of police brutality in those estates and which led to even more riots. The attitude Sarkozy had regarding the situation in the *Banlieue*'s was best represented during a visit from Sarkozy to one of Paris' *Banlieue* where he promised an elderly woman that he would get rid of the *racaille* in this neighborhood "*au Karcher*".¹¹⁹ This tough political situation was also exacerbated by the economic crisis the world, and therefore also France, was facing. France was shaken by issues of unemployment and debates about social welfare which negatively influenced public sentiment.

In addition to this, there were also numerous debates about integration that were related to the French football team. A central point in those debates was the friendly international game between France and Algeria in 2001. This game started off with whistles being blown during the French national anthem and ended up with fans invading the pitch which forced the referee to end the game definitely. This event started heated debates in French society about the integration of postcolonial immigration in France.¹²⁰

In this context, the national team reflected the same reality France was facing. After reaching the 2006 World Cup final that infamously ended with Zidane's headbutt on Marco

¹¹⁶ Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Polity, 2013), 18.

¹¹⁷ William Audureau, "Qu'est-Ce Qui Avait Déclenché Les Émeutes de 2005 et Comment Ont-Elles Pris Fin ?," *Le Monde.fr*, June 29, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2023/06/29/qu-est-ce-qui-avait-declenche-les-emeutes-de-2005-et-comment-avaient-elles-pris-fin_6179835_4355770.html.

¹¹⁸ Marc Angéilil, "The Paris 'Banlieue': Peripheries of Inequity," *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 60.

¹¹⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 235.

¹²⁰ Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France*, 193.

Materazzi and France ultimately losing during the shootout against Italy. France's football team did nothing but collapse after that as shown during the 2008's European Championship where they failed to get out of the group stage. Even their qualification to the 2010 World Cup was complicated as they needed a goal scored by Thierry Henry's hand to miraculously qualify. This gesture opened up many debates as the question of whether it was right to voluntarily cheat and still get away with it got dealt with by many politicians.¹²¹ Moreover, the coach at the time, Raymond Domenech was a controversial figure and was doubted by many football analysts. The team's ethnic composition was already heavily debated, and the coach already left out players such as Benzema, Ben Arfa and Nasri that all came from France's *banlieues* and that had the reputation of being troublemakers. Other affairs also added to the chaos in the national team, the Zahia affair that was released by the French press was massive in this. As it was revealed that four players of the French national team had paid for the service of a prostitute that was minor at the time.¹²²

It is still important to mention that even though this team was struggling coming into the World Cup, France still had exceptional football players available in their group. However, outside of the footballing realm, relations between the team and the media and politicians deteriorated right before the beginning of the World Cup, as shown by Rama Yade's comment regarding the French team's hotel "J'attends que l'équipe de France nous éblouisse par ses résultats plutôt que par le clinquant des hôtels"¹²³ (I expect the team to amaze us by their results rather than by the fanciness of their hotels).

In conclusion in both the footballing and political setting, tensions were high which led there to be an immense pressure on Domenech's shoulder coming into the tournament as he had to not only perform on the pitch but in many ways, he also had the task to unify a team that was as fractured as its nation. The result of the World Cup ended up worse than expected, after the second game Nicolas Anelka got ejected from the team for allegedly insulting Domenech at half time of the second game. This ejection led the French team to go

¹²¹ "La Main de Thierry Henry Devient Un Débat National," *Le Parisien*, November 20, 2009, <https://www.leparisien.fr/sports/la-main-de-thierry-henry-devient-un-debat-national-20-11-2009-717660.php>.

¹²² "Affaire Zahia : Ribéry et Benzema Sur Le Banc Des Accusés," *Europe 24*, January 20, 2014, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20140120-affaire-zahia-proces-ouverture-ribery-benzema-football-prostitution>.

¹²³ Samya Yakoubaly, "Mondial 2010 - Rama Yade : À l'aube Du Début de La Coupe, Elle Critique Les Bleus et Leur Hôtel de Luxe !," *Purepeople*, June 7, 2010, https://www.purepeople.com/article/mondial-2010-rama-yade-a-l-aube-du-debut-de-la-coupe-elle-critique-les-bleus-et-leur-hotel-de-luxe_a57492/1#:~:text=Les%20Bleus%20sont%20log%C3%A9s%20au,la%20blessure%20de%20Didier%20Dr%20ogba.

on a 'strike' and to not attend the last practice before their third and final game. Finally, France lost their final game against South Africa which meant that they got eliminated at the group stage level. These on as well as off-field disappointment created a seism in French society that French politicians were quick to comment on.

5.2.2 Analysis World Cup 2010

Based on the source of 12 relevant documents, the framing of the French National Team ranged greatly depending on the political party. During this World Cup the politicians that heavily addressed the racial diversity of the National team can be regrouped in three parts of the political spectrum: left, right and far-right.

On the left side, the main political actor that discussed the result of the team was Eric Besson (PS; Socialist Party), Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development. When asked about links between the racial diversity of the team and their perceived absence of republicanist values, he retorts "Il y aurait le clan des gentils Blancs mis à l'écart et des méchants musulmans et des Noirs agressifs? Non et j'espère que ça n'est pas ça, et moi j'ai défendu la thèse que ça ne pouvait pas être ça" (Would there be a clan of good white people on the sidelines and mean Muslims and aggressive black people? No, and I hope it's not that, and I've defended the thesis that it couldn't be that).¹²⁴ This shows the attempt of the left to defend the players from racist attacks from both the media and the rest of the political spectrum. In the same fashion, Bertrand Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs also answered to a journalist claiming that it was the end of 1998's BBB post-racial harmony that "c'est que ce serait un peu la fin du mythe '*black-blanc-beur*' d'une équipe de France (...) J'espère que non. J'espère qu'il se trompe. Il n'y a pas que cela" (it would be the end of the 'black-white-beur' myth of a French team (...) I hope not. I hope he's wrong. It's not just that).¹²⁵ This demonstrates the left's willingness to stick with an inclusive

¹²⁴ Eric Besson, "Interview de M. Eric Besson, Ministre de l'immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité Nationale et Du Développement Solidaire, à I-Télé Le 21 Juin 2010, Sur Le Comportement de l'équipe de France Lors de La Coupe Du Monde de Football 2010 En Afrique Du Sud.," Vie-Publique, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/179430-interview-de-m-eric-besson-ministre-de-limmigration-de-lintegration>.

¹²⁵ Bertrand Kouchner, "Entretien de M. Bernard Kouchner, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères et Européennes, Avec 'TV5 Monde-RFI-Le Monde' Le 20 Juin 2010, Sur Les Sujets d'actualité Internationale et Européenne, Notamment La Coupe Du Monde de Football, l'élection Présidentielle En Pologne, Les Violences Inter-Ethniques Au Kirghizistan, Le Vote Des Sanctions à l'ONU Contre l'Iran, Le Rôle Du G20, l'Afghanistan, Les Otages Français, La Crise Financière En Europe, Le Proche-Orient et Le Blocus de Gaza.," Vie-Publique,

civic conception of the nation that defends its players from the attacks of the opposition. Finally, the left also tries to minimize the links between the National's team failure to perform at the World Cup and the state of French society as indicated by Valérie Fourneyron (PS; Socialist Party) that estimated that "une médaille de la démesure a été gagnée" (a medal of excess has been won).¹²⁶

Inversely, the right-wing political parties focus on the *banlieue* side of the French national team, often alluding to a lack of endorsement of the republicanist values. This is most clearly embodied by Roselyne Bachelot's (UMP; Union for a Popular Movement), Minister of Health and Sports, shocking statement at the French Assembly "une équipe de France où des caïds immatures commandent à des gamins apeurés, un coach désemparé et sans autorité" (A French team where immature *caïds* command frightened kids, and a clueless coach with no authority).¹²⁷ This statement needs to be analyzed mainly because of the subtext her choice of words imply. When referring to the *caïd*, she uses a French word that is very close to the term *racaille*, a word that has a clear connotation to the *banlieue* concept explained earlier. What Bachelot implies is that these young, racialized men coming from France's *banlieue*'s took control of the team and that the others, innocent, white, and not from the *banlieue* players were the victims. This statement is a metaphor for the vision of the right wing at the time. Where these *caïds* represent the youth from France's *banlieue*'s that 'bully' the rest of society. With Domenech, the trainer representing the state as weak and unable to control or take action over these *racaille*. This quote thus clearly demonstrates instances of an exclusive vision of civic nationalism as well as having a racist undertone.

In the same manner, Benjamin Lancar (UMP; Union for a Popular Movement) stated "C'est une équipe de racailles, de caïds" (It's a team of *racaille*'s, of *caïds*), even going further when claiming that there were "des tensions ethniques dans cette équipe" (ethnic tensions in this team), he also spoke about an "islamisation de cette équipe" (Islamization of this team).¹²⁸ This statement corroborates the links between *racaille* and *caïd*, it also digs

accessed June 2, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/179338-entretien-de-m-bernard-kouchner-ministre-des-affaires-etrangeres-et-eu>.

¹²⁶ Charlotte Chaffanjon, "Roselyne Bachelot : 'J'ai vu Des Joueurs Qui Fonctionnent En Autarcie,'" *Le Point*, 2010, https://www.lepoint.fr/sport/roselyne-bachelot-j-ai-vu-des-joueurs-qui-fonctionnent-en-autarcie-29-06-2010-471652_26.php.

¹²⁷ Fiche question, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q13/13-2382QG.htm>.

¹²⁸ "Bleus : 'Une Équipe de Racailles' (Lancar)," *Le Figaro*, 2010, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2010/06/30/97001-20100630FILWWW00373-bleus-une-equipe-de-racailles-lancar.php>.

deeper into the communitarian vision of the French team as he added the players' religion as a excluding factor to his civic conception of the nation. Additionally, it confirms the narrative established by Bachelot that divided the team by the player's skin color, which exemplifies that the right wing uses a racist vision of the French team as not representing their vision of France.

Rama Yade (UMP; Union for a Popular Movement), Secretary of State for Sports, goes away from the racist conceptions of the team but still deplores a lack of embodiment of civic values by the players as exhibited during an interview on France 2 "Il faut qu'il la chante la marseillaise, parce qu'il représente les valeurs, l'image, l'identité de la France, ça c'est pour l'exemplarité" (They have to sing the Marseillaise, because they represent the values, the image, the identity of France, and that's about setting an example).¹²⁹ This goes back to a long lasting debate in the French society on the obligation, or not, of the players' signing the national anthem.¹³⁰ Yade also underscores the importance that football has in representing France and on its impact in society "Les joueurs prennent conscience qu'ils n'étaient pas des simples joueurs de foot, qu'ils étaient des ambassadeurs de notre pays, qu'ils représentaient la France à l'étranger" (The players realize that they weren't just football players, that they were ambassadors for our country, that they represented France abroad).¹³¹ Finally, she also declares "Ce qu'il faut faire c'est que dans la formation sportive des joueurs il y ait un volet civique" (What we need to do is ensure that players' sports training includes a civic component), which confirms that the right wing deplores a supposed lack of adhesion to republicanist values from the national team.¹³²

Comparably, the far-right also attacked the players heavily because of their supposedly lack of conformity to republicanist values. The main French far-right party was FN, which was divided between the president at the time Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter Marine Le Pen who would later go on to become president of the party herself. The way they comment on the national team accurately represents the nuances in their respective political stances. On the one hand, Marine Le Pen, takes the angle of criticizing the players' lack of

¹²⁹ Broadcast, 20h (France 2, June 23, 2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGiGR_SQVwo&ab_channel=INAActu.

¹³⁰ "Un Monde Complètement Foot !," L'équipe de France et la marseillaise, accessed June 3, 2024, <http://edf-story.wifeo.com/l-equipe-de-france-et-la-marseillaise.php>.

¹³¹ Broadcast, 20h (France 2, June 23, 2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGiGR_SQVwo&ab_channel=INAActu.

¹³² Broadcast, 20h (France 2, June 23, 2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGiGR_SQVwo&ab_channel=INAActu.

embodiment of republicanism values, she does go further as she denounces their character as inappropriate “Il y a des individus dans cette équipe (...) Les valeurs qu’ils véhiculent ne sont pas les valeurs de la France. S’ils se comportaient correctement, si on entendait de temps en temps parler de patriotisme dans la bouche de ces joueurs, si un certain nombre ne refusait pas de chanter la Marseillaise (...) peut-être les choses changeraient” (There are individuals in this team (...) The values they convey are not the values of France. If they behaved properly, if these players occasionally spoke of patriotism, if a certain number didn't refuse to sing the Marseillaise, (...) maybe things would change).¹³³ Marine Le Pen also did state “Cette équipe ne représente pas la France” (This team does not represent France), when discussing players having multiple nationalities and playing for the team which also entails a racist view of the team but she avoided making any direct references to skin color.¹³⁴

Jean-Marie Le Pen on the other hand did openly criticize the lack of white players on the team explicitly “Qu’il y ait deux Blancs dans l’équipe de France, on sent bien qu’il y a une volonté politique d’imposer une image de la France qui n’est pas celle, pour l’instant en tout cas, de la France” (The fact that there are two white players in the French team clearly shows a political will to impose an image of France that is not, for the time being at least, the image of France).¹³⁵ This confirms a framing of the national team using a racist angle, Jean-Marie Le Pen argued that he “détesté la politique politicienne qui faisait de l’équipe de France un drapeau de l’antiracisme au lieu d’en faire un drapeau du sport” (hated the politician's politics that made the French team a flag of anti-racism instead of a flag of sport).¹³⁶ These statements serve to openly demonstrate the far-right racism and unwillingness to include players of color in the French national team.

5.2.3. Theoretical Analysis 2010

The framing of the national team by French politicians in 2010 completely turned around compared to its framing in 1998. The main difference in the framing is the

¹³³ Marine Le Pen, “M. Le Pen : " Cette Équipe Ne Représente Pas La France ",” BFMTV, 2010, https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/m-le-pen-cette-equipe-ne-represente-pas-la-france_AN-201006030012.html.

¹³⁴ Marine Le Pen, “M. Le Pen : " Cette Équipe Ne Représente Pas La France ",” BFMTV, 2010, https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/m-le-pen-cette-equipe-ne-represente-pas-la-france_AN-201006030012.html.

¹³⁵ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Équipe de France: Jean-Marie Le Pen Parle d’une Débâcle ‘Méritée,’” Gentside Sport, June 22, 2010, https://sport.gentside.com/autres-sports/foot/equipe-de-france-jean-marie-le-pen-parle-d-une-debacle-meritee_art4398.html.

¹³⁶ Jean-Marie Le Pen, “Équipe de France: Jean-Marie Le Pen Parle d’une Débâcle ‘Méritée,’” Gentside Sport, June 22, 2010, https://sport.gentside.com/autres-sports/foot/equipe-de-france-jean-marie-le-pen-parle-d-une-debacle-meritee_art4398.html.

representation of a part of the players as *banlieusard*, right wing parties associated the players with a communitarian vision and excluded them from their civic nationalist view of the nation. They reproached a lack of common desire to live together from a part of the players that were racialized or were seen as coming from the *banlieue*. What this demonstrates is that due to the tensions French society was facing at the time, right and especially far right-wing politicians framed a part of the team as *racaille* in order to diffuse their vision of a fractured French society.

In addition, French politicians also addressed the skin color of the players in a racist manner, caricaturing non-white players as threatening and bullying the white players (and trainer) of the team. This racist framing of the racial diversity of the team from all of the political spectrum except left-wing parties display a desire to influence French society into adhering to anti-immigration stances from those right and far right-wing parties. Left wing parties refused to adhere to any of their ideas and tried to defuse tensions. They avoided making links between what happened in the team and the situation in French society and tried putting more emphasis on the failure of the French Federation of Football to manage the team's situation effectively. They also went away from using any *banlieue* or racist references and tried to minimize the relevance of football in society.

This World Cup marks the death of the ideals of 1998's BBB, France's politicians, football team and society at large is fractured. Right and far-right politicians mainly hide behind concepts of *banlieue* in order to avoid accusations of racism, but some slip-ups or more provocative politicians do not hesitate to frame the color of the skin of the players as the reason for France's failure. What can be understood by the way politicians frame the team is that they consider this 2010 team as not French enough which they use as explanation for a supposed lack of determination. These consideration of not French enough link back to the concepts of 'thick and thin' levels of belonging, where players that have blood ties and 'ground' ties are seen as having a 'thick' levels of belonging, while players with no blood ties or that were born in another country are seen as having a 'thin' level of belonging. In this situation, colored and/or '*banlieue*' players have a 'thin' level of belonging due to a certain ethno-nationalist view of France by its right and far-right wing politicians. This view is especially shown through Jean-Marie Le Pen's comments that exposes his ethno-nationalist view of the nation. However, seeing this 'thin' level of belonging only under the prism of skin color would be overlooking France's problem with its *banlieue*²s. Some players such as

Franck Ribéry are not treated like the other white players because of their *banlieusard* roots. The *banlieue* narrative links back more closely to France's civic conceptions of the nation as right and far-right parties argue that inhabitants of those *banlieue* refuse to embrace republican values. It is therefore complicated in this situation to analyze when the *banlieue* narrative serves as a justification of a racist conception of the nation or not.

To conclude on the 2010 World Cup, France's calamitous World Cup campaign led several politicians to question what the team represented. What came out most is a rejection of the team's frenchness because of the *banlieue* roots of the players which is seen as the explanation for their 'bad' attitude. However, this World Cup also meant the recrudescence of an ethnic conception of the nation by a part of the politicians. Finally, the events that happened during this World Cup were very largely seen as a representation of the state of French society, and the importance given to the national team was immense.

5.3.1 Context: World Cup 2018, France and Beyond

The 2018 WC was held in Russia, it started on June fourteenth and finished on the fifteenth of July. This tournament was marked by heightened geopolitical tensions as the relations between Russia and Western countries were damaged due to many events but most notably the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. These tensions led many calls for boycott but ultimately all the nations that qualified did take part in the tournament. This WC was also questioned by many because it was marked by a big potential threat of hooliganism.

The French government at the time was led by Emmanuel Macron who was part of a new party called 'La République en marche', he had just gotten elected during the 2017 election which represented a shift towards a centrist and pro-European stance in France. His Prime Minister was Edouard Philippe, a former member of 'Les Républicains', the traditional right-wing party in France (formerly called 'UMP'). The emergence of this new party was due to profound transformations in France's political landscape. The traditional left and right-wing parties were both losing their credibility and relevance as public opinion was looking for new alternatives. These alternatives came in two different manners, first with Macron and his centrist stance but also with Marine Le Pen and her far-right party the RN (former FN). These two emerging political forces clashed during France's second round of the last elections before the World Cup. Coming into power, Macron had many ambitious reforms

that aimed at reforming the country and revitalizing France's economy. However, France at the time was still recovering from the terrible terrorist attacks that they faced in 2015 and 2016 that included the Paris attacks of the thirteenth November. Those events deeply impacted France and instilled a sense of danger that led to a high degree of vigilance in France. The World Cup therefore was a perfect occasion to unify the country and to provide a well needed distraction in a grieving France.

On the footballing side, there was a lot of optimism. In fact, France had gotten to the final of the last European Championship in 2016 and had lost by a very small margin to Portugal. France's football team and all of the federation had been deeply remodeled following the 2010 World Cup. Noel Le Graet became president of the French Federation of Football (FFF) and he led the transformation of the team as he instilled a strict adherence to his code of conduct. This vision notably led to the exclusion of Karim Benzema from the French national team because of his involvement in a judicial procedure accusing him of helping in the extortion of his former French national team colleague Mathieu Valbuena. Le Graet deeply restructured the FFF and got rid of the baggage the team had, such as the story of 'quotas' in 2011, where Mediapart revealed that the FFF tried to install quotas for the number of binational players in France's youth teams. With this new identity, Le Graet and his trainer Deschamps aimed at having a team of obedient and respectful players where any misconduct would lead to an expulsion of the team.

This policy worked due to France's exceptional pool of players as they had a great mix of established and experienced players like Antoine Griezmann and Paul Pogba as well as a new generation of talented players like Kylian Mbappe that were ready to take over the tournament. This team was therefore seen by footballing experts as one of the favorites to win the World Cup and the sense of unfinished business regarding their previous loss was big.¹³⁷ These expectations meant pressure was high for France to perform and the comparisons to the golden generation of 98 were already being made. The comparisons were not only limited to their footballing talent but were also linked to the diversity that composed the team. This diversity again led to debates about France's integration and questions of national identity.

¹³⁷ Lisa Houdeville, "Les Cinq Favoris Pour La Coupe Du Monde 2018," *BeSoccer* Livescore: les resultats de football de la journee en direct, December 1, 2017, <https://fr.besoccer.com/info/les-cinq-favoris-pour-la-coupe-du-monde-2018-339160>.

Finally, France went on to win the World Cup twenty years after the generation of 1998 by beating Croatia four to one in the final.

5.3.2 Analysis World Cup 2018

Based on 21 relevant documents, the framing of the French National Team ranged greatly depending on the political party. The comments of politicians will be divided by four different sides on the political spectrum: far-left, left, center and far-right.

The far left celebrates the victory of the team for its diversity and its embodiment of classlessness as shown by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's, president of *La France Insoumise*, comment "On est content parce qu'on a gagné, parce qu'on a une belle équipe parce qu'elle est de bien des façons à l'image du pays dans sa forme populaire" (We're happy because we've won, because we've got a great team, because in many ways it reflects the country in its popular form).¹³⁸ They avoid discussing skin color and they focus on the victory, more generally, there was no framing of the team in any specific way, neither in an inclusive nor exclusive civic way. Yet, Thomas Guenolé (LFI; *La France Insoumise*) in a recurrent far-left fashion nuances the victory, warning that "ce sont les victoires de cette équipe de France qui euphorisant le pays et inhibent les discours racistes et xénophobes" (it is the victories of this French team that euphorize the country and inhibit racist and xenophobic discourse).¹³⁹ This warning is essential to decipher the rest of the political sphere's comments.

Similarly to the far left, the left also salutes the victory as the opportunity for a moment of cohesion as, François Hollande, former president of France and of France's socialist party states, "L'équipe de France donne un bonheur immense à notre pays, qui n'efface pas toutes les difficultés ni les disparités mais qui permet l'unité. Il faut utiliser ces moments, trop rares, pour assurer encore davantage de cohésion" (The French team brings immense happiness to our country, which doesn't erase all the difficulties and disparities, but

¹³⁸ Geoffroy Clavel, "La France En Finale de La Coupe Du Monde 2018: L'union Sacrée Politique Vingt Ans Après La France 'Black, Blanc, Beur,'" *Huffington Post*, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/la-france-en-finale-de-la-coupe-du-monde-2018-l-union-sacree-politique-vingt-ans-apres-la-france-black-blanc-beur_127372.html.

¹³⁹ Geoffroy Clavel, "La France En Finale de La Coupe Du Monde 2018: L'union Sacrée Politique Vingt Ans Après La France 'Black, Blanc, Beur,'" *Huffington Post*, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/la-france-en-finale-de-la-coupe-du-monde-2018-l-union-sacree-politique-vingt-ans-apres-la-france-black-blanc-beur_127372.html.

it does bring unity. We must make the most of these moments, which are all too rare, to ensure even greater cohesion).¹⁴⁰ Stéphane Troussel, also a member of the PS (socialist party) underlines the diversity of the team in a positive way “une équipe à l’image de la société française, diverse et talentueuse” (a team that reflects the diversity and talent of French society).¹⁴¹ There is no mention of skin color, not even in the traditional positive manner as it was common to do in 1998 with BBB, the focus is on the unity of the team and the victory of France. Again, the left avoids giving an over-conflated importance to the victory and modestly underlines the diversity of the team, avoiding any direct comments on the origin of the players.

The president of France, Emmanuel Macron, also president of LREM (La République En Marche), avoided addressing the skin color or even the origins of players as he preferred to place a complete focus on France and its republicanist values. This was most publicly presented during his speech of the 14th of July at *l’Elysée* “Ne changez pas, cette équipe elle est belle parce qu'elle a été unie et parce qu'elle a été forte et fière de la France, ne changez pas (...) Et comme vous l'avez dit pendant toute cette coupe, vive la république et vive la France” (Don't change, this team is beautiful because it was united and because it was strong and proud of France, don't change! (...) And as you said throughout this Cup, long live the Republic and long live France!).¹⁴² It is important to note that the players did in fact use every occasion they had to celebrate France's Republican values during the tournament and that

¹⁴⁰ “La France Est Belle, Merci Les Bleus !’ : Tous Les Politiques Derrière Les Champions Du Monde,” *Nouvel OBS*, 2018, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/sport/coupe-du-monde-2018/20180715.OBS9719/la-france-est-belle-merci-les-bleus-tous-les-politiques-derriere-les-champions-du-monde.html>.

¹⁴¹ “Après La Victoire de l’équipe de France En Finale de La Coupe Du Monde, Pluie d’hommages Des Politiques,” *Le Monde*, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2018/07/15/pluie-d-hommages-des-politiques-pour-les-bleus-apres-leur-victoire-au-mondial_5331767_823448.html.

¹⁴² Emmanuel Macron, broadcast, *Le Discours Du Président Macron*, 2018, https://www.google.com/search?q=discours+macron+2018+coupe+du+monde&scas_esv=f0f6d5f05aa680dc&scxsrf=ACQVn083Fd3Hh3n8IMQtIALjTXk4K_vifw%3A1712580991277&scgs_lp=Egxn3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiHGRpc2NvdXJzIG1hY3JvbiAyMDE4IGNvdXBIIIGQqAggAMgUQIRigATIFECEYoAEyBRAhGKABMgUQIRigATIFECEYnwVIg0pQwAFY2EBwAXgAkAEAmAHPAaAB_x6qAQYwLjI3LjG4AQPIAQD4AQGYAh2gAs0gqAIKwgIHECMY6gIYJ8ICChAjGIAEGIoFGCfCAhAQLhiABBikBRjHARivARgnwgIMECMYgAQYigUYExgnwgILEAAYgAQYigUYkQLCAGUQABiABMICCxAuGIAEGMcBGNEdwgIFEC4YgATCAGoQABiABBikBRhDwgIKEC4YgAQYFBIHAsICDhAuGIAEGMcBGNEGNQCwgILEC4YgAQYxwEYrwHCAhAQLhiABBikBRhDGMcBGNEdwgIWECC4YgAQYigUYQxjJAXjHARjRAXjUAsICCxAAGIAEGIoFGJI DwgIIEAAYgAQYywhCAhAQLhiABBjLARjHARjRAXgKwgIIEC4YgAQYywhCAgoQABiABBgUGlCwGIGEAAyFhgewgIHECEYChigAZgDFJIHBJEuMjcuMaAHw9MB&scsclient=gws-wiz-serp#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:22b1ff05,vid:LMDx6Z3LfZs,st:0.

they focused on this.¹⁴³ Comparably, Edouard Philippe (LREM; *La République en Marche*), Macron's Prime Minister at the time used the same formula when he proclaimed at the Senate "le mieux est de nous contenter de répéter ce que les joueurs ont dit avec ardeur, avec enthousiasme, avec vigueur : vive la République et vive la France" (the best thing we can do is simply repeat what the players have said with ardor, enthusiasm and vigor: long live the Republic and long live France).¹⁴⁴ This quote confirms the position that the government takes, the focus needs to be put on republican values and on the players, not on skin color or on the origin of the players. The message they are conveying is made clear by Laura Flessel (LREM; *La République en Marche*), Minister of Sports "Effectivement, au lieu d'une politique d'un logo, d'un slogan Black-Blanc-Beur, on a parlé Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité" (In fact, instead of a policy of a logo, a Black-Blanc-Beur slogan, we've talked about Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité. It's a lot of positive messages).¹⁴⁵ Finally, another dimension the center takes is to not fall under the euphoria of victory and to show that they do not aim to recuperate the victory politically, this is best represented by Olivier Dussopt (LREM; *La République en Marche*) "Mais c'est bien l'équipe de France qui gagne, pas le gouvernement ni quelque politique que ce soit" (But it's the French team that wins, not the government or any other policy).¹⁴⁶ In essence, the center chooses to emphasize the team's adherence to republican values rather than any other factor.

The far-right was represented by Marine Le Pen (FN), daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen and her discourse represents a clear change in their parties' communication. The 2018 World Cup therefore perfectly exemplifies it. This can be distinguished in an interview she gave to France 2 after the World Cup where she states "je n'ai pas une vision raciale des Français" (I do not have a racialized vision of the French people) when asked about how she felt about the players' skin color.¹⁴⁷ By doing so, Le Pen shifts away from the ethnic nationalist conception

¹⁴³ Vincent Michelon, "Vive La République' : Ce Leitmotiv Des Champions Du Monde 2018 Repris En Boucle," *TF1 Info*, 2018, <https://www.tf1info.fr/societe/ce-vive-la-republique-vive-la-france-qui-est-devenu-le-leitmotiv-des-champions-du-monde-2018-2093413.html>.

¹⁴⁴ "Victoire En Coupe Du Monde et Unité Nationale," Sénat, 2018, <https://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2018/qSEQ18070434G.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Laura Flessel, "Interview de Mme Laura Flessel, Ministre Des Sports à France 2 Le 17 Juillet 2018, Sur La France Championne Du Monde de Football et La Pratique Du Sport," Vie-Publique, 2018, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/206464-interview-de-mme-laura-flessel-ministre-des-sports-france-2-le-17-jui>.

¹⁴⁶ Florence Beaudet, "Olivier Dussopt Sur La Victoire Des Bleus : 'C'est Une Équipe Qui Gagne, Pas Les Politiques,'" France Bleu, 2018, <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/politique/olivier-dussopt-sur-la-victoire-des-bleus-c-est-une-equipe-qui-gagne-pas-les-politiques-1531724296>.

¹⁴⁷ "Marine Le Pen : Ces 'Bleus Donnent Une Bonne Image' de La France," France TV, accessed 2024, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sports/foot/coupe-du-monde/france-championne-du-monde/marine-le-pen-ces-bleus-donnent-une-bonne-image-de-la-france_2855637.html.

of her father and avoids the accusation of racism that comes with it. In order to avoid having to recognize the diversity of the team she chooses to center her argumentation about the central role that French symbols and that patriotism had during this World Cup.¹⁴⁸

Interestingly, by congratulating this team for their adherence and endorsement of republican values, she immediately marks the contrast between this and the “une image très différente de ce qu'on a pu voir par le passé venant de l'ancienne équipe de France” (very different image from the one the previous French national team had).¹⁴⁹ There is however a discourse that she kept using from her predecessor and that is the aim to minimize the influence of football on society and denounce any form of recuperation “—tous ceux qui cherchent à instrumentaliser cette victoire sont à côté de la plaque” (all those who seek to exploit this victory are missing the point) and “ont 20 ans de retard” (are 20 years too late), referring to when France won the World Cup in 1998.¹⁵⁰ As well as carefully deciding to omit to discuss the ethnic and ‘communitarian’ diversity of the team.

5.3.3. Theoretical Analysis 2018

What stands out in the reaction of politicians regarding the national team is the absence of discussion of the race or origins of the players. This omission relates back to our methodology, as the process of omitting is also a way to frame the racial diversity of the team. What happened at large in France’s politics is the focus put on the players’ embodying France’s values of fraternity, which matches with the ideals of civic nationalism. Therefore, the players are always portrayed in an inclusive civic way as they heavily demonstrate a common desire to live together, and a desire to represent France’s values. Even far-right politicians abstained from making comments about the racial diversity of the team and went as far as celebrating the patriotism of the team. There is a complete absence of any comments linked to the *banlieue* identity, and none of the levels of belonging of the players are

¹⁴⁸ “Marine Le Pen : Ces ‘Bleus Donnent Une Bonne Image’ de La France,” France TV, accessed 2024, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sports/foot/coupe-du-monde/france-championne-du-monde/marine-le-pen-ces-bleus-donnent-une-bonne-image-de-la-france_2855637.html.

¹⁴⁹ “Marine Le Pen : Ces ‘Bleus Donnent Une Bonne Image’ de La France,” France TV, accessed 2024, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sports/foot/coupe-du-monde/france-championne-du-monde/marine-le-pen-ces-bleus-donnent-une-bonne-image-de-la-france_2855637.html.

¹⁵⁰ “Marine Le Pen : Ces ‘Bleus Donnent Une Bonne Image’ de La France,” France TV, accessed 2024, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sports/foot/coupe-du-monde/france-championne-du-monde/marine-le-pen-ces-bleus-donnent-une-bonne-image-de-la-france_2855637.html.

questioned. Better even, France's society stood together against foreign media questioning the 'Frenchness' of the team.¹⁵¹

Additionally, politicians also abstained from giving an exaggerated importance to football on questions of French society, they did not make abusive links between this French team and society which also signified that politicians did not modify their stance to surf on the team's success.

What is necessary to underscore is the attitude displayed by the players, all the players were very well media-trained and pushed the values of France. In addition to the great on-field results, there were no off-field problems as the players seen as 'problematic' like Benzema were excluded. All of this meant that this team did not make waves and was therefore very difficult to attack on the argument of lack of 'civism'. The evolution of French society also was a reason that explains this omission of the race of the players. Indeed, France is not in the same state it was pre-2010 and, the far-right, that traditionally represented France's racist side also was trying to change its image away from its xenophobic past.

In sum, Macron's, and all of the French politicians' unwillingness to repeat the same errors that were made in 1998 meant the reactions to the victory were vastly different. Even though France's team was very largely composed of players of color, there were no slogans such as BBB and politicians avoided using the win to talk about integration. In addition, lessons from 1998 also meant that even the RN was forced to adopt the same framing process. In conclusion, every party chose to focus on the team's republicanism and celebrated the patriotism of France's victory over other countries.

6. Players' perspective

6.1 Relevance answer of the players

This work has focused on looking at the way French politicians portray the racial diversity of the French football team, but there has been one side of this interaction that has been purposefully avoided, that side is the perspectives of the footballers themselves. How did French football players respond to this politicization? Their perspective is relevant as they

¹⁵¹ Balla Fofana, "A l'étranger, Polémiques Racistes Autour de La Victoire de l'équipe de France," *Libération*, 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/sports/2018/07/18/a-l-etranger-polemiques-racistes-autour-de-la-victoire-de-l-equipe-de-france_1667290/.

are the central actors of this debate. The team as a group did respond several times to comments politicians made as Aimé Jacquet's team did in 1996 to respond to Jean Marie Le Pen's comments but this chapter will focus more on the individual responses from the players.¹⁵² Even though there is a wide range of different reactions, this chapter will focus on two distinct ways of responding. The first way will be when football players are very vocal and become politicized themselves, what we will qualify as "Thuram's side". The second way of responding is when players avoid answering or avoid taking clear political sides and prefer to let their play on the field for themselves. This will be referred to as "Zidane's side."¹⁵³ There will be a focus on these two players as knowing their background serves as a foundation to understand their potential political involvement.

6.2.1 Lilian Thuram's side

Lilian Thuram was born on 1 January 1972 in Anse-Bertrand in Guadeloupe. Him and his four brothers and sisters were raised only by their mom and, in 1980, his mom moved to France through BUNIDOM (Office for the Development of Migration in the Overseas Territories), which assisted Antilleans in migrating to France.¹⁵⁴ After a year, his mom brought all her children with her to France where they quickly settled in the *Cité des Fougères* which was located in Avon, just outside of Fontainebleau.¹⁵⁵ This is where Thuram discovered life in France's *cité*s, he grew up in the middle of diversity as his *cité* was composed of a very diverse range of nationalities. He started playing football in a club called "Portugais de Fontainebleau" (Portuguese of Fontainebleau), he quickly transferred to Fontainebleau, a better and richer club that was in the city and not in his *cité*. There, Thuram was for the first time confronted with racism and to the clichés associated with the *cité*'s where he came from. This period, along with many others, is why he wrote that he believed that in France a young black person will grow up knowing that his color is linked to something negative.¹⁵⁶ Thuram's footballing career then continued until his first professional debut with AS Monaco in 1991. After cementing his reputation of being an excellent

¹⁵² Arnaud Richard, "Les Discours Sportifs En Proie Aux Nationalismes et à l'ethnisation" (PhD, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, 2009), 342.

¹⁵³ Jonathan Ervine, "Football, Race and the Republic: A Study of Reactions to France's 1998 World Cup Victory," *French Studies Bulletin* 28 (2007): 65.

¹⁵⁴ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 96.

¹⁵⁵ Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France*, 98.

¹⁵⁶ Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France*, 102.

defender, he got transferred to Parma in 1996 and then he got transferred for what was the record transfer fee for a defender at the time to Juventus of Turin.¹⁵⁷ He then finished his career with a transfer to Barcelona in 2006 where, in 2008, he retired.

His excellent playing level also meant that he quickly became a central piece for France's national team where he played from 1996 to 2008 when he finally retired after having beaten Marius Trésor's record of most selections in the national team.¹⁵⁸ Thuram played an instrumental role in France's victories in 1998 and 2000 and was also present during the 2006's campaign where France lost in the final. His playing career however is not the only reason why Thuram is such an emblematic figure in France, what also stood out is his political involvement. Thuram's goal was to break the clichés around the *cités* where he grew up as well as break the myth of football being an effective tool of social mobility.¹⁵⁹

His central role in the French national team represented the perfect opportunity for Thuram to speak up, as he did in 1996 after a comment from Jean Marie Le Pen where he argued that there were too many black in the national team.¹⁶⁰ This is what Thuram responded "Il dit qu'il y a trop de joueurs noirs, je ne sais pas quoi répondre, car, personnellement, je ne suis pas noir." (He says there are too many black players. I don't know what to say since, personally, I'm not black)¹⁶¹ He explained what he meant after later saying that he wanted to point out that the reason why he was in the French team was not the color of his skin but his nationality, he aimed at showing the possibility of detaching nationality from race. The same year, Thuram also went public to speak about the fact he hated the cliché that said that football had 'saved' him.¹⁶² He said that his case is an exception that shows the limit of growing up in a *citée*, in the sense that the fact there are so many good

¹⁵⁷ "Thuram Signe à La Juventus," *Le Parisien*, 2001, <https://www.leparisien.fr/sports/thuram-signe-a-la-juventus-19-06-2001-2002243538.php#:~:text=COMME%20NOUS%20vous%20l'annoncions,histoire%20pour%20un%20joueur%20fran%C3%A7ais>.

¹⁵⁸ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 281.

¹⁵⁹ "Fondation Lilian Thuram," Fondation Lilian Thuram | Objectifs, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.thuram.org/la-fondation/objectifs/>.

¹⁶⁰ Jean-Marie Le Pen, "Interview de M. Jean-Marie Le Pen, Président Du Front National, Dans 'France-Soir' Du 25 Juin 1996, Sur Ses Réflexions Xénophobes Sur La Composition de l'équipe Nationale de Football et Communiqué Du Front National Publié Dans 'Présent' Le 26 Juin.," *Vie-Publique*, 1996, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/254822-jm-le-pen-25061996-reflexions-xenophobes-equipe-nationale-de-football>.

¹⁶¹ "Lilian Thuram : « Comme Un Gamin de Dix Ans »,» *L'Humanite*, 2006, <https://www.humanite.fr/sports/-/lilian-thuram-comme-un-gamin-de-dix-ans>.

¹⁶² Lilian Thuram - Fréquentstar 1999 (M6VIDEObANK), accessed 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=213386363227409>.

players emerging from the *cités* shows the lack of possibilities more than anything else.¹⁶³ Continuing on Thuram's willingness to respond to politicians are his comments regarding Le Pen's insinuation that the French players in the 1998 World Cup were not 'truly' French. To this comment he responded "On dirait que Mr. Le Pen ne sait pas qu'il y a des Français noirs, blond et brun. C'est surprenant car il a été candidat aux présidentielles plusieurs fois et il me semble qu'il ne connaît pas l'histoire du pays." (Mr. Le Pen seems not to know that there are black French, blond and brown-haired French. What surprises me is that he has been a candidate for president several times and that he doesn't understand French history)¹⁶⁴ This comment aims at underlining the diversity of France while also linking this diversity to France's history and thus clearly referring to colonization. This willingness to answer to politicians and to make links between France's history and its present-day diversity is truly what made Thuram so special, and what led to him becoming a strong political figure.

Thuram's political involvement continued long after the 1998 World Cup, during Sarkozy's presidency the two figures clashed at multiple instances and had many discussions where Thuram defended the inhabitants of the *cités* from Sarkozy's attacks.¹⁶⁵ These debates ultimately led Sarkozy to propose to Thuram a place in his government which Thuram refused, underlining the clash between Sarkozy and his ideas while also saying that he respected the difficulty of the task too much to do it halfway.¹⁶⁶ Outside of the purely political standpoint, he created the Lilian Thuram Foundation for Education against Racism, which is devoted to studying and attacking contemporary racism.¹⁶⁷

Thuram is not the only example of French players during this period that became vocal about political issues. Patrice Evra, France's captain during the 2010 World Cup also took stances to combat racism and became vocal about numerous issues. Along with Evra, many other players expressed their political opinions, but none did it to Thuram's extent.

¹⁶³ Lilian Thuram - Fréquentstar 1999 (M6VIDEObANK), accessed 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=213386363227409>.

¹⁶⁴ "Lilian Thuram : « Comme Un Gamin de Dix Ans »,” *L'Humanite*, 2006, <https://www.humanite.fr/sports/-/lilian-thuram-comme-un-gamin-de-dix-ans>.

¹⁶⁵ "Thuram Explique Pourquoi Il a Refusé d'entrer Au Gouvernement,” *Le Monde*, 2009, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/02/03/thuram-explique-pourquoi-il-a-refuse-d-entrer-au-gouvernement_1149889_823448.html.

¹⁶⁶ "Thuram Explique Pourquoi Il a Refusé d'entrer Au Gouvernement,” *Le Monde*, 2009, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/02/03/thuram-explique-pourquoi-il-a-refuse-d-entrer-au-gouvernement_1149889_823448.html.

¹⁶⁷ "Fondation Lilian Thuram,” Fondation Lilian Thuram | Objectifs, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.thuram.org/la-fondation/objectifs/>.

6.2.2 Zinedine Zidane's side

Zinédine Zidane was born on the twenty-third of June 1972 in Marseille. He's the last born out of four brothers and sisters and grew up in the *cité* of Castellane, to the north of the city.¹⁶⁸ Zidane's parents were both first generation Algerian immigrants. The *cité* of Castellane is known for being one of France's toughest and most violent *cité*.¹⁶⁹ At the time Zidane was playing for local clubs until he turned fifteen where AS Cannes invited Zidane to join their academy. Zidane will spend five years and make his professional debut at AS Cannes before being transferred to the Girondins de Bordeaux. During his four years at Bordeaux, he will make his international debut and start establishing his reputation which will lead him to sign at Juventus. There he will establish himself as one of the best players in the world, this period culminating in a victory at the 1998 WC with France and the Ballon d'Or. After this prosperous period at Juventus, Florentino Perez, the president of Real Madrid transferred him to his club for what was the highest fee for a transfer at the time. Zidane spent the last five years of his career at Real Madrid where he won the champions league and many other trophies.

His accomplishments at the club level made Zidane a star in France, but it was his performances and his aura in the national team that gave Zidane the status of living legend in France. During essentially his entire international career Zidane was seen as the best player on the team which made it seem as he was untouchable.¹⁷⁰ But one of the reasons why Zidane was liked by everyone is also his absence of political involvement. As the son of Algerian immigrants and having grown up in a *cité*, Zidane's identity was technically at the heart of many debates in France. Yet, Zidane never directly took part in those debates.

Zidane's view on racism is quite interesting, on one side, Zidane claims in his autobiography that he never suffered from racism.¹⁷¹ This is probably due to his status, he left

¹⁶⁸ Patrick Fort, Jean Philippe, and Laura Bennett, *Zidane: The Biography* (London: Ebury Press, 2018), 1.

¹⁶⁹ "In the Footsteps of Zidane," *Independent*, 2002, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/in-the-footsteps-of-zidane-189658.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Yvan Gastaut and Steven Apostolov, "Zinedine Zidane's Return to the Land of His Ancestors: Politics, Diplomacy or Something Else?," *Soccer & Society* 15, no. 5 (April 23, 2014): <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.912013>, 685.

¹⁷¹ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 158

his *cit * early enough to not have to face racism as a teenager exploring his city and then, once he was in the academies and then being a professional footballer, his status relatively protected him from racism in different ways.¹⁷² Even though Zidane claims he did not suffer from racism he still thought that as a son of an immigrant he had to be twice as strong as a French person.¹⁷³ But Zidane also considers that he always made the necessary efforts to adapt himself to the environment in which he got confronted, the *cit *, the academy and finally the professional world. He felt as if he never had to claim his differences, but it also was never held up against him. He believed that in a football team, race and differences do not matter, the group only cares about footballing levels. This view probably also comes from his father's thought that as immigrants they did not have the right to complain.¹⁷⁴

One gesture of him was probably more political than any statement he could ever have made. That gesture is his headbutt against Materazzi during the 2006 World Cup final. This headbutt was not the first violent act of Zidane on a football field, during his career he had many moments of violence that would earn him a lot of suspensions, he always apologized when doing so but he never regretted those gestures. He took the same approach when he first talked to the media about the coup de boule, he apologized for the consequences but claimed that he did not regret what he did.¹⁷⁵ He claimed that this would happen if you provoked him and that provocations should stop.¹⁷⁶ That is all Zidane had to say about the headbutt. French society and the whole world on the other hand had a lot to say about this gesture. The most notable comment probably comes from France's president at the time, Jacques Chirac, who immediately gave support to Zidane and spoke about how great of a man and a player he was.¹⁷⁷ As Chirac did, a large part of France immediately flew to Zidane's defense, claiming that he defended his honor as any man should do. What is striking in this situation is that while the general discourse could have taken on a deeply racist tone, suggesting that his action was characteristic of the violence and lack of control of North Africans as a group, only a small minority of far-right politicians claimed this.

¹⁷² Dan Franck, *Zidane Le Roman d'une Victoire* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1999), 81.

¹⁷³ Franck, *Zidane Le Roman d'une Victoire*, 94.

¹⁷⁴ Franck, *Zidane Le Roman d'une Victoire*, 88-90.

¹⁷⁵ "Des Mots Tellement Dur," *L'Equipe* 2006, <https://unes-et-photos.lequipe.fr/unes/photo/l-equipe/2006-07-13,3>.

¹⁷⁶ "Des Mots Tellement Dur," *L'Equipe*, 2006, <https://unes-et-photos.lequipe.fr/unes/photo/l-equipe/2006-07-13,3>.

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Ruelle, "Zizou, Chirac et Nos Valeurs R publicaines," *AgoraVox*, 2006, <https://www.agoravox.fr/tribune-libre/article/zizou-chirac-et-nos-valeurs-11435>.

The coup de boule was linked by many to Zidane's upbringing in the *cité Castellane*, claiming that it showed that even though he got to the highest possible social status, he still carried in him the violence of the environment he grew up in.¹⁷⁸ His violent outburst became a symbol of all the repressed violence of minorities that are faced with structural violence on a daily basis.¹⁷⁹ His act was seen as the revenge for all of those that could not defend themselves because of their position in society.¹⁸⁰ This headbutt symbolized a question about the meaning of violence, the violence of language, and the meaning of rules and their limits in society.¹⁸¹ In the end, because of the setting, one man's outburst of rage led to it becoming a symbol representing everything that Zidane, the son of an Algerian immigrant, embodied. This quite accurately represents the meaning Zidane's career had on the French society, even though he was reticent to speak up politically, his presence and his status already represented such a strong political power.

6.3 Conclusion on the role of footballers

Using Lilian Thuram as an example of involvement in politics, while Zinédine Zidane represented the opposite was needed to show the two different approaches players can use. However, most football players situate themselves somewhere in between these two players. This chapter aimed at including the players' perspectives as they are at the center of the debate, it also aimed at showing the various ways football players can impact society. Whereas it is by being vocal about issues they are concerned with or simply by embodying the success of a colored man coming from France's *banlieue* both significantly impact French society.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Conclusion for each political side

¹⁷⁸ Mustapha Kessous, "Zidane, Héros Lointain et Décevant de La Castellane," *Le Monde*, 2006, https://lemonde.fr/societe/article/2006/07/10/zidane-heros-lointain-et-decevant-de-la-castellane_793951_3224.html.

¹⁷⁹ Serge Quadruppani, "Zidane Ne Doit Pas Etre Le Seul Amnistie," *Libération*, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Serge Quadruppani, "Zidane Ne Doit Pas Etre Le Seul Amnistie," *Libération*, 2006.

¹⁸¹ Serge Quadruppani, "Zidane Ne Doit Pas Etre Le Seul Amnistie," *Libération*, 2006.

Here is how the conclusion of how politicians frame the racial diversity of the French national team during three different events and while analyzing all the different parties will be done. The first summary will divide the (evolution of the) framing by each part of the political spectrum. Then, there will be a general summary, incorporating all sides of the political spectrum. In addition, there will be a part recalling the other findings this thesis discovered. To conclude, these findings will be nuanced by the many limitations that need to be acknowledged.

The evolution of the framing of the team by far-left politicians is very straightforward. They were only represented in 1998 and 2018, when France was winning, and during both events they were part of the opposition. Far-left politicians always minimized the importance of football in society as they did not benefit from the apparent success of France. Regarding their framing of the racial diversity, it followed what will be seen as the ‘typical’ evolution. In 1998, they emphasized the racial diversity of the team in a positive way, as a perceived success at integration was beneficial to their stances on multiculturalism and immigration. Yet, in 2018 they followed the general movement of congratulating the team for their endorsement of republican values without referring to the racial diversity of the team. Far-left politicians did this as they aimed at avoiding overly emphasizing the racial diversity of the team as they did in 1998 and following the movement of public opinion that went away from the push on racial narratives.

The evolution of the framing by left-wing politicians is more nuanced and one of the most relevant of our findings. France’s left wing was in power during the 1998 World Cup but in opposition during the two other World Cups. This explains why, in 1998 they gave a big importance to football, yet, in 2010 and 2018, they nuanced the importance football had on society. However, arguments could be made that in 2010, when France underperformed, they could have given importance to football as it could be associated with an underperformance of the party in power (UMP, France’s right wing). Yet, because other politicians linked the failure at the 2010 World Cup to problems of the *banlieue* and racial tensions, they would not benefit from public opinion following this argument. As (nearly) all the other parties, in 1998 they framed the racial diversity of the team in a very positive way as a perceived success at integration would benefit them in their pro-immigration stances. However, similarly to the far left, they went away from this narrative in 2018 as the BBB

euphoria was long over and therefore, pushing on the importance of the racial diversity would not have the same positive impact as it did in 1998.

As the political parties associated with the center were only relevant during the 2018 World Cup, no evolution of their framing of the national team can be analyzed.

Right wing parties were only represented during the 1998 and 2010 World Cup, during both events they were the party in power. Logically, in 1998 they gave significant importance to football, as the success of the National team was associated with the success of the country. However, in 2010, they also gave some significance to the failure of the team even though they were in power. This is because in both situations the results of the team fitted narrative right-wing politicians were trying to push. In 1998 the narrative they pushed is the success at the integration of racial diversity, in fact, because public opinion was euphoric regarding the success of the team composed of racial diversity, right wing politicians aligned with this view, and pushed the narrative of BBB being a symbol for the success of integration. Yet, in 2010 the situation was vastly different, in a context of heightened political tensions in France, the calamitous result on field as well as the off-field problems led right-wing politicians to frame this team's racial and 'cultural' origins negatively. In fact, depicting the players' negative attitude to link it to their *banlieue* roots, aligned with the vision of a fractured society right wing politicians were promoting. Therefore, by giving a high importance to the failure of the team, they exacerbated the public's opinion of French society being viewed as fractured.

The far-right was represented and was part of the opposition in all three World Cups. Similarly to other parties of the opposition, they nuanced the importance of football when France was winning, yet, comparatively, they gave importance to football during the 2010 World Cup. This is linked to the fact they do not benefit from France being seen as successful when they are part of the opposition, and due to the fact that because of the racial composition of the team, the team being seen as successful is in opposition to their ethno-nationalist conception of France. The far-right did however change their framing of their racial diversity of the team. In 1998, the far-right went against the grain, and criticized the team for allegedly not representing France as it was composed of racial diversity, when all other parties were acclaiming the success of BBB. This stance was maintained during the 2010 World Cup, where they not only followed the right in criticizing the players' supposed

lack of endorsement of republican values because of their *banlieue* roots, but they also criticized the team's racial diversity as it still did not represent the far-right's ethno-nationalist ideal. This is because the accentuation of a supposed failure at integrating players of color and of *banlieue* roots fitted their anti-immigration narrative. However, in 2018 when the whole political sphere complimented the team for their endorsement of republican values, the far-right joined along while also celebrating the patriotism of the team, without discussing the racial diversity of the team. This is because the far-right took lessons from the 1998 World Cup, when going against the grain was costly for them. Therefore, they emphasized the patriotic aspect of the team as it worked with their nationalist stances, while avoiding the backlash of critiquing the players' racial profile when no one else was referring to it.

To conclude on the way politicians frame the national team. Firstly, in general, parties in power tend to emphasize the importance of football when winning, while the opposition tends to neglect it. This already demonstrates how football is instrumentalized. We also showed that left and far-left parties tend to either positively frame the racial diversity of the team or just omit it, but they never frame it negatively. Right wing parties are shown to be the parties that follow public opinion the most. They go from framing the racial diversity extremely positively to criticizing the banlieue origins while using a clearly racist undertone. Far-right parties went from heavily criticizing the racial diversity of the team to just omitting it.

7.2. Other relevant findings

Regarding Gijsbert Oonk's model of 'thick and thin' levels of belonging, this work uncovered new relevant aspects that need to be considered. Firstly, there are political variations in the interpretation of the level of belonging players get. This work demonstrated that left-wing parties do not question the level of belonging, even when the players or team's results are disappointing. This is due to France's left-wing parties' civic nationalist views where they see all French citizens as equal and as belonging to the nation. Questioning the level of belonging of players with foreign roots would go against left wing ideals. This thesis also uncovered another dimension that could lead players to being seen as having a 'thin' level of belonging. Certain politicians used the fact the players come from France's banlieue to derive that they do not embody the civic ideals of having a common desire to live together.

This meant that due to this apparent lack of endorsement of civic values, banlieue players' level of belonging and right to represent the nation was questioned.

7.3. Final Conclusion

At large, in 1998 the racial diversity of the team was heavily accentuated. Yet, this overemphasis on skin color in France's supposed 'colorblind' state demonstrated that France was still struggling with an ethno-nationalist perspective as well as a certain discomfort around race. In 2010 this same racial diversity was perceived as negative, however, the main criticisms were centered around the banlieue angle. This banlieue angle shows France's struggles with its civic nationalist conception, it also serves to hide France's racism as banlieue remarks often serve to hide racist remarks. 2010 thus shows that France was at crisis with its identity and the World Cup reflected the problems of the *banlieue* as well as the problems with its racial diversity. Finally, the general omission of race in the comments surrounding the 2018 World Cup can be perceived as the victory of civic nationalism in France. France's team fully endorses republicanist values and politicians apply France's 'colorblindness', even far-right parties go away from their ethno-nationalist conception of the team. These three World Cups therefore show France's path at coming to terms with its multiculturalism and racial diversity.

7.4 Limitations

Notwithstanding these insightful findings, there are numerous factors that could not have been discussed in detail in this work, that we found extremely relevant and that need to be accounted for and that would be relevant to be studied more extensively.

Firstly, and most notably, a certain result bias needs to be accounted for. This work focused on three World Cups with vastly different results, even though this result bias is considered during individual consideration for each World Cup, it also needs to be accounted at large. Questions can be raised on whether the *banlieue* comments in 2010 would have been the same if the result of the team would have been different? In a similar vein, would the far-right have made comments on the racial diversity of the team in 2018 if they had gotten

eliminated at the group stage? All the conclusions about the evolution of political parties and of the French society at large need to be taken with a strict consideration of the result bias.

Another notable aspect influencing the findings of this work is the selection of our case studies. Selecting these three World Cups meant already influencing the findings of this work. Even though the reasons for this selection have been explained, the results could have been vastly different if the work had focused on other World Cups. Furthermore, European Championships could also have been analyzed as they also generate many comments from politicians. Additionally, focusing on three specific events and reducing the timeframes, meant that some significant events that happened in the national teams could not have been extensively discussed. As such, the 2001 France-Algeria game, Zidane's *Coup de Boule*, the 'quotas' affairs, all would have added nuances and might have revealed other findings. Additionally, reducing the timeframes meant that some relevant comments from politicians that were just outside of the timeframes had to be excluded. Namely, Georges Freche's comments on the racial diversity of the team in 2006 had an enormous resonance in France's politics yet could not be analyzed in this work.

In the same manner, not all political parties could be represented in each World Cup, even though we selected the most relevant parties, it does not allow for a methodological analysis of each political party. This work could not fully account and explain the evolution of both the political realm at large but also the evolution of each party. In fact, the evolution of the far-right going from Jean-Marie Le Pen's openly xenophobic and racist party's Front National, to Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National that aimed at going away from being seen as too extreme, does influence our findings. When Marine Le Pen does not comment on the racial diversity of the team in 2018 it shows a desire to avoid an ethno-nationalist conception of France that is vastly different from her party's initial ideals.- Therefore, the conclusions need to be considerate of this evolution.

The focus on political parties also meant that comments from other important personalities in France's political realm that are not associated with a party could not be integrated into this work. Yet, personalities such as Alain Finkielkraut, who was a severe critic of the 2010 national team did also have a notable influence on France's political sphere and society.

This work also could not fully dive into the transformation of the French Federation of Football. This transformation was mentioned and briefly explained but its full impact

could not be represented in this work. Yet, the team's attitude and results in 2018 directly results from the deep changes that happened after the 2010 World Cup. In fact, because of France's fiasco at the 2010 World Cup, French politicians remodeled the Federation. This meant that politicians changed the team's attitudes and results which, in turn, changed the politicians' comments regarding the team. This demonstrates a dialectic relationship between the French national team and French politics that could not be fully demonstrated in this work.

Finally, there are the more general limitations that come with making the choice to work on the French National football team. Firstly, all findings specifically relate to France, some of the concepts that were found would not apply to other countries which limits the scope of the findings. Secondly, this work focused on the men's national team, which entails an analysis of how racialized men are framed by politicians, which is vastly different. For example, would women have been qualified as *racaille* by french politicians even though they would also be from the *banlieue*? Ultimately, as for every work that is based around sports, numerous limitations apply. Sport's importance in society fully depends on the importance it is given, and it can evolve over time.

7.5 Ideas for Future Research

This thesis uncovered potential for future research in different areas. Firstly, while reading about the French national football team and French politics it became clear how there is a relationship between the French Federation of Football and the political authorities. We found this relationship would deserve to be explored as it directly impacts not only the way the national team performs on the field, but also the off-field attitude of the players. In the same area of research, a deeper analysis of the response of the footballers would also help uncover new perspectives regarding the politicization of the national team. Similarly, a comparative analysis of France with other countries that have teams largely made of players having immigration backgrounds would reveal the differences in how politicians from those countries frame their national's team diversity. In addition, the discovery of the *banlieue* concept and how it is tied to the level of belonging of a player could also be explored in other countries that have the same urban structure as France. Finally, the selected case study used the 2018 World Cup as the final point, yet France's results during the World Cup of 2022 and the reactions it generated would also deserve to be analyzed.

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