



# ***Panalo Nating Lahat* [This is a Victory for us All]: Uncovering Constructs of Language and Nationalism in Social Media Reactions to Alex Eala's Post-US Open Juniors Championship Interview**

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## **Abstract**

Filipina tennis player Alex Eala won the US Open Juniors 2022 title, marking a first for the Philippines. She spoke in Filipino for much of her post-match interview, with no translators on hand, which is rare for international matches that broadcast to wide audiences. Online reactions to the event were of interest from the view of language and national identity. Bottom-Up Framing was used to inductively analyze social media comments on Eala's speech. The researcher found that commenters constructed Eala's post-match interview as a test of Filipino identity, and abstracted their sentiments to include other public appearances of other Filipino sports celebrities, such as Manny Pacquiao. English speakers were mocked for being awkward, while Filipino speakers were praised for being both humble and proud of their language. A performance of Filipinoness was equated with nationalism, and language became an object to be displayed rather than purveyor of meaning and culture. These findings have implications for studies of national identity in sports, and for how we understand the role of social media in facilitating discussions that construct and enforce the image of an authentic Filipino.

Keywords: sports nationalism, Filipino language, post-match interview, alex eala, us open tennis, SDG 10: reduced inequalities

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## Introduction

Alex Eala is a young tennis player who made history by being the first Filipina player to win a Grand Slam singles title at the 2022 US Open Women's Juniors (Levinsohn, 2022). At the start of the tournament, she was the 10<sup>th</sup>-seeded player, but pushed through the competition with straight sets to her name. In the final, she faced the Czech Republic's Lucie Havlickova, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, whom she downed in two sets in a little over an hour.

Fellow Filipinos cheered for Eala in the stands, but what caught their attention, and that of news outlets, was Eala's post-match speech. She first thanked the tournament organizers and fans, then turned to the hosts and asked if she could address the crowd in her native Filipino. Then, she spoke:

*Unang-una, gusto ko lang magpasalamat sa pamilya ko, kasi kung hindi para sa kanila, hindi ko talaga 'to kakayanin. Buong puso ko tong pinaglaban, hindi lang para sa sarili ko kundi para makatulong din ako sa kinabukasan ng Philippine tennis. Hindi lang to panalo ko, kundi panalo nating lahat. Thank you. (Reyes, 2022, n. p.)*

[First of all, I want to thank my family, because without them, I wouldn't have been able to do this. I fought for this with my whole heart, not just for myself, but to also help the future of Philippine tennis. This is not just my win, but a win for us all. Thank you.]

Born in 2005, Eala has since earned a career high of ranking 52nd internationally (as of November 2025), making her the highest-ranking Filipina player in singles history. At the time of the post-match interview, she was a scholar at the academy founded by Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal. She has also won grand slam juniors doubles tournaments at the 2020 Australian Open and 2021 French Open, and has since competed in the majors and tennis federation tournaments (International Tennis Federation, 2025; World Tennis Association, 2025). As with many other international athletes, she maintains an online presence on Facebook and Instagram.

When she won her first singles grand slam title at the 2021 US Open Juniors tournament, news outlets quickly posted the video of her match

as well as her subsequent speech, which prompted swift, though varied online reactions from Filipino social media users (e.g., Badoy, n. d.; Castillejo, n.d.; Reyes, 2022). The reaction should come as no surprise. The use of Filipino with no subtitles is unique: the Philippines is a former colony with hundreds of living languages and multiple cultures, but has also figured on the worldwide stage in sports and beauty pageants with English-speaking representatives. Filipino athletes such as boxer Manny Pacquiao (Sky Sports Boxing, 2021; Top Rank Boxing, 2015) and pole-vaulter EJ Obiena (One Sports, 2023) have both used English in their post-match interviews. Though he consistently uses English, gymnast Carlos Yulo also spoke in Nihongo during a training session in Japan (Philippine Star, 2024). For the first time, however, Filipino was heard in an international competition, with no interpreters or subtitles on hand.

Sports, whether as broadcasted events or live spectacles, have become venues to spread nationalism and patriotism: they can impose a national identity (Billings, 2017); broadcast athletes as heroes around whom countries can rally (Chaeroni et al., 2024; Costello, 2009; Galang et al., 2015); encourage social and cultural bonding (Costello, 2009); and project an image of a united nation (Bairner, 2008; Costello, 2009; Morgan, 1999). Sports events and people's reactions also give us a glimpse into the moral character, identity, dreams, and values of a community (Morgan, 1999). Sports media texts, therefore, can reinforce the collective identity of a nation, and studying such texts can provide insight into conceptions of national identity (Costello, 2009).

Media spaces allow the public to participate in and negotiate meaning making as well. Sports fans live in such a space online, producing texts through their comments and interactions. These texts, in turn, create narratives of nationalism and patriotism (Chaeroni et al., 2024) which might not always match those of mainstream media (Frederick et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2023; Waddell, 2024). Studying these online texts can contribute to research on mediated spaces and how they foster, facilitate, and even gatekeep constructs of a nation and those that can rightfully call it home.

The Philippines is one of the world's largest users of social media (Kemp, 2024), and online comments in response to an issue that unites people (sports) while dividing them (language) can be a space to also uncover constructs of nationalism. Eala's win, and her speech, allowed such a space to arise. The researcher therefore asked: how did online

comments on Alex Eala's post-match interview in Filipino construct the role of language in representing a nation?

The Philippines is a special case, as it has few athletes that figure on the worldwide stage, and fewer chances to hear its language spoken in a wide arena. While Eala's speech was short, it was a rare, unique event that initiated online exchanges, which could possibly reveal public sentiments at that time, as well as surface deeper-seated beliefs related to power and identity (Surya, 2019). Previous research has examined nationalism and constructs of nation in Philippine sports (Costello, 2009; Gems, 2004, 2016; and Ponce de Leon, 2018), but there has been no research on the use of a specific language in sports broadcasts – something that has bearing in this globalized world, where both the diasporic and local Filipino speak languages far from the culture in which they were raised, and where the concepts of national identity and its performance, Filipino-ness, are debated and negotiated.

## **Literature Review**

There has been a wealth of research in language and national identity, sports and nationalism, and language and sports. The following review of literature, though by no means exhaustive, provides theoretical and contextual backing for analyzing social media reactions to Eala's post-tournament speech at the US Open Juniors.

### **Language and national identity**

Nationalism, as a construct, emerged in the late 19th century, as Europe's romanticists became more interested in local cultures as a representation of identity. This was in response to the empires and kingdoms that held power over several nations during that time (Calhoun, 2017). A sense of nationalism is still essential to modern democracies and globalization, as people need a sense of belonging and rootedness to a place (Calhoun, 2017; Kanasan, 2014). Research shows that countries with higher income inequality tend to have higher national pride because these sentiments are frequently conjured in order to engender solidarity across social groups and discourage dissent. More developed nations tend to be less proud of their country, lending support to the notion that globalization tends to dampen national attachment (Ariely, 2018).

Nationalism is politically charged and emotionally driven, and can be sparked when people feel a disruption in their routine, so that everyday objects become symbolic of nation and must be defended

(Billig, 2010). There are, however, everyday objects and habits that are indicative of a banal kind of nationalism: flags, currencies, images, and even one's choice of words all contribute to sustaining the image of the nation. They, too, provide the scaffolding on which to build the much greater shows of nationalism later, when people are called upon to defend their country and define their identity (Billig, 2017).

Nationalism is not entirely innocuous. For instance, blind patriotism and constructive patriotism have been explored as polar constructs. Blind patriots aim to maintain status quo, are intolerant of criticism of the country, and are less concerned with how a nation treats people; constructive patriots allow for change and encourage dissent as a means to improve the nation (Kanasan, 2014; Marinthe et al., 2023). In general, blind patriots fuse their identity with that of the nation, and will critique anything that threatens positive group identity because of their attachment to an idealized image of this nation. Constructive patriots, on the other hand, are attached to the nation as a system and a collection of institutions, so that these patriots see themselves as independent citizens with a civic duty (Schatz, 2018).

National identity is a concept tied with nationalism: it can be changed through time, but it also has deep-seated elements that are both static (such as traditions or norms) and dynamic (such as social and cultural processes that constantly re-shape identity). National identity might have features such as a sense of a common fate or origin, the perception that the nation is unique with those that belong and those that do not (Billings, 2017), self-sacrifice for the sake of a group, and the continuity of an identity across time (David & Bar-Tal, 2009).

The need for tying identity to nation is also linked to individual needs to identify with the norms of a group; this identity is fostered through shared culture and experience, propagated through education (Moran, 2011), and given meaning through culture, beliefs, and language (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). The issue of national identity is understandably more pronounced in multilingual countries: A single language symbolizes the culture and identity of a group, and people might be expected to gather around it in solidarity (Smolicz & Nical, 1997). Speaking a single language is also popularly linked to the character of a civilized society (Blackledge, 2002): people tend to believe that the use of one's language is bound up with one's sense of belonging, to the point that critiquing the language is seen as an attack on a nation (Kilborn, 1993). The use of a single language is thus a means to foster the development of a national

identity and thereby cement nationalism (O'Connell, 2014; Smolicz & Nical, 1997).

Multilingual countries, therefore, tend to push the agenda of monolingualism, or a dominant language that all visitors and residents must speak, at the price of being discriminated against or even misconstrued as contrarian, backward, and disloyal (Blackledge, 2002; Pavlenko, 2002). Nationalism pushes this agenda even further by using institutions, such as the media and state, to encourage the formation of group identity through common traditions, symbols, and values – a strategy that can reinforce discriminatory practices (Blackledge, 2002). The state, for its part, must be distinguished as a political entity that must unite groups of varying languages and cultures, and is not to be confused with the nation, or a group with a single language to define its peoples. When the state and nation are conflated, a state tends to impose the use of a single language on its peoples, regardless of their origin and culture. Monolingualism, therefore, risks not only oppressing minority groups, but encouraging separatism (Smolicz & Nical, 1997). Ultimately, it is the speakers who spread the language because it is they who know what it means and what it is useful for (Ives, 2004) but it is also the ideology attached to the language that determines who benefits from it.

Monolingualism has long been theorized and criticized, perhaps most notably by Italian linguist and sociologist Antonio Gramsci, who used this imposition of a single language as a metaphor for hegemony (Ives, 2004). In Gramsci's early 1900s Europe, debates were rife on how to standardize national languages coming from varying local tongues, and in the name of national unity. Gramsci (Ives, 2004) rejected this idea: language, he theorized, is adopted because it carries meanings of prestige and power, such that adopting a single language also meant imposing this prestige and power, erasing cultures, suppressing creativity, and oppressing the humanity of diverse groups. The imposition of a single language could also widen the gap between the old and the young: the old would not know the standardized language to which the young would perhaps be most accustomed, and this disconnect could stand in the way of transferring culture and traditions to sustain a community. An imposed language could eventually be adopted, but the activities of spontaneous, everyday life would continue to pressure and shape the national language because the unique worldviews of minority groups were not engaged to begin with. Of related interest to Gramsci is

Bourdieu's conception of language as cultural capital: the language that one speaks determines how much one can earn, and this market value is based on the language's symbolic power, which includes dominant ideologies about the language and those who speak it (Costello, 2009).

Language might influence national identity, but that identity is not fixed and can also be influenced by interculturality (O'Connell, 2014). The link between nationalism and linguistic identity, though seemingly intuitive, also shows mixed results in research: for Ireland and Wales, codifying multiple voices also became an imposition of norms against a country where minorities held on to their traditions and language (O'Connell, 2014), while in Malaysia, proficiency in the national language seemed to increase patriotism but only for younger Malaysians (David & Tien, 2008).

Researchers have called for more openness to multiculturalism and multilingualism, particularly in creating a lingua franca without alienating other languages (Smolicz, 1984). Moran (2011) claims that the embrace of many cultures can lead to a shared view, which then promotes belongingness. Multilingualism will not destabilize the political infrastructure or fracture national identity, but can, instead, be a cultural resource (Pavlenko, 2002; Smolicz, 1984).

Hearing multiple voices in places where multiculturalism is frowned upon can be invigorating to those speaking non-dominant languages. Kilborn (1993), in particular, talks about how hearing one's language being spoken is a confirmation of its importance in a world where immigrants and minorities are pushed into a homogenized 'other'. A language, once spoken, speaks to the living heart of the language; the written word, in contrast, is perceived as more intellectual in its approach.

The pitfalls of monolingualism have been well documented in the case of English, and its use in colonies across the world. English has long been used as the standard of mass education, but it has also attained a status of a language that indicates education, which can push inequalities further (Billings, 2009).

In Tanzania, for instance, English is the language of the academe and international business, Swahili is the language of independence, and there, too, are over other living languages which are for private use (Billings, 2009; 2011). Even beauty queens are not spared of the stigmatization: urban beauty queens have their own brand of English that is higher in the ladder of English superiority compared with that

spoken by provincial queens; pageant watchers, in turn, have their own expected views of contestant behavior and speech (Billings, 2011). In particular, English grammar is ignored in favor of unmixed English, which leads some contestants to memorize pre-written answers to standard pageant questions if only to meet the indexical congruence (language and symbolic expectations) of the audience (Billings, 2009; 2011).

English as ideology has also been documented in Australia, which saw waves of European migrants overtaking indigenous populations (Moran, 2011), as well as in the US, where European migrants had to assimilate the American identity to ensure their upward mobility (Pavlenko, 2002). This assimilation always comes at a steep, cultural price: newer generations of migrant children maintain their native language not as a way to belong to a group or uphold their identity of origin, but simply to communicate with their family (Pavlenko, 2002).

The Philippines presents its own unique case of language ideology. The country is home to over 7000 islands, with distinct linguistic groups comprising over 120-170 languages, depending on the classification system (Bravo-Sotelo et al., 2024; Gonzalez, 1998; Roberts & Kitao, 1987; Tupas, 2015; Tupas & Llorente, 2014). The country was first colonized by Spain, which confined education and use of the Spanish language only to the rich; then by the Americans, who pushed education for all, but also pushed the use of English by easing out and punishing the use of other languages (Clampitt, 2015; Roberts & Kitao, 1987). This made English a weapon of the elite and a tool for colonial domination (Tupas, 2003).

To the Americans, both Spanish and the hundreds of Filipino languages were seen as hindrances to Western democracy, as Spain was the former colonizer and the diverse languages were seen as deadweights to the country's eventual self-governance (Osborne, 2021). To unite the country and remove dissenting voices, American educators used a combination of team sports and English (Osborne, 2021). As a result, the use of English became associated with ensured upward mobility, adherence to democratic ideals, and commitment to national unity (Osborne, 2021; Tupas & Llorente, 2014). Provincial languages were stigmatized: they were incorrectly called dialects and defined as petulant ways by which the former colony could show both its jealousy and refusal to engage with the rest of the country (Osborne, 2021) so

that anyone who tried to intellectualize Filipino was labeled jealous, resistant, and lazy (Morgan, 1999).

In the 1930s, the Philippines slowly gained its independence from the US, and the focus turned to nation-building, which was spearheaded by the political elite. The debates in congress turned to defining Filipino identity, and this was, unsurprisingly, dominated by the argument of imposing a single language (Tupas, 2015). Two languages emerged as the frontrunners in the bid to be the national language: Bisaya, widely spoken in the middle islands and Mindanao; and Tagalog, spoken in Luzon and, perhaps most important, the capital Manila. Tagalog won, thanks to the push of lawmakers, but this dominance came at the price of resentment amongst other language groups, which invoked the derisive label of 'Imperial Manila' to talk about enforced monolingualism (Tupas 2015; Tupas & Llorente, 2014). The divide had long been drawn: Philippine provinces had consistently been insulated from colonial forces even during the Spanish Era; it was mostly in metropolitan centers that the pressure to adopt to colonization was exerted, until the identity of the provinces became independent of the colonizers and distinct from the cities (Morgan, 1999).

Later, the language was labeled as Pilipino, in a bid to remove the animosity for Tagalog (Tupas, 2015). Pilipino is an artificial, linguistically-engineered language that is based on Tagalog, but incorporates components from other languages in the country (Clampitt, 2015). Later, Pilipino became Filipino, in the hope of being accepted by all citizens, as the letter F is a sound made by non-Tagalog languages; this did not satisfy the detractors, who were mostly Bisaya and Hiligaynon speakers, which represent over half the country (Gonzalez, 1998; Roberts & Kitao, 1987; Tupas, 2015). Filipino was a supposed unifying banner under which all citizens could rally to liberate themselves from English; however, other languages and, therefore, cultures had to be erased, which created its own struggle for national identity (Tupas, 2015).

The use of English for education and its label as a language of the learned and elite persist (Clampitt, 2015; Smolicz, 1984). After the war, English was still a standard in many schools, as it was tied to development and exports; it became the divide between those who could get good jobs and those who could not (Tupas & Martin, 2016). There, too, were English-only policies, which bred resentment across different language groups (Osborne, 2021), and which enforced a false

dichotomy of English-good economy vs. other language-bad economy (Tupas, 2003).

The education system of the country, however, is not in good shape. Students who come from non-Filipino speaking places can barely grasp English and Filipino, which are widely used in school; they therefore cannot learn other school subjects, as they must also translate the language at the same time that they learn the concepts (Bravo-Sotelo et al., 2024; Smolicz, 1984). This has prompted the education department to enforce mother tongue language education, which supposedly helps students to learn in their native language; however, the program has been suspended following uneven implementation, since mother tongues were treated as a mere tool of translation, rather than as a way to make lessons more culturally relevant to learners (Tupas & Martin, 2016).

English has not lost its prestige. It is considered the language of the learned and governing (Clampitt, 2015; Gonzalez, 1998; Tupas, 2003), the lingua franca of global business and trade, and a driver of upward social mobility (Bravo-Sotelo et al., 2024; Martin, 2008; Torio, 2016). Research has shown variety in attitudes to English: Cebuano and Waray speakers had more positive attitudes toward English over Filipino, but Ilocanos preferred Filipino over English (Smolicz & Nical, 1997); Pampanga high school teachers and students both had a high regard for those who could speak English well, though the perception was much higher for teachers than it was for students (Torio, 2016).

Filipino is framed as the language of national unity and identity (Clampitt, 2015; Gonzalez, 1998; Tupas, 2003), and is considered the language of nationalism, as though English and other local languages are inadequate for expressing love for one's country (Martin, 2008). Filipino is also the language of the everyday: it is code-switched on the street, used for dialogue rather than a formal language (Clampitt, 2015; Tupas, 2003). Defending Filipino as a national language that should have wide use is often done out of duty, rather than actual identification with the language and the culture that it supposedly represents (Clampitt, 2015).

Martin (2008) does not see a rivalry between English and Filipino, though Sibayan (1985), in a look at language policy, sees spaces where Filipino can be exalted without having to ridicule English speakers. For the latter, oral communication and official government documents can be accommodated by Filipino, but professional transactions and education should still be in English. Bravo-Sotelo and colleagues (2024)

are more expansive: they propose an inclusive framework drawing from the country's hundreds of linguistic resources instead of making one language dominant over others.

These issues become thornier when one considers Filipino diasporic communities, and how they perform national identity, or their Filipino-ness (Yacat, 2005). Diasporic Filipinos face discrimination from their host country, as well as from fellow Filipinos, who question whether they are exercising enough Filipino-ness by living away from the country and speaking another language (Aguila, 2015).

Filipino-ness has been studied by a variety of scholars. Yacat (2005), in discussions with students of a Philippine university, found that students constructed identity as comprising one's origins, cultural roots, and consciousness, though the highest value of these components differed among students from different regions. There were also two different identities, as extracted from the conversations: the Filipino by name, who simply identified with the culture; and the Filipino by heart, who was deeply Filipino because they integrated cultural values and were also involved in national affairs. Mamuyac (2020), in interviews with Filipino-Americans, found that the culture of belongingness that Filipinos carried often clashed with the ideals of individualist cultures. Filipinos also experienced discrimination for not speaking Filipino fluently, which arose from a pressure to preserve the Filipino culture. Tigno (2008), in interviews with Filipinos in Japan, found that Filipinos exercised their Filipino-ness through Catholic religious practices, duplication of small business setups popular in the Philippines, and speaking Filipino languages to each other, but not teaching them to their children. Their children, as a result, felt excluded from social events that would otherwise make them feel that they are part of the Filipino community. Eisen et al. (2015), in a study of essays written by Filipino students of Filipino culture and language classes in Hawaii, found that even as they cast Filipinos in a positive light, the students believed that to be truly Filipino, one must speak Filipino, and only then adopt cultural values – making the identity one that had to be adopted in full rather than negotiated and rebuilt through one's life.

This essentialist view of the Filipino identity (or one existing as a static, homogeneous identity, with a checklist of cultural traits that must be exercised in response to colonial influences), clashes with more nuanced views of an identity arising from globalization and digital media (where the Filipino is an individual within a community)

(Aguila, 2015; Eisen et al., 2015). While the historian Zeus Salazar once argued that Filipinoness could only be genuinely performed by those who lived in the country and spoke Filipino (Aguila, 2015), other scholars proposed fluid understandings of Filipinoness, accounting for cultures in flux because of migration or communities that do not share the predominantly Catholic views that national identity might espouse (Aguila, 2015; Herrera-Shaw, 2022; Mamuyac, 2020; Yacat, 2005). To insist on a single national identity, moreover, excludes those who identify as Filipinos but do not share in the dominant group's religious beliefs or speak the dominant language, leading to the oppression and forgetting of the many cultural groups that make up the country (Herrera-Shaw, 2022).

### **Sports and Nationalism**

Where language is the everyday expression of national identity, sports are the broadcast version of it (O'Connell, 2014). Sports, in general, are a way for nations to promote themselves, and for people to construct, reproduce, and even assert their identity through cultural resistance, especially for those who are members of nations that must be subsumed under nation-states with another culture and language (e.g., Scotland or Wales in the United Kingdom, or Catalan or Basque in Spain)(Bairner, 2008; Billings, 2017). The modern-day Olympics allow sports to be a spectacle, where both athletes and spectators are required for a full performance to be experienced; where the hitherto private, hidden, and small issues are given a chance to be public and great; and where nations tell stories about themselves (MacAloon, 1984).

Broadcast media has been used to spread nationalism and patriotism via sport, further expanding the reach of sports, molding national identity, and encouraging shared experiences that strengthen social and cultural bonding (Costello, 2009). The sight of athletes representing a nation is a sign to the world that a nation is united, rather than a set of scattered tribes. This united nation is, by transference, one that can govern and speak for itself (Costello, 2009; Morgan, 1999). Sports events give us a glimpse into communities: their moral character, identity, dreams, and values; they provide a spectacle to show how athletes are bound in national identity with a nation and its culture such that their lives are infused "with a moral sense of meaning they might otherwise not have" (Morgan, 1999, p. 51). Sports competitors are hailed as heroes who can bring honor to a country and become symbols of nationalism and patriotism, and media can extol them as people sacrificing for the

nation (Chaeroni et al., 2024; Costello, 2009; Galang et al., 2015). Such displays of national identity are important in sports in the Asia-Pacific, as a response to the countries' colonial history (Blanco, 2022).

Athletes have used the platform of widely broadcasted sports to display their national identity and advocacies in varying ways. For instance, Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe knelt as the US National Anthem was played in support of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Surya, 2019). Cathy Freeman ran her victory lap in the 1994 Commonwealth Games carrying both Australian and Aboriginal flags. Muhammad Ali used boxing as his soapbox to speak out against the Vietnam war (Schmidt et al., 2019). Reactions to these shows of identity and support have been mixed: some athletes lost promotional contracts, while others became more popular; some athletes were lauded for their bravery while others were called traitors. Kaepernick and Rapinoe, for instance, were chastised online using the language of patriotism, showing a resistance of their fans to critique and change (Surya, 2019).

In the Philippines, there is a growing body of research on sports and nationalism, and there is much publicized pride in sports (Evans & Kelly, 2002). "Pinoy Pride", or Filipino pride, is often touted when the media cover major sports celebrities and their wins. Sports has a rather young history in the country: competitive sports came with the American occupation as part of a bid to modernize their newest colony (Gems, 2004, 2016; Santos, 2012), all while the US press reported Filipinos as barbaric, disorganized, and requiring American ideals to be civilized (Gems, 2004). Sports also became a means to impose white racial superiority, as body ideals of muscularity and height flooded sports spectacles (Gems, 2004); and sports events were designed to discourage dissent by directing a new brand of nationalism toward new rivals (Gems, 2016).

Today, basketball is the most popular sport in the Philippines, and other sports often receive fewer financial incentives, poorer facilities, and less media attention (Baquiran, 2014). Research into Filipino athletes shows that they see sport as a means for personal development, rather than their fight for a country's honor (Peneyra & Jocano, 2013). Hidilyn Diaz, the weightlifter who won the country's first Olympic gold medal, once wore a shirt claiming that the West Philippine Sea belonged to the Philippines. A study of online comments to her activism showed varying constructs on country loyalty: those who opposed her views also shielded sports from politics and perceived shows of nationalism as

futile, while those who shared her views articulated nationalism as duty and did not insulate sports from politics (Ponce de Leon, 2022).

Football in the Philippines is a special case: the men's national team comprises half-Filipinos, prompting debates on social media regarding the validity of their tenure in the team, and the need for more homegrown systems of recruitment and training (Ponce de Leon, 2018; Rehal, 2013). The debates reveal conceptions of national identity: while some internet users see it as a reflection of the global identity of football (Rehal, 2013) and motivation for local players to train better (Baquiran, 2014), others see it as a fluid identity beyond borders that counters a static one determined at birth (Ponce de Leon, 2018).

The boxer Manny Pacquiao has become a national icon and is often hailed as a hero; no surprise in a country where hope in a suffering hero of common stock contributes to community formation and national unification (Costello, 2009). Pacquiao's influence is varied: news and opinion articles frame him as a hero performing noble acts as a boxer and uniting a diverse nation (Costello, 2009); an article about him written in the vernacular primed national identity, and those who associated positive terms with him also tended to have higher national identity scores (Galang et al., 2015).

### **Athletes, Language, and Sports Broadcasts**

Language and national identity are of special concern in international sport, where athletes must travel to various places to compete, or where they are recruited into international clubs. Migration, in whatever form in sports, entails a player entering a new culture, even a new team. They are considered labor migrants, and their command of a language can affect their morale, well-being, and performance (Lavric & Steiner, 2012; Sandrelli, 2020). Even if English is considered the universal language, there are times when English is not enough for players, coaches, and referees to communicate with each other (Gladwell, 2014; Lavric & Steiner, 2012). There are workarounds: migrant players can attain a functional vocabulary through constant training and interactions with fellow players (Lavric & Steiner, 2012; Sandrelli, 2020); clubs can assign interpreters to players or provide language courses (Sandrelli, 2015; 2020; Witz, 2015); or a coach can provide feedback in the players' native language (Losa, 2013, as cited in Sandrelli, 2015). Recently, Major League Baseball in the US has also required English-speaking players to take Spanish classes to both bond teams and reach out to migrant communities (Dougherty, 2019).

Press conferences and interviews are another place where one can glimpse athletes, as they establish their public selves and allow viewers to gain insight into their lives and experiences (File, 2012; 2015; Wilton, 2015). Analysis of post-match Australian football interviews show that footballers were neutral about evaluating themselves, regardless of whether they won or lost their match – which can be tied to the culture of sports, which might misconstrue overly positive evaluation as arrogance, and overly negative evaluation as a sign of weakness (Caldwell, 2009). Post-match interviews with German football players tended to be about collaboration and reconstructing what happened, even when players were interviewed still on their jerseys, on the pitch, right after a match (Wilton, 2015). Interviews with rugby players tend to be positive, complimentary, conciliatory, affectionate, and even humorous (File, 2012).

Once again, language is an issue: non-English speaking athletes are misinterpreted, and often alienated from fans regardless of their sporting talent (Motawi, 2021; Sandrelli 2015, 2020). Media can be demeaning, even embarrassing to foreign players, perhaps because many higher-ranking sports editors and reporters are white and spend time ridiculing players rather than showing the meaning behind what the athletes wish to say (Encinas, 2017). Not all athletes have shown discouragement, however: Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao would speak in stilted, stumbling English in his post-fight interviews, which, though sometimes resulting in snide remarks online, took away nothing from his international fame, and showed that he feared nothing, not even English (Martin, 2008).

The time of merciless media, however, is slowly coming to an end. ESPN Deportes, the Spanish arm of popular sports network ESPN, was launched in 2004, and has increasingly given more jobs to bilingual reporters (Encinas, 2017). Researchers and sportswriters have also called for players to be interviewed in their native language, through an interpreter, to give fans a chance to truly see a player's personality that would otherwise disappear had the player forced themselves to speak in broken English (Motawi, 2021) and to prevent misunderstandings about the player or their team (Sandrelli, 2012; Witz, 2015). However, even the use of translators and interpreters has been contentious: some do not always translate every word that players say, and instead streamline exchanges, which might take away how players express their personality through their words (Sandrelli, 2012). Sports fans might also

be to blame: some will openly criticize players who use interpreters, but then call foreign players curt or arrogant when they give short answers because there is no interpreter on hand, and the player does not have a good enough command of the English language to make a detailed response (Motawi, 2021).

### **Research into tennis players**

Tennis is an international sport, with competitions conducted all over the world, competitors from a variety of nations, and with varying languages spoken on the court and in press conferences. Unlike football and baseball, however, tennis is a largely individual sport. Even in doubles, individual players agree to play with each other and train together, and English is generally the lingua franca amongst players, coaches, chair umpires, and the media.

Tennis interviews are likewise a battleground for issues such as nationalism and gender identity. Research shows that male players are given more game-related questions than female ones are, and this difference is more pronounced in lower-ranked players (Fu et al., 2016). Female players tend to use interviews as a way to assert their identity, to the point of being impolite, evasive, focused on self-praise, and curt to journalists, and often in a bid to counter the framing of women as powerless, emotional, and out of control (Sznycer, 2010).

With its individual focus, tennis players do tend to focus on their appearance. On the court, younger players are conscious of how they appear, avoid mistakes when their coaches are present, and tend to look more to the audience for support, sometimes losing their concentration when there is no audience watching (Dorling, 2012). Some tennis players are also less uneasy about speaking in their native language even without interpreters on hand: Emma Raducanu, for instance, tried to speak her father's native Romanian after a match (Romanian Tennis, 2021). A cursory examination of social media reactions to her attempts at speaking Romanian or Chinese shows a variety of views: while some Internet users were impressed, others did not care because they expected her to speak the languages that her parents spoke at home; others were cynical, since Raducanu has not yet won another major. The perceptions, as expressed, are not surprising: they center on language proficiency as well as access – something that Raducanu has, as she represents Great Britain, where she grew up as the child of Romanian and Chinese immigrants.

To date, there is no research that brings together tennis, language, nationalism, and national identity, perhaps owing to this individual nature of the sport. This research, therefore, aims to fill this gap.

## **Theoretical framework**

This research assumes that expressions of a concept represent a construct of that concept, and that concept is real to those that express it. In the context of this study, this means that online comments, in elaborating ideas regarding language, nationalism, and identity, also represent a construct of nationalism as it is tied with the use of language. The quantity of samples is not an issue; rather, the posts selected should represent constructs of what the speakers/commenters regard as their reality and identity as Filipinos. This constructive, qualitative approach allows researchers to examine phenomena in depth, as a close analysis of fewer, but remarkable cases in a specific context can deliver insights that big data might not always provide (Bozdog & Smets, 2017).

Within this paradigm, the researcher used Bottom-Up Framing (Nisbet, 2010) which has been employed in the public framing of climate change, but which is finding its applications in online comments for varying issues (Doehler, 2022; Frederick et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2023; Pegoraro et al., 2018; Ponce de Leon, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2019). In general, frames are ways to consolidate information and make it salient to specific groups. When used in the context of broadcast media, frames allow journalists to focus on parts of an issue that they deem important to the public. When used in the context of social media, frames are ways by which people make sense of the world: they can articulate this sense-making, and these frames can be extracted from these articulations (Waddell, 2024). People are assumed to deliberately choose their words, so to examine how they express themselves is to also examine a construct of their beliefs.

Sports media can reinforce constructs of nation and national identity, and studying media texts can give researchers insight into constructs of identity and nation (Costello, 2009). Social media, in particular, has increasingly turned into a space where ideologies related to nationalism, such as race, culture, or language, can be debated, creating narratives of the nation (Chaeroni et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023), and this is especially true for sports fandoms (Frederick et al., 2016). While the broadcast media can present its agenda through its framing of sports events, the comments posted on social media can be a sample

of public views that might present an alternate – and therefore, bottom-up – framing of an issue (Doehler, 2022; Surya, 2019). These frames can reflect social values, norms, attitudes, and perceptions of an issue that do not necessarily match those portrayed by broadcast media (Frederick et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2023; Waddell, 2024) and can even challenge the stereotypes that broadcast media uses (Pegoraro, 2018).

The use of Bottom-Up framing is inspired by the work of Schmidt and colleagues (2019), who contend that social media can be used to examine how people define and make sense of issues. In previous studies that employed Bottom-Up framing in relation to sports, researchers studied comments that had high user engagement, such as those that initiated more comments and/or had reactions, to examine how social media users made meaning of varying social issues through sports spectacles and issues (Doehler, 2022; Frederick et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2023; Pegoraro, 2018; Surya, 2019; Waddell, 2024). In this study, the words used by online commenters to react to Eala's use of Filipino can surface frames that define how Filipinos construct nationalism and language.

## **Methods**

Given its constructivist paradigm, this research took an inductive approach to analyzing online comments of Eala and her post-match interview. This allowed the researcher to surface themes in the data that correspond to constructs of nationalism and language.

The researcher chose the most popular social media sites in the country: Facebook still has the widest reach, followed by YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (Kemp, 2024). In choosing the most popular social media sites, the researcher hoped to cast the widest net to capture the greatest variety of responses in terms of age, gender, and social class. While no conclusions can be drawn regarding these variables and their correlations with the themes in the comments, the attempt to encompass as wide a range of commenters as possible is carried out to capture the widest range of constructs possible.

The researcher used each social media platform's search function to look for 'Alex Eala' in general, as there might have been titles also written in Filipino. The researcher selected the posts that came from news media personalities or news media outlets, as these set the agenda according to traditional framing, and would therefore invite conversations that could lead to alternative views that challenge the narrative (or bottom-

up framing). These posts are also publicly available, and could be seen and reacted to by a greater number of people.

For each post, the researcher sorted the comments according to the most relevant, which would sort comments according to those that received the most reactions and responses. This is consistent with previous research in and the theoretical framework of Bottom-Up framing, which is concerned with the most visible comments that could give rise to more reactions, responses, and, possibly, alternative frames (Doehler, 2022; Frederick et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2023; Pegoraro, 2018; Surya, 2019; Waddell, 2024). The researcher copied all comments until only one-word comments related to congratulations remained, or until all comments had no more reactions or discussions. The researcher read through each comment, allowing the researcher to examine the implied tone of the comments via a close reading of them (Doehler, 2021) consistent with techniques used in previous research (Ponce de Leon, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2019).

The researcher treated the data set as a whole, assuming that the different social media platforms represented different age groups and social classes contributing to a construct of national identity. Nevertheless, the researcher labeled which comments came from which news outlet in case there were nuances and differences found later. The researcher used Hatch's (2002) inductive analysis method, a systematic way to draw out constructs from the data which helps researchers glean meaning from a data set gathered with a large focus. The process involves constantly returning to the data to ensure that the themes being derived are true to the spirit of the data from which they were unearthed.

To implement Hatch's protocol, the researcher read through the data set as a whole, and then made a list of frames of analysis, which constitute keywords or keyphrases in the data. The researcher then assembled these keywords and keyphrases into semantic domains, which are phrases or sentences that group data into meanings. The researcher then coded the data according to these semantic domains; looked for patterns (repetition), relationships (connection), and themes (abstraction) within data under each semantic domain; and then looked for patterns, relationships, and themes across all coded data. The researcher assembled these patterns, relationships, and themes, both within and across domains, into a master outline that would form the Results and Discussion. The researcher used the headings of this master

outline to code the entire data set one last time, taking note of both confirming and disconfirming data, and taking note which social media platform hosted the data.

The headings of this master outline represent the constructs, as formed by the comments, of nationalism and its ties to language use. Following analysis, the researcher did not see any salient differences among the comments sections in the news articles, and across social media platforms, save for some comments that nuanced the themes even as they seemed unique to a social media site. The constructs, therefore, represent the articulations of nation and language across comments on media outlets that covered Eala's win.

The researcher used only publicly available news articles and comments, and, in presenting the data, did not use actual names, and did not consider the commenter's identity. The contents are also in the public domain and accessible by anyone who wants to witness how Filipinos define and construct their identity.

## **Results**

The researcher studied the comments on seven Facebook posts, three YouTube videos, one Instagram post, one TikTok video, and five Tweets. The greatest number of comments was found on Facebook, which is not surprising, given that Facebook is still the Philippines' top social media site (Kemp, 2024). While TikTok is gaining considerable market reach, it was not as popular when Eala gave her post-match interview in Filipino.

The qualified comments and their corresponding social media platforms are listed below.

### **Facebook**

1. Alex Eala makes history in 2022 US Open Juniors Championship (<https://www.facebook.com/rapplerdotcom/videos/1981398845389605>), 1783 comments, 253 selected for analysis – Rappler is an online-only news outfit founded by Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa.
2. Nagsalita ng Tagalog si Alex Eala matapos manalo sa 2022 US Open [Alex Eala Spoke Tagalog After Winning the 2022 US Open] (<https://www.facebook.com/News5Everywhere/videos/447492457404923>) 1356 comments, 80 selected for analysis - News5 has both an online and broadcast arm, and a wide coverage unit for sports in the country.

3. (NO title) (<https://www.facebook.com/abscbnNEWS/videos/5743657875656242>), 222 comments, 32 selected for analysis - ABS CBN News is a popular broadcast network.
4. Alex Eala Nagpasalamat sa Mga Kababayan [Alex Eala Thanks Her Compatriots] (<https://www.facebook.com/philstarnews/videos/767731964533807>), 116 comments, 11 selected for analysis – PhilStar is the online arm of one of the most widely circulated English language newspapers.
5. Alex Eala, nakamit ang unang grand slam title sa 2022 US Open [Alex Eala Wins First Grand Slam Title at 2022 US Open] (<https://www.facebook.com/gmanews/videos/811970923168390>) 79 comments, 8 selected for analysis – GMA News is a broadcast network with the widest reach.
6. The Philippines Deserved it (<https://www.facebook.com/PhilippineSTAR/photos/a.134754620011561/2851949614958701/>), 68 comments, 13 selected for analysis – Also from PhilStar.
7. #LOOK: 17-year-old Alex Eala speaks in Filipino during her acceptance speech (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1149253279269139>) 65 comments, 7 selected for analysis – NowYouKnow is an online media organization.

## **YouTube**

1. Nagsalita ng Tagalog si Alex Eala matapos manalo sa 2022 US Open [Alex Eala speaks Tagalog after winning the 2022 US Open] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gd-BvORE78>), 230 comments, 46 selected for analysis – News5's YouTube page.
2. Alex Eala, nakamit ang unang grand slam title sa 2022 US Open Tennis Championship [Alex Eala wins first grand slam title at the 2022 US Open Tennis Championship] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHuYJZcbZa8>), 105 comments, 3 selected for analysis – GMA news' YouTube page.
3. Alex Eala wagi ng Junior Grand Slam Singles title sa 2022 US Open [Alex Eala wins Junior Grand Slam Singles Title at 2022 US Open] (<https://youtu.be/qgsafakvGuQ?si=i6H4Nxa8QKD>)

MC8Kb), 68 comments, 4 selected for analysis – ABS-CBN’s YouTube page.

### **Instagram**

1. Dyan Castillejo’s Instagram Reel: [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiVhSgTDkHV/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&ig\\_rid=b15dd478-2244-4feb-ac76-20295d920263](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiVhSgTDkHV/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=b15dd478-2244-4feb-ac76-20295d920263), 107 comments, 6 selected for analysis – sports broadcaster’s Instagram page

### **TikTok**

1. History was Made Today! (<https://www.tiktok.com/@wimspots/video/7141902757807607067?q=alex%20eala%20tagalog&t=1734591350917>), 26 comments, 5 selected for analysis – When in Manila’s (an online guidebook) TikTok page

### **Twitter**

1. Andrew Masigan: [https://x.com/aj\\_masigan/status/1568841579275911168](https://x.com/aj_masigan/status/1568841579275911168), 8 comments, 1 selected for analysis – Philippine Star columnist
2. Gang Badoy: <https://x.com/gangbadoy/status/1568653778311839744>, 98 comments, 14 selected for analysis – public figure and activist
3. LiveScores Philippines: <https://x.com/LiveScoresPH/status/1568776606986170369>, 4 comments, 1 selected for analysis – sports online news outlet
4. Vogue Philippines: <https://x.com/vogueph/status/1586182749567692801>, 6 comments, 1 selected for analysis – online arm of international magazine
5. Dyan Castillejo: <https://x.com/DYANCASTILLEJO/status/1568838305919401988>, 8 comments, 3 selected for analysis – sports broadcaster’s Twitter page.

In some cases, as few as 3% of the total comments on a post were analyzed; at other times, 20-30% of the total comments were subjected to analysis. While the number of selected comments might appear to be minuscule compared to the large volume of comments, they were also

marked relevant by the social media comments algorithm, showing that they had received large engagement and visibility.

Most of the non-relevant comments on the news articles were simple: commenters sent out their congratulations to Eala, sometimes with 'Pinoy Pride' attached. The researcher selected comments that elaborated on a language-related view and that also received multiple reactions from other readers and commenters (which then pulled them to the top of the engagement list).

After analyzing high engagement and high content comments, the researcher found two major threads of reasoning united under a common theme: every interview that a Filipino athlete participates in is a test of Filipino identity. The performance of Filipino identity begins after the competition ends, and when the Filipino is called upon to speak. At this point, the athlete is a contradiction in terms of nationalism: if they speak English, then they are seen as boastful fakes; if they speak Tagalog (not Filipino), then they are seen as proud but humble.

These themes are explained below, supported by direct quotes from the data, which have been translated from the vernacular by the researcher, herself a native Filipino speaker. In the interest of ethics, the researcher did not lift the original commenters' names from the data. Rather, each quote presented is cited as a comment on a specific social media post by an organization or individual, and each specific social media post is referenced in the bibliography at the end of this document. This approach is consistent with those taken in the researcher's previous work on sports and nationalism online (Ponce de Leon, 2018, 2012). Data that has been translated from the original vernacular is enclosed in brackets [XXX]. Some parts of the data have been removed for brevity, but these do not constitute removal of ideas. A three-point ellipsis denotes removal of a phrase (...) while a four-point ellipsis denotes removal of a sentence (....). The results are followed by a general discussion of the findings.

### **English is an awkward mask worn by an athlete ashamed of their true identity**

To some commenters, speaking English was an awkward act people carried out to disregard or diminish the truth about themselves. Some comments referenced an abstract national figure in talking about the role of spoken language in reflecting an athlete's identity. Comments across Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok targeted Filipinos who spoke English: they were judged as boastful and artificial, creating permanence out of

their temporary step into another country. In particular, the comments framed such Filipinos as people who forcibly put on English as their language, even if they had spoken it for only a few years, did not grow up with it, or had spent only a few days abroad.

**REPLY:** [...there are lots of people who speak English a lot even if they grew up with Tagalog, just because they took one step in a foreign country] (News5, 2022)

[That's good, someone who speaks Tagalog in front of an international audience, unlike other people who just went to a foreign country and stop speaking Tagalog after...] (News5, 2022)

[At a time when people sitting next to you at a fast food restaurant and upscale coffee place in Pasay all speak in English...we salute you, Alex!] Jose Rizal and the Philippines are proud of you! (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[That's a Filipino, not those who just stepped onto US soil and don't know how to speak Tagalog anymore... long live Alex Eala] A certified Pride of the Philippines. (News5, 2022)

Some commenters referenced diasporic communities and their supposed forgetfulness.

It's really a great thing that she did speak in Filipino you know why? Because it's like a message to those Filipinos living abroad who forgotten their own roots and their native land. And also proves that Filipinos are more than...a stereotype. (News5Everywhere, 2022)

Commenters also directly or indirectly mocked beauty queens who “forced themselves to speak English” (News, 2022; News5Everywhere, 2022), as well as Manny Pacquiao, who always tried to speak English in post-fight interviews regardless of the language used by the interviewer.

[Manny Pacquiao gets asked a question in Tagalog, and then tries to speak English but fails. Alex gets asked a

question in English but she answers in Tagalog. This child is really humble, not boastful!] (News5, 2022)

While there is no research on the content of Pacquiao's answers, a cursory examination of his post-fight interviews shows him speaking English haltingly, with visible effort. Eala, on the other hand, was labeled humble, even natural in her delivery of Tagalog. Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram commenters said that she had 'no twang, no forced accent' and was 'unpretentious.'

[Unlike those people who speak English even if they can't be understood, and they're just proud to speak English] (Rappler, 2022)

The commenters drew an interesting dichotomy, almost qualifying as a double standard: A Filipino speaking English in the presence of Filipinos is fake, but a Filipino speaking Filipino in the presence of English speakers is genuine. Facebook commenters extended this expression of sadness (Filipino: 'Nakakalungkot') to the youth, whom they bemoaned could speak English but not Tagalog; they also called out those who insisted on speaking English while talking to pure Filipinos. A commenter on News5, and a reply (2022), were less formal:

[That's the true Filipino, speaking Tagalog even while in another country. **REPLY:** And then here in the Philippines, they speak English...hahahah]

A Facebook Rappler (2022) commenter even went as far as calling out a comment praising Eala, which had been written in English. The reprimand extended toward all Filipinos after.

[You should speak Tagalog too. I hope that Filipinos unite. Maybe it's hard because our attitude is all about envy, pride, fakeness, gossip, lack of respect]

A Facebook NowYouKnow (2022) commenter elaborated on these Filipino faults:

[Aside from her talent in sports, she played it smart. Do you know why? She avoided getting bashed by her fellow Filipinos whose crab mentality would have kicked in if she spoke English badly]

YouTube comments were cynical. A commenter asked why everyone seemed so surprised at her speaking Filipino, with another adding that she was Filipino and therefore expected to speak the language (similar to critiques of Emma Raducanu when she spoke Romanian or Chinese). Another pointed out that if Eala did not speak in Tagalog, then she would not get any support. Some were sarcastic in their approach.

[So if Serena Williams won, would the title of the video be] “Serena Williams spoke English after winning”? (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[What did you want her to speak? German? Dutch? Japanese? Isn't she Filipino?] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[It's like you're saying wow, an American spoke English] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[Imagine if she had spoken in gay lingo, then you'd have seen Filipinos really lose it!] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[It's just Tagalog. I thought it was Chinese] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

While these comments might appear flippant, there is an underlying assumption that a Filipino must, by default, speak their native language. To point it out in the media, therefore, is deemed superfluous because it is not the mask that one puts on, but the identity that one is expected to bear.

Some commenters blamed schools for making students speak English, so that they had a hard time in their Filipino-based subjects. A Facebook ABS-CBN (2022a) commenter even mocked Filipino students who joined protest rallies, calling them “proud rallyists’ who soiled the streets and spoke “slang” even better than Americans did. Another commenter on”the same item spoke highly of Filipino athletes overseas, casting them in a heroic light versus those who lived in the country (and then still sending congratulations).

[There are Filipino athletes in different parts of the world who want to raise the image of the Philippines, while those who are in the Philippines fight to bring the

Philippines down – anyway congratulations.] (ABS-CBN News, 2022a)

In this part of an athlete's act, the English-speaking athlete has made the conscious choice, the commenters imply, to put on a mask to hide their Filipino identity. Whether or not one is speaking sense, one's Filipinoness is assumed to be a greater truth that spoken English is striving to hide; and the more one strives to speak English, the greater the obviousness of the mask being worn. To speak Filipino, on the other hand, appears to be both a performance and a genuine show of self. In this case, performance appears to be defined as someone representing the country, where the language is the signal that one is a genuine Filipino – except the signal is that of an essentialist brand of nationalism that demands the use of a single language absent diverse cultural meanings.

### **Tagalog represents the true identity of a Filipino, who performs so that others might see the true Filipino**

A considerable proportion of the comments focused on the idea of Tagalog – rather than Filipino – as a hallmark of Filipino identity. To speak it, commenters said, was to show Filipino pride as well as to be humble. To some commenters, Tagalog appeared natural, native, a sign of truth to one's self while serving the dual purpose of showing off the Filipino language to the world. These statements appeared to be contradictory – pride and humility, humble and showing off – and yet it is their dichotomy that creates a seemingly solid identity.

To speak the language, some commenters said, was a sign that Eala was not ashamed of her origins and was therefore a true Filipino. This was repeated in across Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok comments, where commenters talked about Eala being 'true to herself', a 'real' Filipino, and how she was natural and therefore beautiful. To the commenters, the assumed humility in speaking Filipino and showing her roots would ensure that Eala would 'go far' in her sporting career.

[You're such a very humble person! You're not ashamed to speak Tagalog to the crowd and you showed them that you're Filipino] (ABS-CBN News, 2022a)

[That's a true Filipino, not ashamed to speak Tagalog and even asked for permission out of respect.] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[Long live for raising the Philippine flag, loving our country, and offering your win to announce all over the world where your roots are.] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[That's the true Filipino, unashamed of their language, using it in the middle of a worldwide community. Long live, Alex, you're a legend and a true Filipino in thought, word, and deed] (Capati, 2022)

To other commenters, speaking Tagalog was also a sign that Eala had not forgotten her origins. A News5Everywhere (2022) commenter even said that Eala was rooted in the country. An Instagram comment focused on identity.

**Instagram:** [It makes me really proud when a countryman speaks in Filipino and doesn't forget our national identity.] (Castillejo, 2022a)

There were some detractors. To a Facebook PhilStar (2022) comment about how Eala had not been ashamed of her language and of being Filipino, a commenter replied:

[At the US Open, the winner is given the chance to use her own language to speak to her supporters. It's not because Eala isn't ashamed of her own language].

A Twitter commenter was more cynical:

[There seem to be more unrelated responses to her profession and what she does] instead of being proud of what she is bringing to the world. And that's Pinoy Pride. (VoguePH, 2022)

A YouTube comment thread on News5Everywhere's (2022) video also saw one commenter remarking how Leylah Fernandez, another pro-tennis player, would not even speak Filipino or acknowledge being a Filipina despite having a Filipino mother. Another commenter replied that Fernandez, unlike Eala, did not grow up in the Philippines, speaks other languages fluently and "has a Canadian mentality" (News5Everywhere, 2022) so she could not be expected to behave like a Filipino born and raised in the country.

For the greater part, however, the dichotomy that interspersed place and language once again emerged: A Filipino who spoke English

was fake, a source of disgust. A Filipino who spoke Tagalog in a foreign country was considered a true Filipino, both brave and patriotic, sincere and telling the truth, a source of pride for the country.

[That's a true Filipina, no matter where she is, she doesn't forget our language] (Rappler, 2022)

[I am proud of you because you're a champion, but I'm prouder because you spoke our language in front of foreigners. Long live!] (Rappler, 2022)

[That's a true Filipino: in front of an English speaking country, they really show off that they're Filipino] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

[I like that she spoke in Tagalog, you can see the sincerity in showing that her victory is dedicated to the Filipinos] (Castillejo, 2022b)

This expression of pride, in particular, was repeated in comments across the news outlets. Commenters would say that they were proud that Alex had won, but even prouder and more admiring of her when she had addressed her supporters in her native language. She was not only good at tennis, commenters said, but was truly nationalistic.

Eala's choice of language was given even deeper meaning, to the point that commenters were not only speculating, but assigning motivation to her actions. One speculated motivation was that she was showing off the beauty of the Filipino language.

[Good job, fellow Filipino! Thank you because you showed off our country and language] (News5, 2022)

[I'm proud of you ma'am, you are a true Filipino. Thank you because you showed off our own language] (GMANews, 2022)

[Wow she used the Filipino language, it makes me proud. Now the whole world knows how beautiful our language is] (Rappler, 2022)

One commenter even used Eala as an example of how other athletes should behave when representing the country. Other commenters recommended normalizing speaking Filipino internationally, that government officials speak Tagalog for their everyday tasks, and that beauty queens – also the country’s representatives – should speak Tagalog:

[I wish the winners of international beauty contests would also do this] What’s the use of interpreters, several contestants are doing it...(Now You Know, 2022)

A News5Everywhere (2022) commenter was more sweeping in their recommendations, though it is rather remarkable that Tagalog rather than Filipino was deemed the national language.

I wish that everyone who represents the country will also speak our principal language Tagalog so that they can really feel what it’s like to be a true Filipino.

This use of Tagalog rather than Filipino was rampant in and unique to YouTube comments. Variants included: “Speaking Tagalog so they’re proud of Pinoy language” (ABS-CBN News, 2022b), “the true Filipino speaks Tagalog” (GMA Integrated News, 2022), “Not ashamed to speak Tagalog” (GMA Integrated News, 2022), “You spoke Tagalog with your whole heart and showed the world that you’re a Filipino to be proud of” (News5Everywhere, 2022), “thank you for showing your love for the country and Tagalog” (News5Everywhere, 2022).

[This is the real Filipino pride because Alex herself acknowledged her roots, offered her triumph to the Philippines, and spoke it in the Tagalog language.] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

Other commenters, especially in YouTube (mostly on News5Everywhere, 2022) and Twitter (mostly on Capati, 2022 and Castillejo, 2022b), corrected other posters by commenting variations of “It’s Filipino, not Tagalog.” This correction was pronounced on these social media sites, but not on the others sampled; the corrections were all ignored.

Nevertheless, and across all social media outlets, speaking one’s native language would almost inevitably mean that the world would see the beauty of the language.

[...every time an athlete wins something in another country, they should use our language so that other people know how beautiful our language is] (Rappler, 2022)

[Our language is so beautiful. We should show it off]  
Thank you Alex Eala (News5Everywhere, 2022)

Nearly all these motivations, though speculative, appeared cosmetic: they represented people's conceptions of the use of language as a way to show it off, as-is, rather than for its symbolic or cultural value, once again pointing to an essentialist brand of nationalism that is performed through language as a means to show off the language for its own sake rather than as purveyor of culture. Some commenters even referenced personal experiences with their families to talk about language as a means, even a badge, of nationalism, rather than a bridge into a culture.

[It's like my cousin, who has white skin that she takes from her father, but if she's talking to a Filipino she'll also speak Tagalog] (Rappler, 2022)

[It's true, especially those who have foreign fathers and yet speak English – hey, make your presence felt to other Filipinos, right?] (Rappler, 2022)

The only exception was a Facebook commenter from News5 (2022), who claimed that Alex's speech brought the Philippine culture to a worldwide stage.

Another interesting trend was that of imputing on Eala an assumed choice: she supposedly chose to speak in Filipino out of love, even if she was an educated English speaker.

**REPLY:** [long live Alex. She knows English but she likes Tagalog more. That's Filipino blood for you.] (Rappler, 2022)

[Even if she's a very good English speaker, she chose to offer her triumph to her beloved Philippines using our own language] (Rappler, 2022)

[Congratulations, even if you speak English well, you like to speak Tagalog more, I really am in awe of you] (ABS-CBN News, 2022a)

[THAT'S A TRUE FILIPINO, EVEN IF THEY KNOW HOW TO SPEAK ENGLISH THEY WILL SPEAK A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE COUNTRY THAT THEY WIN IN] (Rappler, 2022)

Some even assumed that using Filipino was strategic:

[You know she's very smart. She knows how to speak a foreign language but she really chose Filipino for her countrymen] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

The use of Filipino as a language was bandied about, it seemed, as a way to simply show off that the country has its own language, and that its winners can do as they will in the presence of foreigners. There were some exceptions, however: a Facebook News5 (2022) commenter spoke of the concept of language as a way to understand ideas, and celebrated the fact that even if 'foreign people' could not understand the language, at least Eala's fellow Filipinos could. A News5Everywhere (2022) commenter jokingly speculated that the interviewers should have asked Eala to translate her speech herself. Not all comments were as festive:

Of course I'm very proud of you. But you were in a larger crowd with a very diverse audience. No one understood you and appreciated what you said, and did, except Filipinos. (Rappler, 2022) I'm all for speaking Tagalog. No problem about that. But other people don't understand. It should have been translated to English after each Tagalog sentences. After all it is US Open, not PH Open. Just saying. (News5Everywhere, 2022)

In these contradicting passages, there is nevertheless a prevailing tone of familiarity with Eala or the directors of the coverage, perhaps facilitated by social media, which might have given the illusion of proximity. Regardless of whether the commenters appreciated her actions or not, and regardless of the motivation they assigned to her use of the language, they all appeared to be addressing people, including Eala, personally, as though they knew her completely, read her accurately, and predicted the results of her activities.

The commenters even recommended her as an example for other athletes and the youth, in general, to follow, saying how it was good news that there was a model now for young people, whether or not they were engaged in sports.

[Long live, and may you be an example to our young Filipino sportsmen, not just in tennis but in other fields!] (Rappler, 2022)

A real role model for Filipino youths to emulate not only for her athletic prowess but also for being proud as a Filipino. (News5, 2022)

[I hope you'll be an example for Filipinos known worldwide, to speak Tagalog so that everyone will know that Filipinos won't back down] (News5Everywhere, 2022)

A commenter even referenced the country's national hero, Jose Rizal, who once spoke of the youth of the Philippines in a text that is studied in high schools across the country.

[Aside from using Tagalog, Alex Eala showed a very beautiful example of our Filipino youth that our national hero, Jose Rizal, spoke about when he was alive: the youth is the hope of the nation. Long live, Alex Eala, you reflect the youth of the Philippines] (News5, 2022)

The commenters framed Eala as someone carrying both humility and pride, and who would go far because she did not forget her roots. She had been fitted, as it were, into a template of contrasts, where she met a spectrum of demands of nationalism from an audience that allowed itself to both guess her motivations and assign meaning to them.

Humble, meek, patriotically proud of being a Pilipino, unprecedented in any major sporting event won by a Pilipino, by unabashedly addressing the huge multinational crowd in our Pilipino language at length? (Rappler, 2022)

They also speculated on her origins by congratulating her parents for their good work, pointing to a conception of nationalism as originating in the home and family.

SALUTE THE PARENTS FOR KEEPING THE  
FILIPINO LANGUAGE ALIVE IN THEIR HOME.  
AND FOR ALEX FOR PURPOSELY KEEPING IT AS  
WELL (Rappler, 2022)

[I love that she's speaking Tagalog] Kudos to the parents  
(Capati, 2022)

This role of parenting was interesting, as it was also referenced in another comment regarding upbringing.

[That's a true Filipino! Not ashamed to speak their  
own language. Not like those who are proud to not  
speak Filipino, so that they even ban their kids from  
speaking Tagalog because it doesn't look classy]  
(News5Everywhere, 2022)

Speaking one's native language, therefore, was a sign of rootedness, a signification of a static position, whether it was physical/geographic or born/originating. The act of speaking English, on the other hand, was temporary vanity, which had arisen through momentary immersion in another country, and was signification of Filipinos trying to be something or someone they were not.

It appears that in constructing patriotism online, the commenters showed that pride comes following the realization that the world can see the Filipino because the Filipino has made himself heard. Being Filipino is not so much winning a prize due to skill, but performing one's Filipinoness through language to show the language off without having to speak of the diverse cultures that make up the Filipino.

## Discussion

Previous research on the role of language in sports has often dealt with team sports, where squads comprise members from a variety of locations, cultures, and languages (Chaeroni et al., 2024; Costello, 2009; Galang et al., 2015; Lavric & Steiner, 2012; Motawi, 2021; Rehal, 2013; Sandrelli, 2020; Sandrelli, 2015; Surya, 2019; Wilton, 2015). There is hardly any research on individual sports, where players represent

countries of origin. In this inductive analysis of comments on online news items from Philippine news outlets and media personalities, the researcher found that a sports interview appears to be a test of Filipino identity, a performance that signals whether one subscribes to temporality and foreignness, or permanence in a contrasting template – a performance where one is apparently representative of the country and speaking about one’s individuality, rather than using one’s skills or language as a glimpse into the diverse and changing culture into which one was born. These narratives countered the generic national pride broadcast by the mainstream media coverage to which the commenters reacted, reflecting alternative views, or bottom-up frames. Though there were only a few such comments in contrast to the many that were written, they were nevertheless pulled to the top of the lists because of their length and the engagement of other social media users with the comments.

These findings provide new insight into constructs of nationalism and language in post-match interviews, in that they show the audience’s perception of what an athlete is against the backdrop of both sports and nation. These findings also show that social media can become a breeding ground for nationalist sentiments by providing venues for discussions that enable not only bottom-up framing of an issue, but gatekeeping of a supposedly authentic identity. The broadcast of a tennis match and its post-match interview became a way for people to assert, construct, and reproduce their identity as they revealed once private sentiments about language and nationalism (Bairner, 2008; MacAloon, 1984). In articulating their views about the use of the Filipino language in a once English-dominated arena, some Filipino social media users saw the spectacle as a nation showing its unity and ability to speak for itself (Costello, 2009; Morgan, 1999) and the athlete not so much sacrificing for the nation, but speaking with a voice that could be understood.

The spoken language was constructed as the representative of a nation, reflecting Kilborn’s (1993) assertion that hearing one’s language also provides a glimpse into the language’s heart. The use of Tagalog in an international event, it appears, no longer invokes the label of ‘Imperial Manila’ (Tupas, 2015; Tupas & Llorente, 2014), but seems to encourage the notion that English is used as a status symbol of social climbers rather than an indication of education (Billings, 2009). Where English was once the language that reinforced inequalities (Billings, 2009), it now becomes the language that surfaces resentments. Where

English was once framed as the key to democracy, its use is now prompting a dissenting voice that speaks of identity through cosmetic means. To speak English is not to reveal one's educational pedigree, but to show one's artificiality and commitment to an ill-fitting mask. To speak Tagalog is to cling to national identity (Clampitt, 2015; Gonzalez, 1998; Tupas, 2003) but with nuance: it is a static, essentialist national identity, and performing it is a way to show the country and its language off, with no reference to the richness of the cultures therein. It appears that the prestige and power once accorded English are not held in as high regard, and Tagalog (not Filipino) has become a badge of honor; Tagalog has therefore attained another kind of symbolic power, aside from its label as the language of nationalism (Martin, 2008).

Interestingly, there is very little dissent for Tagalog itself, though there were a few corrections made, mainly on YouTube and Twitter, for those who called Filipino Tagalog. This is mere semantics compared to the debates in congress by Bisaya vs. Tagalog speakers who jostled for recognition as the national language (Gonzalez, 1998; Roberts & Kitao, 1987; Tupas, 2015). The Philippines is multilingual, but in this case, it appears that the use of a single language provided the illusion of two languages as indicators of a battle for identity. Instead of framing Tagalog as a majority language trying to destroy minority languages (Blackledge, 2002; Pavlenko, 2002; Smolicz, 1984), the online users are turning against English, which was once weaponized as the language of unity and education. The resentment of English as a symbol of national division can perhaps be traced to the long-brewing bitterness across language groups that had to work under strict English-only policies in school (Osborne, 2021) or across professionals who were pushed to believe that speaking English was good for the economy while any other language was deemed inimical to national development (Tupas, 2003). The commenters are living the scenario written about by Blackledge (2002), where speaking a single language is equated with a civilized society; in this case, however, it is not so much a civilized society as it is a society that feels as though it cannot make itself heard unless it speaks with its own voice.

There is, however, a seeming dark side to this insistence on using Filipino, as evidenced by the language used by some of the commenters. There is a streak of blind patriotism, similar to previous findings of comments on Hidilyn Diaz, where protesting was constructed as unpatriotic (Ponce de Leon, 2022). In this research, some commenters

held up the use of Filipino as a truer sign of nationalism than people protesting on the streets, calling to mind intolerance to criticism and clinging to national symbols (Kanasan, 2014; Marinthe et al., 2023). There, too, is an essentialist construct of the Filipino (Aguila, 2015), as the standards once imputed upon half-Filipinos are now in place for a Filipina born and raised in the country: she, too, has become subjected to a checklist of traits to judge her for her Filipinoness, foremost of which is her ability to speak the language effortlessly on a global stage. Even more disturbing is the fact that none of the commenters brought up the diverse languages and cultures of the Philippines that could possibly be erased by the dominance of this static view of the Filipino identity (Herrera-Shaw, 2022).

The concept of national identity is closely tied to nationalism, and can contain features such as a sense of common past and future, the traits that make a nation unique, the persistence and consistency of identity, and what it means to represent the nation (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). Nationalism can be nursed in the everyday, through language and symbolic objects, as a means to support the greater spectacle and call to defend one's country later (Billig, 2010; 2017). In this research, it appears that nationalism, as performed through language, takes into account a single language rather than the diversity of languages; and that single language is hardly ever referenced as a means to understand a culture or to convey meaning. Rather, that language is used as a performance, where the least amount of visible effort is constructed as fluency, and where fluency is equated with nationalism. To do something outside of this mold of Filipino-ness is frowned upon and derided. In this research, the banal use of language, once the scaffolding on which greater demonstration of nationalism could be built (Billig, 2010, 2017), has become the spectacle itself, whose speaking is to be celebrated because of its now global display that showcases the beauty of the language. In the spirit of the spectacle of worldwide sports (MacAloon, 1984), that which was small and hidden has become great and public. And at the level of national identity, that which is performed has been taken for granted as evidence of depth and integration of culture (Yacat, 2005).

In previous literature, Filipinos defended the national language out of what appeared to be duty but seemed to show no sign of identifying with the language and culture (Clampitt, 2015; Tupas, 2003). To this, the researcher adds: the defense and heralding of Filipino as a language of the world shows that nationalism is worn as a badge rather than an

identity deeply embedded in thinking, doing, and understanding; that nationalism is deemed valid in its performance but not embodied in civic duties; and that language is either the mask to be worn, or the artifice to be removed to perform this nationalism. This performance of Filipinoness was reflected in comments on Filipinos living or raised abroad, who were expected to merely show their presence through using the language – once again an expectation of performing nationalism by speaking a prescribed language and removing masks, seemingly a show of so-called sincerity on a worldwide stage.

Interestingly, the once rampant “Pinoy Pride” saw contention online as some commenters scoffed at its use (many of which appeared on News5Everywhere, 2022). The findings in this research add nuance to previous research on national identity and sport in the Philippines: where people once associated the place of one’s birth with their nationality and therefore their nationalism (Rehal, 2013; Ponce de Leon, 2018), the use of language is now seen as a mark of nationalism as well. Even the references to Manny Pacquiao are interesting: his once-hailed image of the common man with stilted English uniting a nation through suffering in his sport (Costello, 2009; Martin, 2008) is now pitted against the image of a young girl speaking Filipino while surrounded by English speakers. This research also adds to the sparse research on post-match interviews by providing a case study at the intersections of national language and identity, and how social media provides a space for negotiating the role of one in shaping the other, as well as for creating bottom-up frames and gatekeeping of national identity. This, even for an individual sport that previous research claims focuses on appearance rather than nationalism (Dorling, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

Alex Eala won the 2022 US Open Women’s Juniors title, making her the first Filipino grand slam winner. She delivered part of her post-match speech in Filipino, which prompted discussions and reactions online from Filipino fans. The online world has long been studied for its ability to generate spaces of discussion of complex issues such as national identity, and often in views nuanced or alternative to those framed by broadcast media. In this case, Eala’s speech brought about discussions on national identity and language, both of which are of interest in multilingual, post-colonial Philippines. Guided by bottom-up framing in a constructivist paradigm, the researcher inductively analyzed social

media comments on news coverage of Eala's speech. Analysis showed that the post-match interview became a test of Filipino nationalism: if the speaker spoke English, they were putting on an awkward mask; if they spoke Filipino, they were showing off the language and therefore true to their identity.

In congratulating Eala and commenting on her win, Filipino social media users showed that language is the face of the country: it is not necessarily a bridge conveying a culture and its experiences, but a performance that signals one's loyalty to a nation. A language shows off its own beauty, rather than the nation from which it originates. To use a language other than one's expected own is to use an awkward mask, which is ridiculed. These articulations of a seeming performance came as a surprise to the researcher, who expected to read comments lauding the use of Filipino, but who did not expect comments openly bashing English speakers to the point that using Tagalog (and not Filipino) became a performance of Filipinoness and a signal of loyalty to one's roots. This expected performance of national identity through spoken language merits further study in other situations where national identity and language intersect.

This research has implications for issues in nationalism, especially in a fragmented Philippines that has recently witnessed an election that returned the infamous Marcoses to power. The country has been called ground zero for misinformation: fake news spreads fast, discrediting good candidates while creating heroes out of those who have neither integrity nor credentials. Those who speak up against the government are called useless dissenters, but they also tend to be the educated class, which expresses itself in English. Language is now seen as revelatory of one's social position, and those who speak English are often seen as out of touch with current realities and unpatriotic. Whether one speaks English for good or ill, the mere speaking of it is sometimes enough for people not to listen or engage in discussions. Such regard for language, for its cosmetic use, can be frightening in an age of populism. While the themes extracted reflect only a fraction of the total comments on the posts, they nevertheless reveal a counter-narrative: one that garners enough attention to be deemed relevant by social media algorithms, and one that can have implications on how social media can facilitate discussions that center around an essentialist brand of nationalism that is defined as adherence to a single language rather than recognition

of the richness and diversity of one's culture, and civic duties to one's country.

The findings of this research, therefore, have implications for the dichotomy of nationalism vs. citizenship, or the divide between blind and constructive patriotism, where those who speak up against wrongdoing are automatically assumed to be unpatriotic. This research shows that the act of nationalism is performed, with hardly any reference to culture, and even with mockery of those who speak their minds. It appears that blind patriotism carries language as part of its symbolic baggage, so that any misuse of it will result in condemnation, and every public performance that uses it will be deemed nationalistic. This research contributes to an understanding of social constructs of Filipinoness as well, as it appears that mere performance of a language is enough to draw conclusions on one's depth of love for one's country – the negotiated world between Yacat's (2005) Filipino by name and Filipino by heart.

The findings also have implications for understanding how the public perceives influencers and authority figures, and how it regards the issue of representation on the international stage. These findings provide a perspective into how people believe public figures should act, as well as the role of language in the performance of that representation. As in previous research on the performance of activism and nationalism, the online world provides a wide swath of opinions that do not necessarily reflect dominant media texts – and the polarized opinions reveal the many debates and negotiations still ongoing as Filipinos discern their national identity.

These findings also add to the growing body of research into sports and nationalism in the Philippines. Previous research has examined anthropological and sociological understandings of basketball (Gems, 2004, 2016), national identity in football (Baquiran, 2014; Ponce de Leon, 2018; Rehal, 2013), nationalism in weightlifting (Ponce de Leon, 2022), and a national hero in boxing (Costello, 2009; Galang et al., 2015). This research shows that much has yet to be understood about how Filipinos negotiate their identity in a globalized world where the exchange of ideas has become swifter with the rise of social media. In the case of this research, social media did not only facilitate bottom-up framing but generated a grassroots form of gatekeeping of an “authentic” Filipino identity. Social media, therefore, has become a place to not only perform Filipinoness, but to prescribe behavior and exclude detractors

– an interesting contrast when one considers that sports events are often expected to bring the country together in shared experience.

While the findings of this research do add nuance to research on the intersections of language and nationalism, these findings are confined to shared social media discussions. There might be other opinions from Filipinos who do not watch the news on social media, or do not write their opinions online. The researcher also assumed that the comments were written with honesty and candor, and that truly represent the views of social media users across a variety of backgrounds. These writers might not have the same articulation online that they would when asked to talk about their opinions. Future research can consider using research tools such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups to investigate articulations of language and identity.

A majority of the comments came from Facebook; there are, however, intriguing differences in YouTube, where there is an air of cynicism for events lauding the achievements of Filipinos; as well as in other rising social media sites, which had still not gained their popularity at the time of Eala's win. Future research on nationalism and sports can analyze these other social media sites separately for people's articulations of nationalism as reflected in sports.

The researcher also carried out the analysis on her own, which presents a limitation to the research (Doehler, 2021). Future research can examine more comments across different platforms, for a variety of language and sports-related issues, with a team of researchers cross-checking each other's work.

The researcher also recognizes the limits set by the theoretical framework of Bottom-Up Framing, and, therefore, the methods employed to examine the theory in reality: only relevant comments were selected, based on the algorithms of the social media platform in which they had been posted. Relevance, here, is measured by how many users interacted with the comment, whether through reactions or more comments and discussion. While this is consistent with the theory's use, it might also have left out comments that could have presented another construct of nationalism, even if the comment had been ignored or not received any reactions or discussions. Future research can look at all comments, regardless of the relevance, and perhaps carry out discourse analysis on the ideas therein.

The researcher also recognizes the risk of generalizing across platforms in consolidating the data. The researcher took care to note

where the comments were posted throughout each step of the analysis; this later allowed for nuanced discussion of the data, as the researcher found interesting differences in YouTube and Twitter comments. These differences should prompt research into platform-specific comments, now that more comments have already been posted thanks to Eala's rising through the ranks of professional women's tennis.

Sports might appear to be a public performance for an audience seeking meaning, but it is also a place for audiences to advocate for national issues. In this study, sports, too, allows certain brands of nationalism to be nursed, and the availability of sports media on social media gives these brands of nationalism a space to be aired, regardless of their flavor. In a multicultural, multilingual country like the Philippines, sports provides an escape and a means of facilitating social cohesion, but reactions to it are also a glimpse into the deeply held sentiments and resentments that beset this post-colonial nation.

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