Migrant footballers in national teams

A critical reflection and alternative approach(es) to foreign-born football players at the FIFA World Cup, c. 1930-2014

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French squad without migrants

- Steve Mandanda
- Samir Nasri
- Rod Fanni
- Moussa Sissoko
- Paul Pogba
- Karim Benzema
- Matthieu Valbuena
- Raphael Varane
- Blaise Matuidi
- Loic Remy
- Mamadou Sakho
- Patrice Evra
- Not Pictured: Eliaquin Mangala, Rio Mavuba, Bacary Sanga

Source: Simran Khosla / Global Post (2014)
International football as a prism

• Recent phenomenon?

• Lack of (historical) overview on migrant footballers and nationality changes in international football

• Database on FIFA World Cups, 1930-2014
  – Biographical data and genealogy
  – 9,400 cases/football players
  – Who counts as a migrant football player?
Acquiring Citizenship

Jus Soli

Jus Sanguinis

Jus Nexi

Source: van Campenhout (2017)

Source: FIFA (2017)
Foreign-born proxy (Jus soli)

- Foreign-born
  “An international migrant is a person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth.” (UN, 2015)

- Overlooks historical and geo-political contexts
  ➢ Territorial changes of borders
  ➢ Colonial relationships between states

- Three approaches
  1) Current state borders (2014)
  2) Territorial borders at time of FIFA World Cup edition
  3) Colonial ties
Approach 1: 2014 Borders

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014, APPROACH 1 [#CASES: 913, N=9.400]

Source: van Campenhout (2017)
The France that Never Was

There are 25 French-born players representing other countries at this year’s World Cup. That would be enough to field a full second squad for France—and have some emergency spare players to boot. Here’s where those players have gone.

Sofiane Feghouli
In Algeria’s first match of the tournament, Feghouli scored the country’s first World Cup goal in 28 years on a penalty kick.

Andrew Ayew
American fans saw striker Ayew equalize against the US during its group stage match against Ghana. He plays for French club Marseille.

Benoit Assou-Ekotto
The outspoken and controversial left-back has said he’s surprised his black teammates at Tottenham feel accepted by English society.

Jean-Daniel Akpa-Akpro
A versatile defender, Akpa-Akpro has played every back-four position for Toulouse, his club team. He’s been linked with English giants Arsenal this summer.

Gonzalo Higuain
Though born in France, the ex-Real Madrid star grew up solely in Argentina. He’s scored 20 times for the World Cup challengers.

Source: Conrad (2014)
Approach 2: Territorial Changes

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014, APPROACH 2 [#CASES: 623, N=9,400]

Source: van Campenhout (2017)
Disintegrated States

Yugoslavia: World Youth Champions 1987

Source: Diallo (2013)

Approach 3: Colonial Ties

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014,
APPROACH 3 [#CASES: 578, N=9,400]

Source: van Campenhout (2017)
Colonial Nationals

1934: Dutch international Beb Bakhuys

Portuguese national football team in 1966

Outcomes

APPROACHES FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

Source: van Campenhout (2017)
Thank you for your attention.

Questions?

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Source: Football Whispers (2016)