elements of over-zealous nationality which is seen as a common trait of the average man-on-the-street.

This might sound like stereotyping, but the examples supporting this hypothesis are many. Or how else does one explain *The Sun*, with its war-riddled headlines, being the highest selling newspaper in England?

The truth is that football is perhaps nationalism's last frontier. In the real world it is almost a dying philosophy. Even as far back as 2002, the British newspaper *Independent* concluded that, "...national symbols such as the Queen and the flag bear uncomfortable overtones of racism and colonialism. Patriotism," they went on, "is seen as profoundly downmarket, like doilies and bad diets."



In football, however, flag-waving nationalism is widely acceptable. Nationalism in football is understandable, to a certain extent, especially when it concerns an international context. European Championships and the World Cup are competitions that are organised around the principle of nationality. Teams are composed of players with the same nationality, the national anthem is played and the national flag is displayed. Therefore, the organising principle of such competitions implies that nationality matters -- that it is a generalisation with substantive content rather than an empty stereotype. So arguably, every European Championship, World Cup, or even Olympic games does more to strengthen nationalism than to weaken it.

Which is not really a bad thing; as long as it does not get very complicated.

But, too often in football, simple flag-waving nationalism descends into chauvinistic and anti-foreigner behaviour. Multicultural teams are frowned upon and invoke debate and people like Hakan Yakin face allegations about their allegiance for their national side. It also explains how even people who give Fascist salutes are revered and regarded as cult-heroes for their clubs.

Take the case of this year's World Cup in South Africa.

The biggest point of contention seemed to be on the said "German-ness" of the German national team. Many people I spoke to seemed to harbour the judgment that the creative bunch of young olive-skinned professionals were somehow impostors. The lingering feeling was that Germany had somehow cut some corners to make this happen; that somehow if you were not blond and blue-eyed you could not really be German.

Many others seemed to understand this view, but in reality it should be inexplicable, especially when you consider that this is the exact concern that was expressed by the National Party in Germany during the World Cup in 2006. A tiny Neo-Nazi group, they unfurled a banner showing 11 paper figures in Germanesque uniforms. Ten had brown, black, yellow or red faces. One had a white face.