

Why are East African Players Absent in European Football? Localizing African Football Migration Along Structural Constraints, Colonial Legacies and Voluntary Immobility

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Abstract

While studies on transnational African football migration have increasingly attracted scholarly attention, little is known about the continent's regional particularities. However, in contrast to the massive influx of footballers from West and North Africa, squads of European professional clubs seldom include players from East Africa. Yet, the concentration on West Africa in academic studies runs the risk of overgeneralizing certain practices on the African continent and, hence, of reproducing Africa's standing as the homogeneous peripheral other. By analyzing the various historical, structural, and socio-cultural reasons for the general absence of migrant footballers from East Africa, we aim at contributing to a more nuanced picture of African football migration and further discuss the ambivalent consequences of players' spatial immobility for East Africa's football development.

Keywords

football migration, East Africa, colonial networks, football in Africa, spatial immobility

Spending the time during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in an African country, I, Mads Backer Schmidt, experienced a massive excitement for football. In many cities, all of the games were shown in local pubs and one could find a screen at almost every street corner. The sub-Saharan teams from Nigeria and Senegal enjoyed the most passionate

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support from local fans, but no game was too insignificant to watch. While crowds gathered in front of TVs, the constantly busy streets were less active during the matches. The World Cup seemingly dominated public life, and I was captivated by an omnipresent football enthusiasm. The love for the game, however, was not bound to watching the global mega event. Over my 6-month stay, I joined a group of young men who met every evening to play. Their passion and talent were impressive. The technical skills and physical abilities of some were outstanding to a degree that I wondered why they just played on this informal level and not professionally. After the matches, we often talked about European football and discussed player performances and latest results. Everyone had his favorite team to cheer with and players they looked up to.

If these experiences had taken place in Senegal, Nigeria, or any other West African country, this would not come as a surprise. However, they took place in Tanzania, a nation of 58 million, which has never accomplished international success in football and whose national team, the Taifa Stars, is lagging far behind other African nations. With the exception of the country's outstanding striker Mbwana Ally Samatta, no Tanzanian player ever made it to such a level of international football which could serve as an explanation for Tanzanians' enthusiasm. The pattern appears similar in the countries surrounding Tanzania: Despite widespread football enthusiasm, Kenya and Uganda have also been low performers in international competition, and very few players originating from these countries have made it to the top of international football (Njororai, 2014). Compared to other regions on the African continent, the performance of the East African countries has been less than impressive on the international stage. It seems that football enthusiasm and talent do not automatically transfer to expatriate players in the top European leagues or a strong and internationally competitive national team. But why is East African football much less developed in these terms compared to other regions on the continent, particularly in the North and West?

By analyzing various relevant historical, structural, and socio-cultural factors, we particularly focus the relative absence of intercontinental football migration from East Africa and the lack of East African players in the European top leagues. Hereby, we elaborate exclusively on men's football and migration. Drawing on the underlying conditions and factors in the KUT countries (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) more generally, our specific focus is on Tanzania as an exemplary case. Beside the initially presented observations and encounters of Mads Backer Schmidt, our analysis is based on information from two expert interviews. Schmidt conducted an interview with Kim Poulsen, a Danish football manager and coach who looks back at several years of experience in various positions in Tanzanian football. From 2011 to 2012, he coached the U21 national side before taking over as the head coach of the senior national team from 2012 to 2014. Between 2016 and 2018, he served as the Head of National Football Development of the Tanzania Football Federation (TFF). Beside his positions in the TFF, Poulsen has been working as a development expert for FIFA for several years until today. He was chosen as an expert informant for our study due to his long-term experience with East African football in general and Tanzania in particular. Meeting him through the Danish community in Dar es Salaam, he agreed to share and disclose his insight view. The interview with him took place in his residence in

Sønderborg, Denmark, on October 22, 2018, and lasted approximately 2 hours. Christian Ungruhe conducted an interview with a Kenyan travel agent and intermediary for international player transfers on September 20, 2011, in Nairobi. In order to secure his anonymity, we use the pseudonym Robert. He particularly works with African footballers and clubs in South-East Asia and facilitates the players' visa applications at the respective embassies in Nairobi. At the time of the interview, he had taken care of more than 100 visa applications for African footballers. Robert agreed to share his knowledge about Kenya as a migration hub for footballers to South-East Asia in an interview that lasted approximately 30 minutes. His expertise is used as a minor supplement to the contribution of Kim Poulsen. Information from the existing literature, particularly regarding football and migration in the East African context, add to the choice of methods and means of data collection.

With our study, we aim at contributing to empirically and conceptually localize a phenomenon broadly labeled as "African football migration." We do so by highlighting regional differences that reflect the continent's diversity. Knowledge about football migration from Africa, from young players' imagination of international mobility to the experiences of migration and post-career trajectories, merely stems from studies in and on the western part of the continent (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Darby, 2010, 2012; Dubinsky & Schler, 2019; Esson, 2013, 2015; Ungruhe, 2014). This regional focus has identified widespread aspired and realized out-migration of footballers to become successful players in Europe. However, while this is valid for the West African context, it is not representative for the whole continent. In a comparative study on Ghana and South Africa, Darby and Solberg (2010) have already pointed to some fundamental regional differences on the continent. While professional clubs in Ghana do not attract foreign players to a great extent and local players rather seek career trajectories abroad, the opposite is visible in South Africa where relatively reliable governance and finance of professional football contribute to keep and draw talented players, particularly those from countries in the southern African region. By further localizing "African football migration," we will elaborate on its possible nuances and particularities and also highlight commonalities in approaches to sport migration and sport more generally in and among various African settings.

Hereby, we will generally contribute to overcome Africa's overall peripheral status in sport sociology and qualify existing power imbalances and problematic hegemonies regarding the discipline's epistemology. While a growing body of sociological and anthropological literature on sport-related issues on the continent remains in a niche existence, knowledge on sport and body culture in Africa is only slowly moving away from the colonial images and ideologies that have shaped the dominant notion of Africa's general inferior otherness in the rest of the world (Amara & Nauright, 2018). Furthermore, Africa's prevalent neglect tends to reinforce notions of "the West and the Rest" (Hall, 1992), in which the (often uncritical or implicit) accentuation of the West as the economic, cultural, and political center and norm fosters limited interest in the regional differences within the so-called periphery of the Global South (Kummels, 2013). Hereby, a continental structure such as Africa is (often unintendedly) reproduced as a uniform entity, disregarding both the transnational turn in sport migration studies

which calls for centralizing the multifarious and fluid relations between specific locations (Agergaard & Tiessler, 2014) as well as the general advice to avoid conceptualizations of Africa as a homogeneous whole (Ferguson, 2006).

By focusing on the East African region, which is probably among the most understudied regions in sport sociology and sport migration to date, we aim at contributing to elaborate on Africa's diversity and to challenge its problematic status as homogeneous peripheral other in the disciplines. While empirically concentrating on Tanzania, and Kenya to some extent, we make references to the broader context of the East African region, namely the KUT countries as low migration rates and the analyzed factors (structural constraints in football administration, history and colonial legacy, and migration culture) may allow for careful generalizations beyond the Tanzanian level.

Faint, Failure, and Structural Constraints in East African Football

Recently, the KUT countries accomplished a milestone for the region. For the first time in history, the national teams of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania all qualified for the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), namely the latest edition held in Egypt in mid-2019. Despite this recent achievement, so far, the East African countries have performed relatively poorly on the international and continental levels. None of the KUT countries has ever qualified for the World Cup, the Olympics, or ever won the AFCON. Since its inception in 1957, the AFCON has been held 32 times, with Kenya qualifying six times, Uganda seven times, and Tanzania qualifying only twice (in 1980 and 2019). Collectively, the KUT nations have missed out 19 tournaments. On the latest FIFA World Ranking Table from April 9, 2020, Uganda is positioned as number 77, Kenya at 107, while Tanzania is ranked 134th. Of the 12 highest-ranked African teams, 10 are from the north and west of the continent, the remaining nations being Cameroon and DR Congo. The East African football nations are governed under the Council of East and Central Africa Football Association (CECAFA), which also includes—beside Zanzibar as an independent, non-FIFA-affiliated member—Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, and South Sudan, among none with significant international success and all ranked low at positions between 128 and 205 (FIFA, 2020).

The participation of all of the KUT countries at the AFCON 2019 cannot overshadow the severe and persisting structural problems of football in East Africa. To begin with, the national teams of KUT benefited from an increase of participating nations from 16 to 24 which made the qualification round less competitive. Beyond that, and over the years, the enduring mediocre performance of the KUT countries in international football has led to intense and plentiful criticism of how the sport is managed in the three countries. Studies point to multiple problems in the administration of football and have identified weak financial management, poor leadership and governance, political intrigue and corruption as the main factors (Njororai, 2019; Nyanjom, 2010; Rintaugu et al., 2012). Nyanjom (2010) shows how ineffective and problematic leadership constraints the development of football at various levels and for a long

time. Referring to the case of the Kenyan Football Federation (KFF) in the early 1990s in particular, he argues that a flawed KFF has allowed the wrong people to sit in positions of authority, which has resulted in insufficient funding of personnel and infrastructure, frustrating any attempt of development. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and adequate leadership has kept sponsors away from Kenyan football, which has added to exacerbate the underfunding problem. This vicious cycle of mismanagement and underdevelopment constraints the development of football in Kenya and other East African countries until today; an observation that leads Kim Poulsen to conclude that “corrupt and incompetent leadership has undermined East Africa at every turn.” Although FIFA had sanctioned the three KUT associations at various occasions (following cases of severe mismanagement and inadequate government interference), the problem remains (Rintaugu et al., 2012).

One important consequence of structural constraints in the national football administrations is the widespread inability to nurture a functioning youth football system that produces future top players. Indeed, there is a growing number of professional football academies in the region, and, particularly in Kenya, some of those academies have already achieved remarkable results at international tournaments. Nevertheless, the rise of academies has not yet impacted on how national talent development is governed. Rather, national youth football strategies often remain short-sighted. Kim Poulsen underlines this when saying that in Tanzania “the existing talent development structure [. . .] is close to zero. We managed to work with some players, develop them and achieved some good results, but that doesn’t mean the structure lasts.” He observed

a tendency to want to build the house from the top. They [football associations] bring in a foreign coach and tell him: “Listen, we have a dream to qualify for the AFCON, and we want it tomorrow.” Then it fails, the coach is fired, a new coach comes in, it fails again.

Instead, he argues that

you need to build the house from the bottom-up. You need to have a system where you can identify the talents that are in the country. [. . .] There are plenty of talents running around in Tanzania, but there is no structure, so you never discover them.

Likewise, Scottish Bobby Williamson, who was the national team coach in Uganda between 2008 and 2013, mentions the lack of functioning and lasting structures in local youth football as among the major reason for the poor Ugandan performance in international football (Bloomfield, 2009). It is those obstacles that lead Njororai (2019) generally to conclude that national talent development remains widely unprogressive in the KUT countries.

Furthermore, on a club level, funding and acquiring financial resources remain a problem. Although, TV deals and league sponsorships have eased the situation in the KUT countries to some extent. Yet, while the revenues remain low compared to leagues in Northern and South Africa, poor governance in clubs and on the level of football associations in KUT countries has detracted much of their benefits. Particularly

in Uganda, the poor financial state of clubs in the elite league has negatively affected the stability in its structural composition: a number of clubs that qualified for the first-tier level could not last and disappeared after a short time (Onwumechili, 2019). In Kenya and Tanzania, the situation is a bit better where sponsorships allow some clubs, such as Gor Mahia FC and AFC Leopards FC from Nairobi or Simba SC and Young Africans FC from Dar es Salaam, to invest in lasting structures and pay players decent wages. On one hand, this may account for the reason why these clubs attract migrants from other countries of the region and, to some extent, from other parts of the continent. On the other hand, however, better funding has not impeded mismanagement and the general decline of professional football in the two countries (Njororai, 2019).

Combined, the poor governance, funding, development, and performances of East African football have created to what Njororai (2014) has identified as an “identity of failure” (p. 75). Accordingly, the popularity of the game has produced high expectations to the national teams and clubs to perform well in international competitions. But these expectations have continuously been frustrated by the ongoing disappointment to succeed. Moreover, they have become part of national shame among football enthusiasts, as the region has produced world class athletes in other sports such as athletics, boxing, and rugby (Chepyator-Thomson & Ariyo, 2017) which seemingly receive better results with less resources but better management. Therefore, in KUT and beyond, the image of East African football has repeatedly been associated with disillusion and incompetence, not least by East Africans themselves (Njororai, 2019). Despite the recent qualifications of the KUT countries for the AFCON 2019 tournament, overcoming this depressing state seems to be almost impossible in the near future as structural improvements, coordinated on national levels, are not in sight. Moreover, and given the lack of incentives to promote long-term strategies that eye on talent and personnel development, the misery of East African football is likely to continue (Rintaugu et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, private investment and growing international attention to run football academies (Kwalimwa, 2018) may have a positive impact in the long run. Yet, their impact on national strategies on talent development is uncertain. Therefore, and given the outlined constraints, player migration from East Africa to the world’s top leagues will probably not increase in the near future. However, it is questionable whether governmental constraints and structural underdevelopment alone account for the underrepresentation of East African footballers in Europe. Compared to many West African countries, from which most sub-Saharan African players in Europe originate, important facilities such as professional academies are overall fewer and less professional in the eastern part of the continent. Still, as Kim Poulsen concludes on the basis of his experiences as FIFA development expert for African football, the organization of football in East Africa is not significantly worse than in West Africa. Indeed, when considering the issues relating to problematic governance, the situation in West Africa does not seem to be significantly different. To give a recent example, in June 2018, Ghana decided to dissolve its national football association (GFA) after its president Kwesi Nyantakyi was caught on tape accepting a huge cash gift from an undercover reporter. In the same report, more than 100 West African referees and football officials

receiving bribes to manipulate games over a 2-year period between 2016 and 2018 were exposed, according to the BBC (2018). Furthermore, incidents of corruption and illegal ticket sales among Ghanaian officials also occurred during a government-sponsored fan trip to the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010 (Alber & Ungruhe, 2016). In the following, therefore, we look at other factors that contribute to explain the low numbers in East African football migration beyond structural constraints, namely historical and socio-cultural factors. We will do so with reference to West African countries in order to evaluate their significance in relation to these African powerhouses of football migration to Europe's top leagues.

History, Colonial Legacy, and (Post)Colonial Networks in African Football Migration

In order to avoid conceptualizations that treat Africa as a single whole, it is essential to foreground the continent's social, cultural, political, and economic diversity. This also implies to consider diversity within the various regions of the continent, including East Africa. However, with regards to football, East African countries, particularly KUT, share a similar colonial history under British rule that created a unique regional sporting identity (Njororai, 2014).¹

Initially, and after British settlers had introduced football to the colonies of the Empire in the East African region in the beginning of the 20th century, the game was first used as a leisure time activity for settlers and colonial staff as well as an educative instrument to promote social control over the local population. In the following decades, however, the introduction of domestic football tournaments and leagues and the implementation of all-African teams developed massive interest in the game in East Africa. A milestone was the establishment of the first cross-border football tournament in Africa, the Gossage Cup, in 1926 (between 1967 and 1971: Challenge Cup). It initially included the teams of the territories of Kenya and Uganda. Tanganyika and Zanzibar joined in 1945 and 1949, respectively. It was only in 1973 that the tournament (since then: CECAFA Cup) was expanded to include the other CECAFA member states (Njororai, 2014). In addition to the CECAFA Club Cup, an annual competition between football clubs from the CECAFA member states founded in 1974, the Gossage Cup has contributed to create connections between the KUT nations through sports and served as a chance for East African footballers and enthusiasts to obtain international experience and success on a regional level (Njororai, 2014). It is not least due to this long-term institutionalization of the game that toward the end of the colonial era in the 1960s, football had not only become a popular leisure time activity and an arena to display emerging nationalist feelings in the region. Its further relevance can be identified by stressing on its role as an important tool in the struggle for independence in the region. In particular, football clubs were used as arenas to promote and organize political resistance and contributed to the successful struggle. Finally, with the beginning of independence of the KUT countries in the 1960s, football had become an

important part of the physical activity culture and identity in East Africa which continues to today (Ndee, 2005, 2010).

Colonial Legacies

While this historical role of the game is similar and visible in other parts of the continent (Alegi, 2010), colonial ties often remained in football. This is most visible with regard to migration routes and networks, however, these linkages vary considerably. As a general observation, the main receivers of African players in European club football today are clubs from the leagues of the former colonial powers. Indeed, there is an overrepresentation of players from former French colonies in West and North Africa playing in France and players from DR Congo, the former Belgian colony, playing in Belgium. The same pattern applies to the former Portuguese colonies. This leads Raffaele Poli (2006) to state that the migration of football players to Europe is closely linked to colonial history, and old colonial ties continue to structure the flow of migrants until today. However, this does not apply to Great Britain and its former colonies. While there are some players from the former British colonies of Ghana and Nigeria playing in British leagues, footballers from other former colonies of the empire, particular in East Africa, are widely absent here. Looking at the regional level more generally, it becomes evident that “[b]y comparison to West Africa, East Africa remains unaffected by the flux of African football players towards Europe” (Poli, 2006, p. 403). Hence, once established, colonial networks may explain contemporary African football migration to some degree. Yet, as the regional differences between the former French-dominated colonial West Africa and the former British-dominated colonial East Africa indicate, there is the need to take a deeper look into the (colonial) histories of football migration from the continent in order to scrutinize the reasons for this varying pattern.

Football clubs in France started to recruit players from North Africa as early as the 1930s. Many players from Morocco and Algeria came to the French leagues, and many succeeded, with some becoming members of the French national team. French clubs soon started to search for talent in this region and began to establish transfer networks in the 1950s, leading to a significant increase of the number of players from West Africa in the French leagues (Poli, 2006). Portuguese clubs started to recruit players from their former colonies (e.g., Mozambique and Angola) from 1949 (Cleveland, 2017) and clubs in Belgium from the territory of what is DR Congo today since the 1960s onwards. Hence, while African players were increasingly recognized as most cost-effective by European teams, their recruitment was bound to existing colonial ties concentrated in France, Belgium, and Portugal (Taylor, 2006). After independence of many African states in the 1960s, new African leaders adopted protectionist policies to keep their best players at home to demonstrate their sovereignty from their former colonizers and to strengthen the local game. This only changed in the 1980s, when the African football federations increasingly realized the advantages of expatriate players in the world’s best leagues for their own national teams. By adopting the new policy, European clubs saw the opportunity to search for bargain-priced

talent and set up partnership agreements and created talent centers aiming at transferring players to Europe at a low cost. This again resulted in a steady increase in the number of African players in Europe in general and in former colonial powers such as France, Portugal, and Belgium in particular (Poli, 2006).

Great Britain, on the contrary, chose a different path during colonial times and the first decades after. Contrary to the French Football Federation, the English Football Association introduced a protectionist approach in 1931 by implementing a 2-year residency qualification for non-British professionals, which in reality meant that foreign players could only play as amateurs. Before this rule was first removed in 1978, British football has had only minor contact with outside the United Kingdom and Ireland in terms of player migration. Hence, until the end of the 20th century, while Britain was “a no-go area for foreign footballers in general,” British football did not exploit its colonial resource anywhere close to the approaches of France, Belgium, or Portugal (Taylor, 2006, 18f).

African Football Migration After the Bosman Ruling

It was only since the mid-1990s that the number of international football migrants to Europe increased dramatically. European football underwent profound change, when the so-called Bosman ruling, a decision by the European Court of Justice in 1995, decreed the free movement of players within the European Union. In the aftermath, foreign player restrictions were increasingly eased for European and later on non-European players. Clubs took advantage of this to an extent that the percentage of foreign players in the top-five European Leagues (Italy, England, Spain, Germany, and France) increased from 20.2% in 1995/96 to 38.6% in 2005/06 (Poli, 2009). In 2019, expatriate players accounted for more than half of the squads in England's, Italy's, and Germany's (as well as in Belgium's and Portugal's) top divisions, while the individual numbers for France and Spain added up to 38.6% and 37.3%, respectively (Poli et al., 2019a). Schokkaert (2016) estimates that around one third of non-European expatriates active in the top European leagues are of African origin, among which players from West African countries, in particular Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Ivory Coast, and Cameroon outshine the rest of the continent (Poli et al., 2019b). The Bosman ruling and the increasing numbers of African players in European football yet correlate with another development in global football since the 1990s. African national teams, particularly at the youth level, made significant impact on the international stage, and even winning titles. European clubs all over the continent began to look for African talents and started to recruit them in numbers. Hence, while the Bosman ruling made it much less difficult to bring African players to the EU, they were among the favorite targets, offering great skill at a relatively low cost. Interestingly, however, the colonial legacy and long-term networks remained. In 2000, 69% of the Africans playing in Portugal were from former Portuguese colonies, while the respective number for the French connection was 59% (Taylor, 2006).

In 2019, while France remains the biggest receiver of African players from their former West African colonies in Senegal (42 out of overall 187 expatriate professional

players of the country worldwide), the Ivory Coast (13 out of 161) and Mali (11 out of 65), Portugal continues to be for Guinea-Bissau (5 out of 11) and Cap Verde Islands (5 out of 17), and Belgium for DR Congo (4 out of 24). On the contrary, players originating from Nigeria (5 out of 327) and Ghana (2 out of 274), despite their international success over the years, remain relatively underrepresented in the British leagues. They rather count on new networks in global football, with diverse destinations such as Scandinavia, the United States, Southern Europe, the Middle East and South-East Asia (CIES Football Observatory, 2019). The general underrepresentation of African players in British football has been further manifested in recent years due to reinforced foreign player restrictions in the English Premier League (EPL). Particularly for players from less successful countries, such as Kenya, Uganda, or Tanzania, obtaining a work permit in the United Kingdom remains a difficult endeavor. Not least in order to guarantee playing time for own national talents in the post-Bosman-era, the English Football Association grants access to footballers outside the European Economic Area (EEA) based on the standing of the respective player. The ruling includes his involvement in his senior national team and his country's average placing on the FIFA world rankings over a 2-year period. In order to be automatically endorsed, the player must have participated in a certain percentage of senior national football matches depending on the FIFA world ranking. Players from countries below the 50th position on the FIFA world ranking list need to obtain a special exception panel based on other criteria (such as the number of appearances in international club competitions or the transfer fee amount) to prove their benefit for British football. In practice, this means that no East African player has direct access to play in the EPL (The FA, 2015).² Indeed, Kenyan McDonald Mariga was denied such an exception in January 2010 when Manchester City wanted to sign him from the Italian side AC Parma—even though Kenya's Prime Minister at that time, Raila Odinga, had appealed to the relevant British authorities in charge to grant this permit (BBC, 2010). Furthermore, Tanzania's prodigy and only player in European top football to date, Aston Villa's Mbwana Samatta, may serve as an example of how East African players are affected both by less-established migratory routes and foreign player restrictions in British football. Samatta was already a star in his homeland, having played for the arguably biggest club in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam-based Simba FC, in the 2010/11 season. He then switched to Congolese powerhouse TP Mazembe, where he played a few successful seasons and won the CAF award for the best African player based on the continent in 2015. In the same year, he started a successful spell in the Belgian top league with KRC Genk and was the top scorer in the 2018/19 season. Since this achievement the international sports media has linked him with a possible move to an EPL club. However, in the same breath, it was uncertain whether he would be granted the needed special approval for a work permit by British authorities. Therefore, Samatta's long expected move to the EPL did not materialize until January 2020, when Aston Villa signed him for a transfer fee of about 10 million Euros and made him the first Tanzanian footballer ever in the EPL. Seemingly, however, producing a work permit was not a straight-forward process and delayed Samatta's debut for the team (Collomosse, 2020; HLN, 2020; Husband, 2020). Moreover, already his initial move to Europe was not a direct and linear trajectory but

made possible by jumping into an existing postcolonial network outside Tanzania. When he joined the Congolese league the path to Europe became possible through Belgium. So far, Samatta's case may only count for an individual trajectory, yet, jumping directly from East Africa to Europe would not appear to be an easy task as Kim Poulsen, who was Samatta's coach in the Tanzanian national team, argues: "You can hardly go directly from Tanzania. You need to go via Congo, for instance, and then maybe a smaller European club, before you reach the big one. Yes, then you've gone the traditional way."

While it is yet to see whether Samatta's successful international trajectory will continue in the EPL, his case illustrates the obstacles for East African footballers to embark on promising careers in European football. Beyond the EPL and postcolonial networks, Tanzania and the other former British colonies in East Africa generally remain sidelined in international player migration. Compared to other regions on the continent, the KUT countries have only a few players abroad, of which only very few play in European leagues (Poli et al., 2019b). Among the 24 participating nations of the 2019 edition of the AFCON only South Africa (6 expatriate players) and Egypt (8), countries with a much shorter colonial history than most other African countries and traditionally strong national leagues, and Angola (10) and Namibia (13) had less-expatriate players in their squads than Uganda (17), the East African country with most players abroad. However, only three Ugandan players played on the first-tier level in Europe (Ronald Mukibi, Östersunds FK, Sweden; Farouk Miya, HNK Gorica, Croatia; and William Kizito Lwagga, Shakther Karagandy, Kazakhstan), two played in lower divisions in Europe and two others were contracted in India and Canada, respectively. The majority of expatriate players remained on the African continent and played in countries attached to CECAFA (5) and other associations in northern, central, and southern Africa (5). The overall numbers of Kenyan and Tanzanian expatriate players during the 2019 AFCON tournament were among the lowest (12 and 9, respectively). While most remained in African countries such as Algeria (1), Botswana (1), Ethiopia (1), Egypt (2), Libya (1), Morocco (1), and Zambia (3), only three players from Kenya (Victor Wanyama, Tottenham Hotspur, England; Johanna Omolo, Cercle Brugge, Belgium; and Abud Omar, Sepsi Sf. Gheorghe, Romania) and one player from Tanzania (Mbwana Samatta, KRC Genk, Belgium) were contracted by a European first-tier club at that time. Some played at lower levels in various European countries. Among them, Sweden was the top destination with three Kenyan players active on the third-tier level. While Kenyans also played in the United States (1), China (1), and Japan (1) members of the Taifa Stars did not play outside Africa and Europe. On the contrary, many West and North African national teams only had one or two local players included in their squads (often their substitute goalkeepers who may not enjoy much exposure on the international team level) or, as in the case of Senegal and Guinea, even none (BBC, 2019). Overall, the club attachments of the expatriate players from KUT countries point to diverse yet less institutionalized migration routes on a rather low level. This observation reflects general migration trends in East African football and is visible beyond the AFCON or other international tournaments. In this regard, the Atlas of migration by the CIES Football Observatory (2019) lists Finland

(with three Kenyan players) and Vietnam (with three Ugandan players) as most important destinations for footballers from KUT countries. Nevertheless, migration toward these destinations is still on a low level compared to other African origins. The experiences of Robert, the Kenyan travel agent and intermediary for international player transfers, confirm this. Among the more than 100 African players whom he helped to go to countries in South-East Asia, only three originated from East Africa (while the others were merely from West African countries who used Nairobi as a travel hub and place to secure visa applications for South-East Asian countries).

To summarize the above findings, it seems that despite the increasing influx of African players to all over Europe since the mid-1990s and to some emerging destinations in America and Asia, colonial legacies remain important for many contemporary intercontinental migration routes. Yet, the wide absence of a British–African nexus keeps numbers from many former British colonies such as the KUT countries on a low level. International achievements of former British colonies like Ghana and Nigeria may have put these two on the map of globalized football and increased international migration from these countries; however, East African footballers, lacking both relevant sport-specific colonial ties and contemporary success are either cut off from a possible career in European first-tier football or, as shown by Samatta, need to join existing other networks between African and European countries. Nevertheless, the fact that migration trajectories have not yet developed and institutionalized widely in East African football is not just a sport-specific phenomenon. Rather, it reflects general tendencies and cultural traits in East Africa as we will show in the following.

A Culture of (Non-)Migration and Its Impact on (East) African Football

In academic, media and public discourses, it is a common and generalized assumption that migration in and from the African continent is a massive phenomenon. Indeed, practices of internal and international migration are widespread, and numbers of both actual and aspiring migrants are high (de Bruijn et al., 2001; Hahn & Klute, 2007; Kleist & Thorsen, 2017). However, again, there is a need to localize this phenomenon and shed light on the diversity of practices and approaches to migration on the continent. Taking Western Africa as an example, spatial mobility in forms of internal and cross-border migrations has been widespread for many generations. Among others, searching for labor, educational opportunities, adventure and urban life-styles, or marriage partners are common motives among mobile men and women. For similar reasons, migration to Europe or North America has been aspired and practiced for decades. Widely deprived from lasting social and economic participation in home societies, a good life is often associated with moving to the Global North in today's young urban generation. Hence, in many West African societies, migration to Europe or the United States has become a social norm among young people longing for social mobility (Grätz, 2010). Becoming “a somebody” in life (Langevang, 2008, p. 2044) demands to gain and to share resources. Hence, achieving social mobility through

spatial mobility is connected to individual aspirations of success as well as being valuable for one's social environment, particularly the (wider) family. Fulfilling demands of a reciprocal intergenerational contract and caring for one's parents (Darby & van der Meij, 2018) as well as siblings and close friends generates longed for recognition and the role of a "social giver" in the family and society (Martin et al., 2016). Regardless of often uncertain and precarious actual trajectories, a migration to Europe is widely seen as a ticket to make it (Kleist, 2017). The social value and statistical significance of (aspired) spatial mobility in West African societies form a rooted practice that has been conceptualized as a "culture of migration" (Hahn & Klute, 2007).

Football migration is part of this culture. In Ghana, one of the main African export countries of football players, one's anticipated future player trajectory is associated with a career abroad (Darby, 2012). Since the mid-1990s, when African players have become attractive (and affordable) targets for European clubs, the increasing commercialization and global reach by TV broadcasting have made top European leagues dream destinations for many West African players. Ever since, following in the footsteps of iconic players like Michael Essien or John Obi Mikel generates the hopes, ambitions, and actual belief in making it likewise of a whole generation of young males in West Africa (Ungruhe, 2016). Indeed, the various examples of successful West African footballers in Europe fuel local players' confidence that players from the region are predestined for the top of professional football due to assumed distinct talent, bodily abilities, and skills. It is this widespread belief that continuously motivates young West African footballers to pursue an international career despite the many uncertainties, obstacles, and possible failures on the way to make it (Esson, 2015; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017). Furthermore, while assumed excessive wealth and celebrity life-styles of West African players contribute to local talents' inclination to migrate, it is particularly the road toward social mobility in their home societies that motivates young players to pursue a career in Europe. Football migration may appear unique at first sight, yet, it is indeed very much driven by the same desires and aspirations as in other forms of migration (Ungruhe & Esson, 2017). While only very few talents will succeed in European football, many try their luck (Esson, 2015) and, regardless of repeating experiences of disillusion, fraud or failure, continuously see and use football as the most promising way to make it to Europe and in life (Ungruhe & Büdel, 2016).

The Absence of a Migration Culture in East Africa

This culture seems to be widely absent in a number of East African countries, both in football and in general terms. Despite specific forms of spatial mobility across the Indian Ocean,³ Noel Salazar (2010) argues that international migration in East African countries, and Tanzania in particular, primarily occurs between neighboring countries. Although, Tanzanians generally think very highly of Europe, and images of (utopian) Western societies are shared among many Tanzanians, these have not triggered anything resembling the massive migration culture in Western Africa. "Contrary to generalized European imaginaries of African mobility (. . .), and in contrast with the situation in many West African countries, the majority of Tanzanians does not wish to migrate,"

Salazar (2010, p. 4) argues. Part of the explanation may be that limited financial resources hinder actual migration projects in East Africa (Salazar, 2010), whereas in West Africa, many people financially support one among their kin to make it to Europe as part of a “household strategy” to care for the nuclear or wider family (Darby & van der Meij, 2018). This absence, however, already points to social-cultural reasons for the limited occurrence of migration projects and aspirations in East Africa. This is exemplified in Salazar’s (2010) interviews in Tanzania, in which people said:

“Migration is not a very Tanzanian thing to do . . . After all it’s (Tanzania) a nice country to live in”; “Going far away isn’t a thing to do . . . Maybe it all has to do with tradition”; “Tanzanians are not the most ambitious people and they usually have a family to rely upon”; “Tanzanians are fearful, we don’t have a mentality of conquering.” (p. 19)

This seemingly widespread Tanzanian attitude also accounts for local footballers as Kim Poulsen confirms:

I experience that the players I’ve been working with—which by all means is a lot by now—they’ve never had the thought that they should live abroad. They have been thinking about being able to make a living, and they can earn good money at home.

As noted above, a player in the top clubs in Dar es Salaam secures a relatively steady and satisfying income in the local context without having to leave the country. For many, it secures an adequate lifestyle that does not require the risk of the uncertainties and possible precarity that comes with an envisaged football career in Europe (see Ungruhe, 2018). Hence, more financial means do not translate into increasing ambitions to migrate in Tanzania. This situation is comparable to the Kenyan context. “Kenyans don’t travel,” confirms Robert. Compared to international transfers of players originating from other regions in Africa, the market for East African footballers is close to zero as the aforementioned low number of his Kenyan clients indicate. Among Robert’s three Kenyan clients so far, only one managed to secure a contract abroad, whereas the other two returned home after unsuccessful trials. Although Robert’s experiences are based on only a few individual accounts, the risk to fail abroad is likely and may add to the motives for many players to rather stay and play in their home country.

Another reason for the low desire to move among East African players is their lack of networks abroad that can facilitate a smooth transition into life and football business abroad. Poulsen argues:

If you come from Ivory Coast or Senegal or Ghana and you are on your way abroad, you would probably know someone who can take care of you in the beginning. But a player from Tanzania, he would be alone, he wouldn’t know anybody. And the agents are not used to it, because there are so few players from Tanzania.

Moreover, the absence of players from KUT countries in European top leagues affects career imaginations of talents in the region. Whereas, private TV broadcasting

of European football may have generated enormous interest in Europe's top leagues, particularly the EPL (Alegi, 2010; Onwumechili, 2019), it has not generated strong inclinations among East African footballers to actually envisage a career there. "Think about a poor boy in Tanzania, who should he look up to? To know that he should pursue football? A poor boy from Ivory Coast has no doubt," Kim Poulsen said prior to Samatta's move to the EPL. As noted above, the West African context shows that having a role model from the same country who has proven that the door to a successful career in a European top league is open is crucial to motivate talents to pursue an ambitious international career. Regardless Samatta's previous success in Belgium, it is, according to Poulsen, his recent move to EPL that may indeed initiate such career imaginations and efforts among Tanzanian talents to follow in his footsteps. "If he really were to become a role model, he would need to go to English football [. . .]," Poulsen argued earlier. Among Tanzanians, it is hoped that Samatta's trajectory will open doors for talents such as 17-year-old Kelvin John, best player and top scorer at the latest CECAFA Under 20 Challenge Cup, who is believed to follow in his footsteps and move to European top football from the Tanzanian Football House Academy via Genk when turning 18 and achieving the legal age for an international transfer (James, 2020). However, Samatta's actual move may not only fuel the migration dreams of Tanzanian talents but, as high ranking officials from the Tanzanian government and the TFF have expressed (Mabuka, 2020), also positively impact football development in the country more generally. In this regard, and according to Poulsen, Samatta's pioneering move can indeed "be an incomparable boost for Tanzania." Former fellow national team coach Bobby Williamson underlines this for the conditions in neighboring Uganda. By arguing that the lack of Ugandan players in the EPL keeps Ugandan football sidelined among scouts and foreign investors, he points to a role model's potential to improve the general conditions for professional football in the region (Bloomfield, 2009). Hence, seemingly, role models would not only encourage East African talents to aim to reach the highest level in global football but also act as ambassadors for their country to attract investments in the development of the local game.

While East African countries generally have very few such role models in the world of football, Kenya, as an exception from the rule, has already produced a few internationally successful players such as the mentioned McDonald Mariga and Dennis Oliech, particularly known for their spells with FC Parma (2007–2010, Mariga) and AJ Auxerre (2007–2012, Oliech). However, Kenya's only player to feature significantly in the EPL was the former Tottenham Hotspur player Victor Wanyama, McDonald Mariga's junior brother. Wanyama first moved to Europe in 2007 where he joined his brother's club at that time, Helsingborgs IF, in Sweden. He already left after a disappointing season with no appearances for the first team. Yet, having entered European football he managed to secure a contract with the Belgian side Beerschot AC in 2008. After a 3-year spell he attracted interest from various European teams including British clubs. By moving to the Scottish giants Celtic Glasgow in 2011, he was able to obtain a work permit in the United Kingdom. Although the Kenyan did not meet the criteria, the relevant authorities were convinced that he would make a significant impact on Scottish football and granted a special exception (Daily Mail, 2011). While it is uncertain whether he would

have been granted likewise if he was moving directly to the EPL, his “detour” via Scotland served as the entry ticket to English football as his work permit for the U.K.-retained validity. When Wanyama then joined a club in England, namely FC Southampton in 2013, he became the first Kenyan player to feature in the EPL. While he was widely praised for his accomplishment in his home country, his new team gained strong support among Kenyans right from the start of his move. This support both indicates people’s strong identification with a countryman in a top league (Oakley, 2014) and fuels cosmopolitan identities, particularly among Kenyan youth (Siundu, 2011). However, despite his personal success and his move to one of the EPL’s powerhouses, Tottenham Hotspur, in 2016, Wanyama has not yet led the way for Kenyan football talents to become successful professional players in Europe. He left the EPL in early 2020 and signed a contract with Montreal Impact FC in the North American Major League Soccer (MLS).

The Impact of New Forms of Transnational Sport Migration

Examples from other popular sports in the region show how the international success of role models may boost talents’ ambitions to follow in their footsteps. Particularly world class Kenyan long- and middle-distance runners have fostered a running culture in the country that increasingly translates into sport labor migration practices. As an individual sport and compared to others such as football, running favors from its less dependency on public financial resources which allows poorer nations to compete internationally (Njororai, 2016). However, running’s growing commodification on a global scale is problematic for Kenya as a sporting nation. So far, dozens of promising Kenyan runners have been recruited by countries in the Middle East, obtain national citizenship there and do no longer contribute to Kenya’s records and pride (Campbell, 2010; Njororai, 2011). This development is increasingly visible in football, too. As part of their strategy to compete at an international top level in various sports, Qatar runs academies in various East African countries to benefit from talent on the continent. Scouting, training, and selecting the best individuals to become citizens of Qatar is aimed at forming a competitive national team for the upcoming World Cup on Qatari soil in 2022 (Campbell, 2010; Poli, 2010). This practice of sport labor migration may produce role models and implement a (sporting) culture of migration in East Africa. Yet, this new kind of transnational sport migration will first bring loss rather than gain for less-developed football nations in the region.

Indeed, a number of excellent footballers may be lost for East African national teams if the Qatari model prevails and becomes a blueprint for other nations. Yet, raising players’ ambitions to migrate and change citizenship may also have some positive outcomes for East Africa in the long run. Qatar’s and other countries’ investments in lasting structures such as professional academies may, as a side-effect, raise the local standard of play and produce players of quality for the Taifa Stars and other national teams in the region. If, in an ideal scenario, a few will attract attention from European clubs and scouts and embark on careers in the top leagues in Europe, they may become

the longed-for role models needed to spark a sporting migration culture that may benefit the local game in the long run.

However, whether Qatar's approach or role models in top-level international football would indeed translate into a virtuous cycle of sport migration which increases the local standard of play and facilitates further international mobility of East African players is uncertain. As examples from West African countries show, national teams may benefit from out-migration of their best talents to some degree; however, local professional leagues have not developed accordingly and suffer from inadequate finance, mediocre performances, and declining public interest (Darby, 2012; Darby et al., 2018; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017). While mushrooming football academies all over West Africa, ranging from professional enterprises to improvised facilities, have institutionalized talent development for international markets, the production of players for sale seems to be the main motive for many (Darby et al., 2007). However, beside "sport only" approaches, many academies offer education for players or promote communal social development as their primary goal (Dubinsky & Schler, 2019). Nevertheless, even in the latter cases, the overall aim of the participating talents is to succeed as footballers. Hence, academies, whether implicitly or explicitly, nurture the dream of young players to become international football stars. Hereby, they all form part of the global football business and its unequal power structures and thus contribute to the commodification of young African players (Darby et al., 2018). Given that their widespread export-orientation toward talents has widely caused precarious career and life trajectories among moving players the academies' benefit for local football is indeed questionable (Darby, 2012; Darby et al., 2018). Hence, if East African countries will develop (sport) migration cultures similar to other regions on the continent, the general and long-term gain for the region's football development will remain more than uncertain.

Concluding Thoughts: Ambivalences of Sport Labor Migration and Its Absence

The reasons for the vast absence of East African footballers in the world's top leagues in Europe today are multifarious: (a) structural constraints in the administration bodies of KUT countries have caused a perpetual underdeveloped football sector which has led to less talents, poor standard of play and less international interest in East African football. (b) In contrast to other European colonial powers like France, Belgium, and Portugal, Britain's protectionist approach in national football has excluded East Africans from joining British football clubs over decades. Britain's nonutilization of colonial ties in football has further prevented clubs' from establishing networks similar to those that French, Belgian, and Portuguese clubs still utilize today. (c) The absence of a general culture of migration in East African countries lowers ambitions and actual projects of international spatial mobility. In football, this is also visible and reproduces itself particularly by the lack of role models in the European top leagues for young East African talents today.

However, to put the aforementioned points into perspective, while (a) football governance in West Africa seems to be equally problematic as in KUT countries and (b) former British West African colonies Ghana and Nigeria are among the main export nations of African football talents to Europe today, (c) countries like Kenya have produced a number of world class athletes who migrate abroad and particularly emerging sport nations like Qatar have begun to establish football academies in East Africa aiming at exporting local talents. Hence, East Africa's lack of international football migrants cannot be explained by one of the three identified factors alone. Rather than single causes, the colonial legacy, structural constraints in local football governance and development as well as the absence of a general migration culture form a complex, intertwined, and mutually reproducing set of reasons. It is, thus, the combination of the three factors that explain the underrepresentation of players from the KUT countries in European top leagues to a great degree.

For sport science, therefore, it is essential to draw attention to the differences and diversity in African—and other so-called peripheral—(sport) settings. Generalizing footballers' migration from the continent as a common African phenomenon disregards local particularities and connections to global sport and points to a problematic power discourse in sport science that implicitly portrays marginalized sport settings as socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political entities. Hereby, the discipline is at risk of reproducing the peripheral status of these settings as a nonimportant other. Beside a greater awareness and acknowledgment of particularities at the periphery, a critical evaluation of what "African football migration" entails is needed. While there is a widespread consensus among academics that generally mirrors problematic power imbalances in the world, hegemony in sports continues. International sport migration, for example, from African countries to European leagues, may have initiated modest success of peripheral nations in major sports over the last decades. In addition, African athletes, coaches, and functionaries have contributed significantly to sport in the West and to global sport more generally. However, by taking advantage of African skill and expertise all this benefited actors and institutions in Europe and elsewhere and manifested Western power in and over sport. Hence, while, to a large extent and increasingly contested by actors from the Middle and Far East, "the control over the content, ideology and economic resources associated with sport still tends to lie within the West" (Maguire, 2008, p. 8), African countries remain marginalized and sidelined in most disciplines.

Regarding East African football, an increasing number of export-oriented academies, further diversifying migration routes and new networks beyond the usual south-north nexus, may contribute to increasing numbers of international player migration from the region. Yet, footballers' greater spatial mobility does not necessarily translate to better national teams, further talent development and general good football governance in export countries that may lead to international success. Rather, export-oriented approaches such as those of academies raise concerns about the benefit of player migration for countries on the African continent as they may reproduce structural power imbalances that hinder and not strengthen local football development.

In the same vein, having a role model abroad is an ambiguous achievement. In addition to the Taifa Stars' respectable (though unsuccessful) performance at the recent AFCON, Samatta's move to the EPL may put Tanzania on the map of world football, create new and direct pathways to Europe as it is expected in the case of Kelvin John and, overall, further increase football enthusiasm in the East African country. However, while Samatta wearing the jersey of a British team may fuel imaginations among Tanzanian youth to follow in his footsteps and attract interest among the world's top clubs in local talents, it is, in the first place, international clubs in search for cheap labor, in addition to a few lucky local players indeed making it, who would benefit. Considering this, it remains questionable whether Samatta's spell in the EPL will indeed lead to sustainable football development in Tanzania as Poulsen and other functionaries have predicted.

This uncertain benefit for football in Tanzania (and other marginalized countries in East Africa) also applies to transfers beyond the EPL and other European top leagues. Yet, destinations and migration networks outside Europe remain widely understudied. Therefore, future research shall also take into account the role of emerging destinations beyond Europe such as the Middle East or South-East Asia (see e.g., Akindes, 2013). In this regard, it may be worth to consider new political ties between countries apart from colonial legacies as facilitators for migration routes as shown by İpek et al. (2019) in the case of Turkey. Likewise, existing networks between clubs and agents in East African and South-East Asian countries, as demonstrated in the case of the Kenyan intermediary Robert, may also influence migration of players originating from the KUT countries in the coming years and form an important future research agenda.

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Notes

1. Colonial history in the region is complex as borders and colonial powers changed over time. Mainland Tanzania was part of German East Africa since 1885, before being seized by British forces in 1916 and re-named Tanganyika. The territory was formally administered by Great Britain from 1922 onwards. After gaining independence in 1961 and 1963, respectively, Tanganyika and Zanzibar (including neighboring island Pemba) merged in 1964 and became the United Republic of Tanzania. However, Zanzibar kept its own

national team which is, nevertheless, not recognized by FIFA and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and cannot participate in international tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup or the Africa Cup of Nations (Fair, 1997; Kimambo et al., 2017; Künzler, 2010).

2. Before this current rule was implemented in 2015, non-EEA players must originate from a country among the first 70 nations in the FIFA ranking and were obligated to participate in at least 75% of games for their respective national team during the 2 years preceding the transfer (Poli, 2009). Both Kenya and Uganda have previously temporarily passed the threshold in the FIFA ranking but have been unable to remain long enough to make an impact (Bloomfield, 2009).
3. These include long-established and enduring trading networks, particularly among Swahili communities as well as the deportation of East African slaves to localities in Asia between the 16th and the early 20th century (Vernet, 2013, 2015).

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