Global players? Football, migration and globalization, c. 1930-2000

Taylor, Matthew

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Global Players? Football, Migration and Globalization, c. 1930-2000

Matthew Taylor [*]

Abstract: The migration of professional footballers has become a popular subject of late. Not only has it formed the basis of a number of books and journal articles over the last ten years or so, it has also emerged as a key debating point for newspaper, radio and television journalists. Attitudes to the migration of footballers raise a number of issues relating to the political economy of top-level sport but also pose broader questions about national identity, citizenship, freedom of labour and the inclusion or exclusion of 'outsiders'. This paper summarizes some of the key writing on the subject, critically analyzing the way in which the concept of 'globalization', in particular, has been employed. It also adds a historical perspective to our understanding of the phenomenon of football player migration. At the heart of the argument are two basic contentions: first, that football migration is nothing new, but has a long and complicated history; and second, that it should not be isolated from general migratory trends and patterns. The movement of footballers from country to country and continent to continent is thus much more than the product of the current economic and power relations of world football. It reflects a complex set of linkages between specific countries, or sets of countries – linkages that often have deep social, cultural and historical roots.

---

[*] Address all communications to: Matthew Taylor, University of Portsmouth, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Park Building, King Henry I Street, GB-Portsmouth PO1 2DZ; e-mail: Matthew.Taylor@port.ac.uk.

Introduction

If football is the global sport par excellence, it arguably became so as early as 1930, when 13 national teams headed to Uruguay to compete in the first World Cup competition. Most historians would point out that this tournament was some way short of a genuinely international, much less a global, affair. Only four European nations were represented and the crowds were largest for matches involving the South American countries, particularly the final between hosts and eventual winners Uruguay and their River Plate rivals Argentina. In many respects, the early World Cups – the 1934 tournament in Italy and the 1938 edition in France as well – should be seen as local or regional, rather than international, events. Yet what the establishment of the World Cup did from the beginning was to expand the international market for football talent. For the first time, significant numbers of players moved from one continent to another, many of them 'pushed' by the poor economic state of their homeland and the amateur status of the game they played and 'pulled' by the promise of financial rewards in a land that had been home to their parents.[1] Such interactions arguably had a positive effect on the quality and style of play at both ends but also fermented debate around issues of national identity, citizenship, freedom of labour and the inclusion and exclusion of 'outsiders'. In parts of Europe and South America, certainly, the mass migration of footballers was a product of these early international encounters.

Football labour migration again became a topic of popular, and increasingly academic, debate in the last decade of the twentieth century. This paper will summarize and assess some of the key writing on the subject, revealing how much of it has suffered from being too focused on contemporary developments, with a corresponding failure to understand how historical patterns of migration help us to understand the present. The aim of the paper is thus to provide some historical depth to our understanding of the phenomenon of football player migration. At the heart of the argument are two basic contentions: first, that football migration is nothing new, but has a long and complicated history; and second, that it should not be isolated from general migratory trends and patterns. The movement of footballers from country to country and continent to continent is thus much more than a product of the current economic and political relations of world football. It reflects a complex set of linkages between specific countries, or sets of countries – linkages that have deep social, cultural and historical roots.

---

[1] Christiane Eisenberg, "From England to the World: The Spread of Modern Football, 1863-2000", *Moving Bodies* 1.1 (2003): 16.

Theorizing Migration and Football

It is hardly surprising that much of the existing literature on the migration of football talent, written by social scientists to make sense of contemporary trends, has paid scant attention to its historical context. John Bale and Joseph Maguire's edited volume *The Global Sports Arena* was the first major study to seriously address the issue.[2] The book contains a number of essays on the "tradition" (or history) of sporting migration, but tends to focus on national cases and specific chronological periods, rather than looking at patterns of flow over time. Theoretically, it is suggestive of possible interpretations, without providing any comprehensive understanding of the overall phenomenon. In their introduction, the editors emphasize the importance of "the global dimension" and "global system", going on to put forward a number of cross-disciplinary frameworks, from modernization and imperialism to dependency theory and Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory.[3] Maguire in particular has developed this work in a series of journal articles and in a book, *Global Sport*, which features a chapter on migrant labour. He has written on migration in cricket, basketball, ice hockey but also football, focusing specifically in two articles on football migration throughout the European Union and a case study of players at the 1998 World Cup Finals.[4] Largely based on quantitative analysis of migration since the 1990s, Maguire's understanding of the patterns and structures of football migration has been underpinned by an examination of the "political economy of global soccer", although subsequent attention has been paid to the non-economic, particularly a combination of the political, historical, geographical, social and cultural "interdependencies" which "contour…the migrant trails of world sport".[5]

Other scholars have built upon the theoretical frameworks suggested by Bale and Maguire. Drawing loosely on world system theory, Jonathan Magee and John Sugden have posited a model that connects the historical diffusion of football to the flow of migrant labour. From Europe at the core, they argue that the modern game of football spread outwards to the semiperiphery of South and Central America, the periphery of Africa and the external area of Asia, Oceania and North America. The migration of football labour, they suggest,

---

[2] John Bale, and Joseph Maguire, eds., The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

[3] Joseph Maguire, and John Bale, "Sports Labour Migration in the Global Arena", Bale and Maguire, *Global Sports Arena* 1-21.

[4] Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Joseph Maguire, and David Stead, "Border Crossings: Soccer Labour Migration and the European Union", *International Review of the Sociology of Sport* 33.1 (1998): 59-73; Joseph Maguire, and Bob Pearton, "Global Sport and the Migration Patterns of France '98 World Cup Final Players: Some Preliminary Observations", *Soccer and Society* 1.1 (2000): 175-89.

[5] Maguire and Pearton, "Global Sport" 175.

has tended to move in the opposite direction, to those leagues with greater financial resources and status at the "core" of world football.[6] Paul Darby offers a more sophisticated theoretical approach. His study of the migration of African footballers to Europe draws upon three perspectives: world system theory, imperialism and neo-imperialism and dependency theory. He utilizes all of these approaches but ultimately settles on the economist Andre Gunder Frank's thesis of dependent underdevelopment, in which "the first world prospers through the underdevelopment of the third world", as the most insightful way of explaining the processes at work when African footballers move to European clubs. Darby sees the consequent de-skilling of African football according to the requirements of recruiting clubs in Europe as a perfect illustration of how dependent underdevelopment works in practice.[7] Focusing on the political economy of European football, meanwhile, Raffaele Poli has used concepts of transnationalism and circulation to explain the "migratory trajectories" of Cameroonian football players in Switzerland and the exploitation of these migrants on an economic and human level.[8]

Underpinning each of these perspectives is the notion of globalization. One of the key 'buzzwords' among social scientists over the past fifteen years or so, globalization can be a nebulous term that explains very little if not used carefully. According to one account, it "is in danger of becoming…the cliché of our times"; another points to its misuse as "a label to cover whatever strikes our fancy".[9] It is not the intention here to consider the various meanings of globalization, or to outline the different positions taken by those who employ the term and those who are more sceptical of its utility. What is evident, however, that much of the writing on football migration has tended to employ 'globalization' uncritically, as if it were an established fact rather than a contested concept. This is particularly problematic given the awareness among some sociologists of sport that their colleagues may well have embraced the concept too readily and enthusiastically. John Hargreaves, for example, has suggested that while globalization may not be a myth "neither is it as significant as is often made out".[10] He sees the concept as little more than modernization by another name,

---

6   Jonathan Magee, and John Sugden, " 'The World at Their Feet': Professional Football and International Labor Migration", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26.4 (2002): 421-37.

7   Paul Darby, "The New Scramble for Africa: African Football Labour Migration to Europe". *European Sports History Review* 3 (2000): 217-244.

8   Raffaele Poli, "International Football Players' Migrations: A Circulatory Approach", paper presented at the International Football Institute Conference "European Football: Influence Change and Development", University of Central Lancashire, September 2004. See also Raffaele Poli, *Les migrations internationals des footballeurs: Trajectoires de joueurs camerounais en Suisse* (Neuchâtel: Editions CIES, 2004).

9   David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) 1; Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 15.

10 John Hargreaves, "Globalisation Theory, Global Sport, and Nations and Nationalism", *Power Games: A Critical Sociology of Sport*, eds. J. Sugden, and A. Tomlinson (London:

an extension of processes and developments that have long been recognized by sociologists. In sport as in other areas, Hargreaves maintains, globalization "is uneven and exhibits great variation", while nations and national identities continue to represent fundamental barriers to a fully globalized world.[11]

A significant flaw in much of the literature on sport and globalization, and globalization more generally, has been its insensitivity to historical change. There is, for example, considerable debate over issues of periodization and a basic lack of agreement over when globalization actually began. Theorists have dated it from the dawn of history, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the late nineteenth century, or, more commonly, as a recent phenomenon of the last fifty years.[12] What is usually assumed in all these approaches, however, is that globalization is a process that is gathering momentum. Historians naturally have a lot to contribute to these debates and their work is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. A. G. Hopkins and colleagues, for instance, have suggested a taxonomy of globalization based on four overlapping stages: archaic globalization; proto-globalization; modern globalization; and post-colonial globalization.[13] C. A. Bayly has taken up these categories in his recent monumental study of world history from the 1780s to the First World War. He focuses on the gradual erosion of an archaic form of globalization prominent before the late eighteenth century – and evident in the "global exchange of ideas, personnel and commodities" – by a nineteenth-century international system "driven by cooperating or conflicting national political economies".[14] Bayly describes this as a move from globalization to internationalism but is keen to stress the persistence of these older patterns of globalization and the crucial "interconnectedness and interdependence of political and social changes across the world well before the supposed onset of the contemporary phase of 'globalization' after 1945".[15]

Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson have likewise identified the discontinuities and ruptures in the history of globalization.[16] They chart the development of transcontinental networks in the period up to the 1750s, which they argue was then followed by an era of unprecedented global integration based around imperialism, industrialization and free trade. From 1880, globalization became politicized and subject to increasing national controls, with a period of economic 'de-globalization' following the First World War. This interlude

Routledge, 2002) 41. See also Barrie Houlihan, "Sport and Globalization", *Sport and Society: A Student Introduction*, ed. B. Houlihan (London: Sage, 2003) 345-63.

[11] Hargreaves 33.

[12] For a discussion of periodization, see Scholte 19-20, 62-88.

[13] A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

[14] C. A. Bayly, The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 42, 234.

[15] Bayly 1.

[16] Jürgen Osterhammel, and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

ended in 1945, the post-war era heralding the development of a new kind of globalization characterized by a range of integrative political, economic and sociocultural processes. Osterhammel and Peterson conclude with an analysis of the years since 1970, considered by many to be the "age of globalization". However, they prefer to see this latest stage less as a radical departure than part of a longer-term historical transformation. Such had been the influence of globalization on much of the world's population as far back as the eighteenth century that, by the 1980s and 1990s, it was "no longer…anything particularly special".[17] Those economic historians who make much of the globalizing trends of earlier periods have also vigorously challenged the assumed novelty of globalization. It is now generally accepted, for instance, that prior to the First World War the international economy was in many respects as integrated as it was to become in the late twentieth century.[18]

For historians of migration, the concept of globalization can be particularly problematic. International migration, after all, is not the linear phenomenon it is sometimes assumed to be. As Carl Strikweda has argued, migration across the globe has in fact "flowed and ebbed in two great waves over the last two hundred years".[19] The first of these waves was the so-called "Great Migration" of the nineteenth century. Between 1860 and 1914, 52 million Europeans are estimated to have moved to the Western hemisphere, Asia or Oceania. The largest population movement involved transatlantic migration from Europe to North America but Europeans were not the only ones to move. The mass migration of Asians, often as temporary indentured workers, helped to create what Strikweda has called "the closest approximation to a global labor market that we have ever seen".[20] The First World War and economic depression brought an end to the "Great Migration". But more important than a simple fall in numbers, what occurred in the period of the two world wars was an end to the free migration that had characterized the nineteenth century system. Throughout Europe and the Americas, governments imposed controls on entry, through quotas, nation-to-nation agreements, passports, visas and work permits. Most significantly, in the United States a series of restrictive measures starting with the 1917 literacy test and continuing to the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, the Immigration Act of 1924 and the National Origins Act of 1929 effectively cut pre-war immigration levels by four-fifths.[21]

---

[17] Osterhammel and Petersson, *Globalization* 146.
[18] A. G. Hopkins, "The History of Globalization – and the Globalization of History?", Hopkins, *Globalization* 28-29; Timothy J. Hatton, and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "International Migration 1850-1939: An Economic Survey", *Migration and the International Labor Market, 1850-1939*, eds. T. J. Hatton, and J. G. Williamson (London: Routledge, 1994) 3-32.
[19] Carl Strikweda, "Tides of Migration, Currents of History: The State, Economy and the Transatlantic Movement of Labor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999): 371.
[20] Strikweda 377.
[21] Hatton and Williamson, "International Migration" 27-28.

The second great migratory wave of the post-1945 period has clearly had profound effects on the composition of societies across the globe. Migration expanded to include more regions and intensified in volume. So significant has the movement of population been in the shaping of the contemporary world that two leading writers on the phenomenon have even christened this "the age of migration".[22] Yet the recent wave of migration is not as unprecedented as it appears. In many respects, the movement of population flowed more freely in the nineteenth century than it did in the late twentieth. The vital control that states have maintained in deciding whether to let migrants in, and under what circumstances, is crucial here. Most writers agree that even if the movement of goods, capital, even of culture, are being transformed by globalization, we are some way short of a global labour market. As Malcolm Walters noted in 1995: "No other area of social life remains so under the thrall of states and so resistant to globalizing effects".[23]

All of this is relevant to football. In fact, it makes more sense to see the history of the international migration of footballers as one of ebb and flow rather than of straightforward increase and growth; as a series of waves rather than a simple upward curve. Just like any other type of migration, the movement of footballers has been affected by economic and political processes and by the restrictions of states and governments, as well as the regulations of national and international football federations. Even in the late 1990s, footballers were far from free: they were rarely exempt from the systems of work permits, green cards and other immigration controls which exist throughout the world. For these reasons, and some others that will be developed in the course of this article, references to globalization may not be the best way of understanding the history of football migration.

Footballers, then, are not "on the move" as Bale and Maguire suggested: they have in fact always been moving.[24] Even a cursory glance at the early development of club football, particularly in continental Europe, indicates that it was largely founded on the activity of migrants.[25] The most celebrated club founders were the British. The role allocated to the British abroad in diffusing the game throughout Europe and elsewhere can hardly be underestimated but there were others involved in the process too. Rather than giving the prize to one nationality, it is crucial to recognize that the spread of football was built on international networks. In continental Europe, football became closely associated with Britishness but it was also linked with notions of economic progress and modernity and more specifically with a range of technical innovations –

---

[22] Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller, The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World (London: Macmillan, 1993).

[23] Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995) 89.

[24] Maguire and Bale, "Sports Labour Migration" 1.

[25] Much of the following section is based on Pierre Lanfranchi, and Matthew Taylor, *Moving With the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) chapter 1.

from electrification to the development of the railway network – all of which required massive migration of skilled and highly qualified workers.

The defining feature of the first football clubs in continental Europe was their cosmopolitanism. In a French novel published in 1932, the author described the atmosphere of Lyons Football Club at the turn of the century. It was, he wrote, "a mixed society in which the German-speaking Swiss was together with the Italian, the Englishman with the Egyptian, and the man from Lyons with the man from Marseilles".[26] One could argue that the real situation was not much different. Even clubs founded by the British, or with British names, were often initially a mixture of different nationalities and cultures. Started in 1893 by a group of Englishmen and Scotsmen under the patronage of the local British Consulate, Genoa Cricket and Football Club was a strictly British affair until the arrival of James Spensley in 1897. Spensley, a doctor in charge of the British shipping crews, decided to broaden membership to Italians but also other nationalities such as Swiss and Austrians. Conscious of football's association with modernity, he approached members of local high society to join the club. Many of those who joined, such as the Italian-Swiss Pasteur brothers, were highly educated, anglicized and well-travelled 'sportsmen'.

The multinational composition and cosmopolitanism of Genoa was repeated elsewhere in Italy. When Bari Football Club was founded in 1908, Swiss, German, Austrian, French, Spanish, British and Italian tradesmen played alongside one another in the same team.[27] The two clubs founded in Naples in the early twentieth century reflected the cosmopolitan identity of the city. Naples (pronounced with an English accent) and Internapoli included among their first teams an Egyptian fine arts student, three Germans, two Swiss white-collar workers and representatives of Belgium and Malta. Naples also fielded three British professionals alongside the Scarfoglio brothers, who like the Pasteurs were Italians who had been educated in Switzerland. To complete the club's exotic image, two Norwegians signed in 1913.[28] In the north, Torino, Milan and Internazionale, like Genoa, were often lambasted as 'English' teams but their memberships were invariably a mixture of nationalities.

The creation of FC Barcelona provides another good example of this tendency. The club was founded in 1899 by Hans Gamper, a Swiss accountant representing the interests of various French and Swiss companies. It was composed entirely of foreigners who had been prevented from joining a local gymnastics clubs. Players from the first Barcelona team came from as far afield as

---

[26] Joseph Jolinon, *Le joueur de balle* (Paris: Ferenczi, 1931) 83.

[27] Gianni Antonucci, *Bari 90, 1908-1998* (Bari: Corcelli, 1998) 14-18.

[28] Roberto Ciuni, *Il pallone di Napoli* (Milan: Shakespeare and Company, 1985) 16-21; Giogio Nicolini, *La storia del Napoli* (Rome: Editrice Italiana, 1967) 14-18; Elio Tramontana, and Gianni Virnicchi, *Il Napoli dale origini ad oggi* (Naples: Arte tipografica, 1970) 11.

Britain, Switzerland, Germany and Austria and the club colours of blue and red, chosen by Gamper because they were the same colours as those of his home canton's flag, represented its initial cosmopolitan identity. Only from the 1920s, according to Gabriel Colomé, did FC Barcelona develop an important role in Catalan political and social life, transforming itself from a team of foreigners into "a symbol of Catalonia".[29] Even the foundation of German clubs, generally more nationalistic than those in southern Europe, was often the work of migrants or highly mobile locals. The founding members of Bayern Munich, for instance, were hardly locals: Heiner Gillmeister has concluded that they "were Saxons, Hanseatics, Jews, Prussians, foreigners…for short, there were no Bavarians".[30]

Most of the great pioneers of European football fitted this model of mobile cosmopolitanism. Before he founded FC Barcelona, Gamper had studied in Basle, Geneva and Zurich (where he helped to set up FC Zurich in 1897) and had worked and played football in Lyons.[31] Both Henry Monnier, a French banker and Vittorio Pozzo, the famous Italian manager of the 1934 and 1938 World Cup teams, spent time studying and playing football in Switzerland and England, before establishing clubs in their own countries. The most prolific club founder of all was the German Jew Walter Bensemann. Educated at a private school in Switzerland, Bensemann established his first club, FC Karlsruhe, at the age of sixteen. He went on to found a number of other football clubs in Switzerland and Germany before moving to Britain for some time and later becoming involved, like Pozzo, in the formative years of European sports journalism.[32] The similarity in the patterns of these lives is quite striking. All were educated in Switzerland, all were trained in aspects of business and commerce, and all had spent time in Britain and/or were anglophiles. Most importantly, they were all on the move. Although very different from their professional descendents, Europe's first football players and club founders were migrants.

Determinants of Migration

In studying the historical patterns of migratory flows, it is possible to identify a range of factors that have influenced and stimulated (or, conversely, slowed

---

[29] Gabriel Colomé, "Football and National Identity in Catalonia: FC Barcelona and Español", *Football and Regional Identity in Europe*, ed. S. Gehrmann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1997) 113-19.

[30] Heiner Gillmeister, "The Tale of Little Franz and Big Franz: The Foundation of Bayern Munich FC", *Soccer and Society* 1.2 (2000): 81.

[31] See Nicolau Casaus, *Gamper* (Barcelona: Labor, 1984).

[32] On Pozzo, see Vittorio Pozzo, *Campioni del Mondo, Quarant'anni di storio del calico italiano* (Rome: CEN, 1960); on Bensemann, Heiner Gillmeister, "The First European Soccer Match: Walter Bensemann", *The Sports Historian* 17.2 (1997): 1-13.

and restricted) the movement of football labour. Three main sets of determinants can be identified: economic, cultural and institutional or structural. The first of these, economic determinants, are undoubtedly crucial, often taking precedence in the explanatory literature. As we have noted, one possible way of conceptualizing the whole process of football migration has been to see it as a movement of sporting labour from the economic periphery to the economic core. According to one such account, the European core has acted "as a magnet for [football] labour migrants on a global scale".[33] There is certainly a great deal to be said for this type of approach. The movement of playing talent from Africa and Latin America to Europe – and within Europe, from east to west – has been a characteristic of world football for many years. The reasons for this are not difficult to ascertain. Weak national economies and financial crises have often worked to 'push' players out while, on the 'pull' side, the wealthiest European leagues, in particular, have been able to offer unrivalled financial rewards.

However, this type of simplistic centre-periphery model fails to do justice to the complexity of football player migration. First of all, the centre and periphery in football do not correspond completely to the conventional centre and periphery of world system theory. North America, for example, a core economy in every respect, is on the football periphery. In much the same way, many of the peripheral countries of the southern hemisphere (such as Brazil and Argentina) are much closer to the core of world football. The relative development of national football infrastructures is significant here. Within Europe, for instance, one of the main migratory routes has historically been from the 'poorer' north to the 'richer' south, an obvious contrast to general economic relationships. We must remember that many of the rich countries of northern Europe have been exporters rather than importers of football labour. Before 1954, for instance, Dutch football was strictly amateur and so players anxious to earn a living from the game had to go abroad. Faas Wilkes, the most famous Dutch footballer of the period, migrated in 1949, playing first in Italy for Internazionale and then with Valencia in Spain. But his exile meant his exclusion from international football; he did not play again for the Netherlands until he returned home in the mid-1950s.[34] Likewise, before the 1980s the Scandinavian leagues were amateur and still are largely conducted on a semi-professional basis. The pull of lucrative contracts in the professional leagues of the south of Europe has proved to be difficult to resist for generations of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish players.[35]

---

[33] Jonathan Magee, "Historical Concepts of Football and Labour Migration in England", paper presented at the 18th Conference of the British Society of Sports History, Eastbourne, April 1999.

[34] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 206-07.

[35] David Stead, and Joseph Maguire, " 'Rites de Passage' or Passage to Riches? The Motivation and Objectives of Nordic/Scandinavian Players in English League Soccer", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24.1 (2000): 36-60.

A more fundamental problem, however, is that this type of economic-centred explanation is insensitive to socio-cultural differences and the variables of geography, language, religion and colonial and post-colonial ties. For many football migrants, language, culture and heritage have been at least as important as any economic considerations. This is clear if we consider in more detail their precise destinations. The first South Americans to cross the Atlantic in the late 1920s and 1930s, for instance, were certainly attracted by good contracts but also by the prospect of achieving this fortune and fame in the land of their parents. Many of the Argentinian migrants to Europe, for example, were descendents of Italian immigrants who had settled in Argentina in the nineteenth century. The families of Julio Libonatti, who signed for Torino in 1925, and Raimundo Orsi, who joined Juventus in 1928, were both from Genoa. Renato Cesarini, another Juventus signing, had actually been born in Italy. Similarly, the majority of Brazilian migrants to Italy in the 1930s were of Italian descent. Many of them were recruited specifically from the Palestra Italia Club of São Paulo (now Palmeiras).[36] Significantly, these migratory routes have by and large remained consistent over time. Of the 351 foreign players who played professionally in Italy between 1929 and 1965, over half (176) came from Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay, and the majority had Italian origins. And while 70 % of foreign stars in Spanish football during the 1970s came from South America, only seven South Americans in total played in the German Bundesliga between 1963 and 1983.[37] At the end of the twentieth century, Spain, Portugal and Italy were still the pre-eminent destinations for South American footballers, even if migrants from the continent were increasingly found plying their trade in many European countries. In the 1999/2000 season, for example, there were 74 Brazilians in the Portuguese league and 42 Argentinians in Spain. A total of 35 Argentinians and Brazilians, meanwhile, were playing in Italy's Serie A, compared with just 5 in the English Premiership and 12 in the Bundesliga.[38]

A similar pattern can be discerned among African migrants to Europe. From as early as the 1930s, French professional clubs mined their colonies for football talent. Players from the North African territories of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were initially the most common, some following the migratory paths of unskilled immigrant workers, others enrolling as students at French universities. The Algerians Ali Benouma and Kouider Daho were among the first employees in the newly professionalised French national league in 1932: the former combined his contract at FC Sète with manual work in the docks, while the latter continued his medical studies. Most prominent of all the African soccer

[36] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 74-77, 81-82.
[37] Pierre Lanfranchi, "The Migration of Footballers: The Case of France, 1932-1982", Bale and Maguire, *Global Sports Arena* 68.
[38] Paolo Piani, "Studio sull'incidenza degli stranieri nele rose dei club europei", *News letter del settore tenico FIGC* 1.2 (2000).

migrants of the 1930s was the Moroccan-born Larbi Ben Barek, who transferred to Marseille in 1938 and went on to represent the French national side 17 times during the late 1930s and 1940s.[39] North Africans were increasingly involved in the French professional league after the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1962, 76 Algerians, 34 Moroccans and seven Tunisians played in the top level of French football; 12 of these players were selected to represent France. From the 1950s, footballers from Francophone West Africa became equally prominent numerically and symbolically. From negligible numbers in the mid-1950s, there were already some 43 West Africans employed by French clubs in 1960.[40] What is more, from Raoul Diagne and Ben Barek in the 1930s and 1940s, through to Zinadine Zidane and Patrick Viera in the 1990s, African migrants or sons of African migrants have played an important, if complex and changing, role in representing France and articulating notions of French national identity on the football field.[41]

More than any other nation, Portugal built its football reputation upon sons of its colonies and former colonies. From the 1950s, its clubs began to recruit players from Africa, largely as a result of the defeats experienced in propaganda tours to Angola and Mozambique. Players such as Miguel Arcanjo, Lucas Figuereido "Matateu" and Mario Coluna went on to star for their respective club sides and represent Portugal. The most famous Portuguese footballer of all time, Eusebio da Silva, was born in Lourcenco Marques (now Maputo), Mozambique in 1942. He arrived at Benfica of Lisbon in 1961, just a few weeks after a Benfica team featuring four African-born players had won the European Cup. Eusebio went on to gain international recognition as a symbol of Portuguese football and society, playing over sixty times for his nation, becoming European Footballer of the Year in 1965 and winning the Golden Boot at the 1966 World Cup. If by the 1960s Africans were increasingly recognized as the most cost-effective acquisitions for European club sides, they remained concentrated in three countries with a colonial past – Belgium, France and Portugal. Only Britain, at this time a no-go area for 'foreign' footballers in general, failed to utilize its colonial resource to any significant degree.[42] Moreover, long after decolonization these post-colonial connections were still strong. In 2000, 69 % of the Africans in Portuguese football were from the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. Likewise, in France 59 % of the 162 African players were from former French territories while even in Belgium, which had developed more generally over the previous two decades as a 'first stop' for African footballers

---

[39] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 172-73; Darby, "Scramble for Africa".
[40] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 173-75.
[41] See Geoff Hare, *Football in France: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) 131-38.
[42] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 177-80.

and agents looking to develop a career in Europe, the equivalent figure was still 31 %.[43]

Alongside economic factors and cultural and historical traditions, institutional or structural factors have been instrumental in helping to shape patterns of migration. We could mention a number of factors here – many involving governmental and regional agencies outside the football world – but will limit ourselves to the role of national football federations in controlling immigration. A quick snapshot of the 1930s reveals the range of different approaches to the frequently articulated 'problem' of foreign players. At the protectionist end were England and Germany. In 1931, the English FA introduced a two-year residency qualification for non-British professionals in major competitions, which effectively meant that foreigners could only play as amateurs. A planned professional league in Germany was shelved when Hitler came to power in 1933 and the German federation banned the involvement of foreign players and managers at every level. The French professional league, formed in 1932, allowed its clubs to field up to five foreign players in every match. The Italian league, meanwhile, banned non-nationals but permitted the importation of players with dual citizenship (the so-called *rimpatriati*) from South America. At the opposite end of the spectrum to England and Germany was the American Soccer League (ASL) in the United States, which made no restrictions on the grounds of nationality.[44]

After 1945, national immigration policies continued to be important in determining where migrants actually went. Italian football, for instance, opened its doors to foreigners but placed limits on numbers. More interestingly, in 1949, it introduced the concept of the *oriundi* alongside the categories of nationals and foreigners. The *oriundi* – originally from in Spanish – were South American players of Italian or Spanish descent who could have their 'original' citizenship reinstated. In Franco's Spain, meanwhile, reforms in the 1950s led to the development of dual nationality agreements with South American nations, and subsequent increases in the number of imports. But this relative openness to migrant talent was not constant. In France and Spain, the borders were closed to footballers in 1962; they reopened again in the early 1970s. Italy's famous defeat to North Korea in 1966 convinced the federation to shut its gates on foreign entry for over 15 years. English football, which had effectively barred foreign professionals since 1931, finally removed its prohibitive residency qualification in 1978. The loosening and tightening of these restrictions have naturally had a significant effect on patterns of migration over time.

---

[43] Darby, "Scramble for Africa"; Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 182-83.

[44] See Matthew Taylor, *The Leaguers: The Making of Professional Football in England, 1900-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) 237; Pierre Lanfranchi, and Alfred Wahl, "La professionnalisation du football en France (1920-1939)", *Modern & Contemporary France* 6.3 (1998): 313-25; Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) 189-97; Colin Jose, *American Soccer League, 1921-31: The Golden Years of American Soccer* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1998).

Globalization, Internationalization and Migration Systems

From at least the late 1980s, it could be argued that a number of factors combined to transform the international migration of footballers. The 'new' migration in Europe initiated by the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Communist regimes and the subsequent opening of national borders certainly had an impact on the volume of football players exported from Eastern Europe to the West.[45] More significantly, perhaps, the Bosman ruling of 1995 has been deemed responsible for the "internationalization of European league football and a new more globalized pattern of player mobility".[46] The ruling was undoubtedly significant in guaranteeing football players the same freedom enjoyed by other European Union workers to move, once their contracts had ended, to whichever employee they wished without the burden of a transfer fee, although some writers have certainly overplayed its "revolutionary" and "global" impact. In fact, we need to locate the Bosman ruling alongside a range of technological, structural and economic developments that combined to facilitate the increasing volume and speed of football player migration during the 1990s.[47] Of these, the expansion of television coverage was probably most important. It not only allowed many viewers across Europe (and beyond) access for the first time to the matches of the major championships of other nations but, with the reorganization and enlargement of the European Champions League, also increased the amount of non-domestic football shown regularly on national television. All these factors certainly facilitated the development of a vibrant international market and has meant that club owners and managers, as well as spectators, are more likely to have seen their new signings on the screen before they witness them in the flesh.

Yet for all this, it would be mistaken to think that these developments necessarily led to the creation of a global market for football talent. The distinction between globalization and internationalization is significant here. In a recent article on foreign footballers in England after the Second World War, Patrick McGovern has argued that the labour market in English football has been characterized above all by a process of internationalization which is "marked by a

---

[45] Khalis Koser, and Helma Kutz, eds., *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Council of Europe, *People on the Move: New Migration Flows in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1992); Vic Duke, "The Flood from the East?: Perestroika and the Migration of Sports Talent from Eastern Europe", Bale and Maguire, *Global Sports Arena* 153-67.

[46] Takahashi Yoshio, and John Horne, "Japanese Football Players and the Sport Talent Migration Business", *Football Goes East: Business, Culture and the People's Game in China, Japan and South Korea*, eds. W. Manzenreiter and J. Horne (London: Routledge, 2004) 83; John Williams, *Is It All Over?: Can Football Survive the Premier League?* (Reading: South Street Press, 1999) 41.

[47] On this see Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* 222-29.

regional rather than a global orientation".[48] There had, he argues, been remarkable continuity in the underlying trends of player recruitment from 1945 until 1995. Despite a relative decline from the late 1970s, English football continued to draw on talent from what McGovern calls the "Celtic periphery" (Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic) as well as (to a lesser extent) players from the English-speaking Commonwealth. Moreover, he suggests that those "overseas" players who arrived generally came from a small number of regions, principally Scandinavia and Northern Europe, especially the Netherlands. Thus, for McGovern, the notion of a globalized labour market is fundamentally flawed because it ignores the degree to which "labour market behaviour is socially embedded". Employers prefer to "engage in repeated transactions with reliable or known sources" and these transactions are heavily influenced by social and cultural ties and by established historical and economic relationships.[49]

We could build upon McGovern's argument that patterns of international migration within football are "socially embedded" by suggesting that, for the historian, it makes more sense to study the migration of footballers as a series of interlocking migration systems or networks rather than a single global labour market. Indeed it could be argued that a broader geographical and chronological understanding of the phenomenon comes from adopting what has been called a "systems approach". Applied initially by social geographers to the study of rural-urban migration, the systems approach has become a popular tool in the analysis of contemporary international migrations. According to this perspective, migration is a part of wider flows of goods, services, ideas and information and takes place within a set of circuits that form distinct geographical systems. The systems approach has been applied by historians such as Jan Lucassen in his study of migration in the North Sea region of Europe from 1600 to 1900 and, more recently, by Marcelo Borges in his examination of the regional and transatlantic migration circuits of workers from the Algarve between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.[50] What it offers is a means of considering "the migration experience of particular geographical areas within global patterns of migration".[51]

How can we define a migration system? Lucassen has called it a "composite of 'push' and 'pull' areas", while Dirk Hoerder has described it as "empirically

---

[48] Patrick McGovern, "Globalization or Internationalization?: Foreign Footballers in the English League, 1946-95", *Sociology* 36.1 (2002): 30.
[49] McGovern 23, 24, 29-30
[50] Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe: The Drift to the North Sea* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Marcelo J. Borges, "Migrant Systems in Southern Portugal: Regional and Transatlantic Circuits of Labor Migration in the Algarve (Eighteenth-Twentieth Centuries)", *International Review of Social History* 45 (2000): 171-208.
[51] Borges 175.

observable interconnected migrations that continue over time".[52] At a basic level, a migration system is constituted by a group of countries that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants with each other. Such a system may only include two countries, but normally involves all those linked by unusually large migration flows. The existence of a system would also need to include other linkages between countries, such as historical, cultural and colonial ties, along of course with economic connections. Its emergence and perpetuation would rest on a series of networks – be they individuals or institutions, national or international – which link the migrants to the system. And finally, population exchanges within the system involve both permanent and temporary movements (including those of students, military personnel and business men), and thus would have to account for return-migration and re-emigration as well as permanent migration.[53]

Time is perhaps the crucial dimension of migration systems. Systems evolve over time: the product not of short-term flows, but recurrent patterns of migration. But their relative stability and structure does not mean that these systems are not open to change and adaptation over time, responsive to changing social, demographic, economic and political circumstances. Systems can evolve, adapt or disappear entirely and, similarly, while one system might dominate in a specific region, they are not necessarily exclusive and can overlap.

The British Migration System

The application of a systems approach to the migration of footballers can provide interesting perspectives. Above all, what it allows us to do is examine the relationship between regional patterns on the one hand and global patterns on the other. We have already touched upon a number of these systems and can outline the fundamental relationships involved in some of them here in a little more detail. A good example is the system based around England and the countries of the United Kingdom and Ireland, which has been the focus of

---

[52] Lucassen, 4, 100f.; Dirk Hoerder, "Migration in the Atlantic Economies: Regional Economic Origins and Worldwide Expansion", in Dirk Hoerder, and L. P. Moch, *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). See also Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (London: Duke University Press, 2002) 16-19.

[53] Mary M. Kritz, and Hani Zlotnik, "Global Interactions: Migration Systems, Processes, and Policies", *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, eds. M. M. Kritz, L. L. Lim, and H. Zlotnik (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 1-16; John Salt, "A Comparative Overview of International trends and Types, 1950-80", *International Migration Review* 23.3 (1989): 438-41; Douglas S. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouchi, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor, "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal", *Population and Development Review* 19.3 (1993): 431-66; Yoko Sellek, *Migrant Labour in Japan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001): 44-50.

McGovern's work and indeed much of the published research on football migration. As originators of both the modern game of football and its professional variant, we might expect the nations of the United Kingdom to be at the centre of any international migration systems. Yet their role has been characterized by marginality, having little more than intermittent contact with all but a select group of nations.

The dominant migration relationship here has been that within the UK, between England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, with England occupying the central position. From the late nineteenth century, English clubs heavily recruited Scottish players. They were among the first professionals, with some clubs, such as Burnley and the first Liverpool team, relying almost exclusively on Scottish talent. As early as the mid 1880s, there were 58 Scottish professionals registered with clubs south of the border. By 1910, Scots accounted for 168 (19.3 %) of the 870 players in the Football League and even 45 (11.7 %) of the 385 in the rival Southern League. By 1925 the figure had risen to 302 Scottish players in the Football League's four divisions, although this represented a slightly diminished 15.5 % of the total professional workforce.[54] If the Football League vice-president Charles Sutcliffe could call Scotland the "great football emporium" for English recruiters, south Wales had likewise become a "convenient and free football nursery", with Arsenal, for example, reported to have 14 Welsh players in its 1938/39 squad. The movement was not one-way, however, with the best Welsh clubs attracting talent from all parts of the British Isles. Martin Johnes has shown that, of the 94 first-team professional contracted to Cardiff City, Merthyr Town, Newport County and Swansea Town during the 1925/26 season, 42 were English and 18 Scottish, while Cardiff managed to win the 1927 FA Cup Final with only three Welsh players.[55]

Compared to the Welsh, the Irish were less well represented in English football at this stage, although they were tempted in greater numbers to Scottish clubs, particularly those associated with immigrant communities in Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere. Attracted by higher wages than they could claim at home, as many as 20 Irish professionals had reportedly crossed the Irish Sea by 1902. One newspaper bemoaned the fact that the Irish game was being "crippled by the advent of wealthy English clubs bent on securing Irish players at any price".[56] Manchester City and Manchester United, certainly, were associated with the hiring of Irish players long before the First World War, while Leeds City's squad for the 1911/12 season contained 11 Irish footballers, two

---

[54] These figures are adapted from Graham Williams, *The Code War: English Football Under the Historical Spotlight* (Harefield: Yore, 1994); Wray Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 205 (Table 13.5); *Athletic News* 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925.

[55] *Topical Times* 18 March 1933; Martin Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002) 77, 178 (Table 6.1).

[56] *Sport* 20 August 1904. I am grateful to Neal Garnham for this reference.

Scots, two Welshmen and only two native Englishmen.[57] Looking at the post-1945 period, McGovern has emphasized the role of recruitment networks in maintaining the flow of 'Celtic' football talent to particular English clubs but fails to note that these networks were established much earlier. We know that by the 1930s Arsenal, Aston Villa and even Third Division Ipswich Town employed representatives specifically to look out for new players in Scotland; the former also had a scout designated for south Wales. Similarly, many professional clubs regularly visited northern and southern Ireland on scouting assignments and some employed scouts based in Belfast and Dublin.[58]

This basic system organized around England as the buyer (or receiver) of football migrants and the other British nations as sellers (or senders) remained largely in tact until the Second World War. However, the boundaries of the labour market for all British players gradually expanded over the course of the twentieth century as migratory routes multiplied and diversified. The catalyst for the first major migrations of British players were the economic difficulties caused by the depression, which throughout the inter-war years left large numbers of professional footballers unemployed or in a precarious position through reduced wages and even less job security than previously existed. The 'pull' factors were the creation of professional leagues in the United States in the 1920s and France during the 1930s. The ASL successfully recruited a stream of prominent British players, such as Manchester City's Irish forward Mickey Hamill and the Scottish internationals Tommy Muirhead and Alec McNab. By 1926/27, at the height of what became called the "American Menace" by the Scottish and English press, there were as many as 108 Scottish, English and Irish imports in the ASL.[59] The creation of the French league similarly benefited from the availability of large numbers of disengaged British professionals. Attempts to sign major stars, such as Chelsea's Hughie Gallacher and Tommy Law and Arsenal's David Jack, were unsuccessful but the new league still managed to begin its first season with 43 imported Britons – representing over 40 % of the foreign workforce – among its ranks.[60]

One of the other key migrant trails of the twentieth century – the movement of South African players to British football – was also the product of the inter-war years. Liverpool, in particular, recruited a small colony of South Africans in the 1920s and 1930s, including goalkeeper Arthur Riley and inside-forward Gordon Hodgson. Their success stimulated a consistent flow of South African talent to British clubs throughout the 1930s: at Huddersfield Town, for instance, which recruited the goalkeeper Dennis Leary and right-winger George

---

[57] *Athletic News* 14 August 1911.
[58] McGovern; *Topical Times* 8 December 1934; Aston Villa Football Club, Ramsay Correspondence Files, 52/82, letters from George Ramsay (Aston Villa secretary) to Scottish scout "McIlroy", 1919-22; Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Town Football Club, Board Minutes, 5 September 1938.
[59] See Jose, American Soccer League.
[60] Lanfranchi and Wahl, "La professionnalisation du football" 316-21.

Wienand, and at Clyde, where the Johannesburg-born centre-forward Dudley Milligan plied his trade. After the Second World War, Charlton Athletic's manager Jimmy Seed re-trod the Liverpool path by exploiting the South African resource, bringing in players like Eddie Firmani (later an Italian international) and John Hewie (later a Scottish international). By 1964, the FA could report that the "great majority" of the small colony of foreign employees in the top two English divisions came from South Africa.[61]

The movement of footballers after 1945 built upon these established migrant trails. The Scottish contingent remained easily the largest, representing just over two-thirds (68.4 %) of all 'foreign' players engaged in the Football League (and Premiership) from 1946 to 1995.[62] One study found that some 1,653 Scots had played in the English league from 1946 to 1981, the majority arriving in the 1950s and 1960s. Sixty-one players moved from the Scottish to the English league between 1968/69 and 1972/73, but the trend was nonetheless downwards. Whereas the number of Scots in the Football League totalled 258 in 1965, this figure had dropped to 198 by 1975.[63] What characterized the period from the 1970s onwards not so much the replacement of the British-based migration system as its extension. The key change in terms of the importation of migrant labour was, as we saw earlier, the lifting of the effective ban on overseas players, leading to the arrival of Ossie Ardiles and Ricky Villa at Tottenham Hotspur and, shortly afterwards, Arnold Muhren and Frans Thijssen at Ipswich Town. Scandinavian players had already filtered into the system through Scotland (which had no ban on foreign players) and were joined by Dutch, Yugoslavs and the already established flows of players from the British Commonwealth (especially South Africa) as the main 'foreign' imports up until 1985 (see Tables 1 and 2).

Significantly, at different times over this period, the British system became linked to other regional systems, through the export of players to Colombia in the early 1950s, North America during the 1970s and increasingly the major European leagues of Spain, France, Italy and Germany from the late 1970s onwards. The movement of players to the USA and Canada, in particular, showed the significance of established migratory routes which may wane according to circumstances, but can then re-emerge, as this did from the late 1960s. By 1978, 214 British professional footballers were employed in the North American Soccer League (NASL).[64] Many of these closely resembled the collection of youngsters, veterans and fringe athletes who had made the

---

[61] Jimmy Seed, *The Jimmy Seed Story* (London: Phoenix, 1957) 53-61; FA Yearbook, 1964/65.

[62] McGovern 29.

[63] H. F. Moorhouse, "Blue Bonnets over the Border: Scotland and the Migration of Footballers", Bale and Maguire, *Global Sports Arena* 81; Bob Crampsey, *The Scottish Footballer* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1978) 32.

[64] Data drawn from Colin Jose, *NASL: A Complete Record of the North American Soccer League* (Derby: Breedon Books, 1989).

same journey to the ASL fifty years earlier. What the NASL also demonstrated was the crucial role of recruitment networks based on national and personal connections. The fact that the British dominated NASL rosters, representing between 20 and 40 % of the entire league personnel throughout the 1970s, is hardly coincidental. Former Welsh international Phil Woosnam was Commissioner of the league from 1969 to 1983, and explicitly targeted British clubs and associations. In 1972 he wrote to all Football League clubs detailing the ideal types of players NASL clubs would like to recruit, with details of pay and conditions.[65] The establishment of a loan system also allowed British footballers to become seasonal migrants and in many cases formalized the links between employers in North America and Britain.

Table 1: Regional Origins of Non-English and Welsh Players
in the English Football League, 1976-95

Region	*% (No.)* 1976-85	*% (No.)* 1986-95	*Total No.*
Celtic (Sco, Irl, N.I.)	80.3 (288)	56.5 (281)	569
Western Europe	5.8 (21)	11.9 (59)	80
Scandinavia	2.8 (10)	10.7 (53)	63
Commonwealth	2.5 (9)	8.7 (43)	52
Central and E. Europe	5.0 (18)	5.6 (28)	46
Africa	1.7 (6)	2.6 (13)	19
Latin America	1.9 (7)	1.6 (8)	15
USA/Other	0.0 (0)	2.4 (12)	12
Total	100.0 (359)	100.0 (497)	856

Source: Patrick McGovern, "Globalization or Internationalization? Foreign Footballers in the English League, 1946-95", *Sociology* 36.1 (2002) 30 (Table 1).

---

[65] Professional Footballers' Association, American Soccer Files, Circular from Phil Woosnam to Football League Club Managers, 19 January 1972.

Table 2: Origins of Foreign Imports Registered with
Football League Clubs, September 1980

Country of Origin	No.
Yugoslavia	11
Argentina	4
Holland	4
Poland	3
Denmark	2
Israel	2
South Africa	2
Belgium	1
Finland	1
Italy	1
Spain	1
Switzerland	1

Source: Data drawn from Professional Footballers' Association, Work Permits File, 1978-80.
List of Foreign Players, 29 September 1980.

The crucial change to occur in the British migration system over the last fif-
teen years of the twentieth century was the transformation of England particu-
larly (but also Scotland to a lesser extent) into a major importer of football
talent. The British or Celtic dimension of recruitment was still evident but
declined further still from the late 1970s. Whereas 80.3 % of the non-English
and Welsh players in the Football League between 1976 and 1985 came from
Scotland, Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, this figure dropped to
56.5 % in the subsequent ten years (Table 1). Indeed, McGovern has shown
that from the mid-1980s the volume of Scottish and Irish signings in English
football fell below those coming from 'international' destinations for the first
time.[66] Much can be made of this move towards what is often seen as an 'inter-
national' or 'global' dimension of recruitment. The rapid increase in the num-
ber of foreign players in British football in the 1990s can hardly be questioned.
There were just 11 foreigners in the Premiership in the 1992/93 season, but this
figure rose to 66 in 1995/96 and had reached 166 by the 1998/99 season. And
while English clubs had recruited players from 23 different countries before
1985, ten years later this figure had reached 41, with 22 nationalities repre-
sented in the Premiership alone.[67] All this certainly suggests an increasing
diversification of migratory routes into British football and an emerging global
dimension to its labour recruitment strategies. What is more, the importation of
leading players from France, Italy and directly from South American countries

---

[66] McGovern 29.
[67] Williams, Is It All Over? 41.

did suggest that this particular UK-based migration system was beginning to establish more permanent links with other systems. Yet all this should not deflect us from the salience of recurrent patterns of migration, based on well-established circuits – involving players from Scandinavia, the Netherlands and the British Commonwealth as well as the UK itself – and on social ties and networks which tended to be relatively limited in geographical scope.

Other Migration Systems: South America, South Europe and Japan

Another interesting example that has already been mentioned, and which we can briefly sketch here, is what might be called the South American-South European migration system.[68] At the core of this system was the so-called 'ethnic' migration of the 1930s which connected Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay as sending countries to the receiving region of southern Europe, principally Italy but also Spain and, to a lesser extent, France. Notwithstanding its centrality, this system had also been bound up with other continental migration systems in both Europe and South America. Thus while Argentina has been central to this transatlantic flow, it has also had an essential position at the heart of the South American system, attracting players consistently from most countries in the continent from the 1930s and 1940s onwards. What is more, the waxing and waning of different migration systems over time is well illustrated in this case. During the 1960s and 1970s, the transcontinental system co-existed with the transatlantic system. The former was preeminent in the 1960s, when South American clubs, often under political influence, placed restrictions on the freedom of movement of the best players. At Santos, for example, Pelé received the favours of the authorities and lucrative contracts from his club but was pressurized into remaining in Brazil. Likewise, in Argentina international players were required to stay at home and the best clubs were encouraged to invest in Argentine nationals as well as the best talent from Peru, Brazil and Uruguay. The latter suffered particularly from this transcontinental migration. Rafael Bayce counted 625 professional footballers who left Uruguay in the period 1958 to 1983, of whom only one in six went to Europe compared with one in four employed in Argentina.[69]

From the 1970s migration to Europe slowly increased, with the Spanish league emerging as the principal destination for South American players, during a period when Italy maintained its ban on foreign imports. As in the case of the British system, we can see here that the 1990s explosion in the migration of

---

[68] See Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving With the Ball* chapter 3.
[69] Rafael Bayce, "Deporte y sociedad", *El Uruguay de nuestro tiempo 1958-1983* (Montevideo: CLAEH, 1983) 49-72.

footballers was less 'new' than is often assumed and actually built upon existing patterns and networks. The established migratory routes from South America to Europe remained remarkably resilient and while the volume of migration undoubtedly increased, the relative distribution of nationalities throughout Europe, as we saw earlier, stayed much the same. Careful historical analysis shows us that 'evolution' and 'continuity' are as useful in understanding these developments as 'revolution' and 'change'.

Even the most contemporary examples of football migration can best be understood in the context of established migration systems. This is clear in Takahashi Yoshio and John Horne's work on Japanese footballers. At first glance, the Japanese football migrant might seem to have been a product of the age of globalization but Yoshio and Horne demonstrate that there is a history to this phenomenon that can help us to make sense of the migratory patterns from the 1990s onwards. They identify three specific time periods in the geographical movement of Japanese players: the "seeds" of migration from the 1970s until the professionalisation of Japanese soccer and the creation of the J-League in 1993; the "shoots", from 1993 to qualification for the French World Cup in 1997; and the "fruits" from the 1998 World Cup onwards. The first period witnessed the initial movement of Japanese footballers abroad. The majority of these migrants – 16 out of 20 in total – went to South America and even Okudera Yasuhiko, the first Japanese player to achieve success in Europe – moved to West Germany after first gaining overseas experience with Palmeiras in Brazil. During the second period, six players moved to European leagues but 10 went to South America. The importance of South America as a destination can be explained by a range of factors, from the broader migratory links between Japan and many South American nations to the various informal and formal ties and networks established between players, coaches and clubs in both regions. Only in the third period – after 1997 – did migration to South American decline relatively, with Europe emerging as the preeminent receiving region and clubs elsewhere in Asia, as well as Oceania and North and Central America, emerging as new destinations for Japanese players. Yoshio and Horne explain this shift by reference to the declining economic stability of South American clubs, the increased exposure of Japanese players on a world stage and the "footballisation" of East Asia, involving the growth of professional football infrastructures throughout the region.[70] But, as in the case of the previous systems, we should not make too much of recent changes and thus neglect the established migratory routes between Japan and South America that remain active below the surface.

---

[70] Yoshio and Horne, "Japanese Football Players" 69-86.

Conclusion

It has only been possible in this paper to provide a brief overview of the history of the migration of footballers and its relationship to broader patterns of migration and notions of globalization. Yet one or two tentative conclusions can be made. The main argument here is that much of the movement of footballers across national and continental borders in football's own "age of migration" is actually based on established systems and networks. The story is of the adaptation of existing patterns rather than any radical breach with the past. Thus the importation by English clubs of greater numbers of foreign footballers over recent years can be seen as an extension of the traditional migratory systems which brought Scottish, Welsh and Irish players to the Football League from the 1880s, South African and other Commonwealth athletes from the interwar years and Scandinavians, Argentinians and Yugoslavs from the 1970s. Similarly, in many respects players like Gabriel Batistuta and Ronaldo were treading similar paths in the 1990s as Orsi and Cesarini did in the 1930s. Borges' observation of the historical development of Algarvian migration is equally apposite to the movement of football players: "Migration does not occur in a vacuum, nor is it a spontaneous phenomenon. People build migration paths on previous traditions, using past experiences and the useful information gained from them."[71]

This is not to place too much emphasis on continuity. Nobody would deny that the nature of the international football market, like the labour market more generally, underwent considerable modifications from the 1990s, not least in the sheer volume of player movement. According to the authors of the official centenary history of FIFA, for example, 1478 international transfer requests were processed in the year 2000 alone.[72] More than this, there were increasing signs of the integration of these different regional and intercontinental systems, with the system based around Europe – and the major European leagues – forming a central core for aspirant footballers throughout the world. Yet it remains clear that where these players chose to go – and where clubs decided to look for players – was not indiscriminate, but determined by long-established colonial, cultural, linguistic, social and personal connections. To understand the migration of footballers in the 'age of globalization', we must be conscious of its history.

---

[71] Borges 207.
[72] Pierre Lanfranchi, Christiane Eisenberg, Tony Mason and Alfred Wahl, *100 Years of Football: The FIFA Centenary Book* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004) 97.