

NATIONAL TEAMS, MULTIPLE LOYALTIES. A DISCUSSION OF THREE FOOTBALL CASE STUDIES

Selecciones nacionales, lealtades múltiples. Una discusión de tres casos de fútbol

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ABSTRACT: In several Western European countries, multi-ethnic societies are also reflected in national football teams that field players of migrant origin. This article presents an empirical analysis of how football players with dual identities have negotiated their allegiances to their 'home' and 'adoptive' footballing countries. Research is conducted through inductive analysis of empirical data based on three case studies from Germany, Switzerland and France, dating from 2018. These cases highlight the different manners in which such football players are confronted with their dual identities when opting for the National Team of their «country of adoption». Our findings reveal that, while the national identity of professional players seems to be largely irrelevant in the globalised Football Clubs and Leagues of Western Europe, players with migrant background face serious difficulties when expressing, spontaneously or intentionally, their dual allegiance. The main theoretical contribution of the article is the conceptualisation of a process in which large parts of public opinion and media discourse, even in countries with a long-standing history of migration, have trouble to come to terms with dual loyalties. In those cases, football players face a demand to explicitly make public their allegiance when bearing the nation's «colours» on the football pitch.

Palabras clave

Identidad nacional
Identidades duales
Fútbol
Selección nacional

RESUMEN: En varios países de la Europa occidental podemos encontrar sociedades con una composición multi-étnica que se refleja también en la composición de sus equipos nacionales de fútbol, los que cada vez alinean más jugadores de origen emigrante. Este artículo, con un énfasis principalmente empírico, analiza cómo los jugadores de fútbol con identidad nacional dual negocian su adhesión a su país de origen y al país de adopción futbolística. La investigación se plantea mediante tres casos de estudio situados en Alemania, Suiza y Francia en 2018. En estos casos se analiza la manera en que distintos futbolistas se han enfrentado a su identidad dual al jugar en la selección nacional de su país de adopción. El principal resultado de la investigación sugiere que, mientras la identidad nacional de los futbolistas parece no ser excesivamente relevante en las competiciones Europeas de clubes, no ocurre lo mismo con las selecciones nacionales. Jugadores con origen emigrante encuentran tremendas dificultades para expresar, de manera sencilla o espontánea, su identidad dual dentro del fútbol de selecciones. La principal contribución teórica del artículo es una conceptualización del proceso por el que una gran parte de la opinión pública y del discurso de los medios de comunicación, incluso en países con una amplia tradición de acogida de emigrantes como Francia, Suiza o Alemania, tienen dificultades para entender las complejidades de las identidades duales. En esos casos, los futbolistas se ven forzados a hacer pública, de manera clara y expresa, su lealtad hacia los «colores» de su país sobre el terreno de juego.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROLOGUE: «HEIMAT»

«*Heimat*» is one of those perfectly untranslatable German words loaded with emotion. It stems from the same lexical field as «Home» («*Heim*»), but carries many additional semantic connotations of romantic soul-searching, regional roots and cultural belonging. The term «*Heimat*» is a *singulare tantum*, a noun that describes an abstract concept that only exists in its singular form. Therefore, it is all the more surprising that the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in his quality as official Head of State, deliberately ignored this grammatical restriction by declaring, at the official annual celebrations of «Germany Unity Day» on October 3rd, 2017, that «*Heimat* also exists in the plural» (Der Spiegel, 2017). He did so by insisting on Germany's remarkable success-story of decades of integration of migrants, as an antidote to current migration anxieties following what is generally referred to as «the 2015 Refugees Crisis». He added: «a human being can have more than one *Heimat*, one can find a new *Heimat*, and our Federal Republic has already provided proof of this claim for millions of people» (ibidem: par. 43).

Listening to this speech, it was easy to predict that the sentence «*Heimat* also exists in the plural» was likely to make the headlines the next day and to be passionately and polemically discussed in both traditional media and social networks. In hindsight, however, it was rather difficult to anticipate that within a few months, the President would have to use the very same message when trying to extinguish a particularly heated public debate about the «Germanness» of two pillars of the national football team. It was in vain: on Sunday July 22, 2018, Mesut Özil resigned from the German National Team, precisely because he claimed he was denied the right to have a plural *Heimat*.

The focus of this contribution lies with the question of dual identities in contemporary football and the loyalty pressure it produces on players in both their culture of origin and the society of their country of adoption. Our objective is to discuss whether, in the context of national football teams, *Heimat* can actually be in the plural. How do professional football players of migrant origin negotiate their dual identity? Rather than on Football Clubs or Professional Leagues, the article focuses on National Teams, as they have been widely considered an important element of national identity formation or consolidation. Thus, we aim to discuss the extent to which footballers of migrant background are, against their will, forced to explain themselves publicly on their loyalty to the country of adoption, and the socio-cultural reaction to cases when the loyalty issue becomes problematic.

Based on several decades of research on international football and national identity, as well as on expert interviews before and after the 2018 World Cup in Russia, this paper aims to discuss three case studies, to understand recent evolutions in attitudes to players with migrant background in National Teams. The three case studies are presented in the form of vignettes or episodes: the first involving Mesut Özil and his German-Turkish identity. The second presents the French National Team (World Champions) and their players of migrant origin. Finally, the cases of Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri and their controversial reinvigoration of their Kosovar origin whilst representing Switzerland in the World Cup. Following the exploration of these case studies along five episodes, we put our findings into perspective in the last one. The article concludes with a discussion on what lessons can be drawn from the analysis of these case studies, and ends with a short epilogue that reflects on the future challenges that immigration is posing to national football teams.

Episode 1. GERMANY, SUMMER 2018: AN INTEGRATION SUCCESS STORY WITH AN UNHAPPY ENDING.

When Mesut Özil publicly resigned from the German National Team only one week after the 2018 World Cup finished, his decision sent a shockwave through German media and society. His open letter in English, posted in three parts on his Facebook page, cited «racism and lack of respect» as main motivations for this step, which he said he had taken «with a heavy heart» (Özil, 2018). Mesut Özil had played 92 international matches for Germany; he was a member of the World Cup winning team in 2014.

Özil's resignation was the result of a highly charged public debate in Germany, across all traditional media and social networks, following the publication of a photo taken on May 13, 2018 with the Turkish President Recep Tayip Erdoğan at an event in London. In that picture, Özil and Erdoğan were also accompanied by two other German-born players of Turkish origin, Ilkay Gündoğan (also a German international), and Cenk Tosun (who had opted to play for the Turkish National Team). The three players offered dedicated jerseys of their respective clubs to Mr. Erdoğan, addressing him as «my President» (Olterman, 2018: par. 3).

That photo opportunity, organised by the three players' agents, was interpreted as an active support for the election campaign of a politician, whose autocratic and authoritarian tendencies were deemed perfectly incompatible with the democratic values embodied by the Federal Republic of Germany. Moreover, President Erdoğan had, over recent years, repeatedly slandered Germany in an aggressive manner, comparing current German politics to Nazi methods, and encouraging German citizens with Turkish origins to willingly resist integration in German society.

In the two months between the day the photo was published worldwide and the resignation letter posted by Mesut Özil, the (justified) criticism of this more than awkward endorsement of a political leader with semi-dictatorial attitudes was quickly followed by highly emotional reactions on social media. Özil and Gündoğan were massively booed by the spectators of the last preparation games before the 2018 World Cup; the pros and cons for the exclusion of both players from the national squad were the object of a heated debate. At the same time, the output of the social networks was increasingly dominated by a very active minority with strong racist undertones (Schulze-Marmeling, 2018).

The helpless and somewhat erratic manner in which the German Football Federation (DFB in German), and especially its President Reinhard Grindel, tried to steer through this crisis contributed to its escalation. Neither the President, nor the National Coach Joachim Löw, who was known to hold Mesut Özil in high esteem, nor the Team's Manager, Oliver Bierhoff, fully understood the symbolic dimensions of what had become «the Özil Affair». A quickly arranged «explanation» between the players and the three representatives of the Federation had no consequences whatsoever. Similarly, the two players' visit to Germany's Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and a joint statement on their conversation, including the President's insistence on *Heimat* in the plural (Der Spiegel, 2018), were considered by many as too little, too late. The harm was already done. All the more so as Özil—contrary to Gündoğan, who tried to apologise for the bad impression left by the photo opportunity with Erdoğan, pledging his full identification with the German Team— had stoically refused to apologise for his endorsement of Erdoğan, or at least publicly explain it. A wall of silence that was only broken by his triple Facebook posts on July 22.

Some had hoped that success on the pitch at the Russian 2018 World Cup would calm things down. Needless to say, the simple fact that the German Team was eliminated in the first round for the first time in its long history, after losing to Mexico and South Korea, did not mitigate the inflammation of the public debate. While game statistics provided evidence that Mesut Özil had been one of the rare players to deliver a perfectly satisfying performance, he was nonetheless blamed by a large number of media pundits and anonymous commentators for having unsettled or destabilised the team.

When Özil finally published his resignation statement on Facebook a week after the World Cup final, another controversial debate was ignited between those (including other players) who categorically—and rather credibly—rejected the existence of racism within the DFB and the National Team, and those who showed understanding for his act and saw the whole affair as evidence for widely shared, latent anti-Turkish racism in German society.

Again, this paper is not about racism or discrimination in international football. The topic has been widely and competently addressed by academic research (Burdsey, 2011; Cashmore and Cleland, 2014; Dembowski et al., 2015; Garland and Rowe, 2001; González and Martín, 2006; Llopis-Goig, 2009; Merkel and Tokarski, 1996). And since racism or discrimination are highly unlikely to be eradicated any time soon for a number of reasons, they will continue to be major issues in the overall debate of professional football's commitment to ethical and social responsibility (Sonntag and Ranc, 2015).

Episode 2. FLASHBACK, EIGHT YEARS EARLIER: HANDLING LOYALTY PRESSURE

On October 8, 2010, Mesut Özil had already been the object of a famous photo with a leading politician.

Eighteen months after his first cap with the German National Team, and only three months after signing up for *Real Madrid* following a brilliant World Cup performance that made him an emblematic player of the new multicultural German Team, Özil was in the line-up for a particularly sensitive qualifier for the 2012 European Championship against Turkey in the Berlin *Olympiastadion*. As could be expected, a large crowd from the Turkish diaspora in Germany occupied two thirds of the 75,000 seats, turning the match into a somewhat surrealistic away-game for Germany.

For many of those spectators, «the dogma of singular national identity» described by Yağmur Nuhurat in her excellent study *Mediating Turkishness in Transnational Football* (Nuhurat, 2015: 133), was clearly not negotiable. Considering Özil a «traitor» to the land of their ancestors—despite the fact that he had been born and raised as third-generation migrant in Germany—they booed and whistled his every move on the pitch. Impressively, given the pressure he was exposed to, Özil delivered a brilliant performance scoring a goal, but diplomatically refraining from celebrating it. The most important moment of this match, however, took place in the team's changing room, when Chancellor Angela Merkel dropped by to congratulate the players, most of whom she personally knew already from previous occasions. The photo that was taken on this occasion, showing Mrs Merkel shaking hands with a half-

naked, smiling Mesut Özil, was turned by the Chancellery's communication service into an instant icon of Germany's migration history.

It is not exaggerated to claim that Mesut Özil has been instrumentalized twice in his career by political leaders for their respective agenda. One may argue that there is a qualitative difference between being used as symbol for an overall humanistic integration policy and being asked to endorse an increasingly authoritarian regime that raised worldwide concerns on its respect of civil liberties. The fact remains that the footballer himself had not actively asked for either of the photos. It may be convenient to accuse politicians of using football for their own purposes but, how could they do otherwise? In football-crazy countries —of which the European continent counts a significant number— it is only coherent that the highly symbolic character of the National Teams is exploited by leading politicians. In the «stress communities» that our contemporary Nation-States have become (Sloterdijk, 1999), they are in desperate need of the rare and essential moments of emotional cohesion that football can provide.

Football players have always been «ambassadors against their will», as Ilkay Gündoğan's brother Ilker, a PhD student in East Asian Studies, formulated in a reflective blogpost in Spring 2018 (Gündoğan, 2018). From the moment national football teams appeared at the beginning of the 20th Century, they have been perceived as «uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feeling» (Hobsbawm, 1990: 143). It is only logical that Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal concept of the «imagined community» —which, according to Eric Hobsbawm «seems more real as a team of eleven named people» (ibidem.) — has undoubtedly been the most-quoted reference at each and every international football conference.

Today, however, the community they are supposed to embody has changed. In multicultural societies, dual identities are no longer a rare exception, but a reality experienced by a significant number of individuals in a variety of configurations. Of course, rather than mirror the effective ethnic diversity of a given society, a National Team mainly reflects the rules and practices governing citizenship and access to nationality that are currently in vigour in the Nation-State concerned. But even in countries where the acquisition of national citizenship by migrants —often referred to as naturalization, a revealing term on our conception of Nation-States— is facilitated and dual citizenship is legally possible, the question of *loyalty* never seems entirely settled.

In the midst of the *Özil Affair*, on July 2018, the German journalist and book author of Turkish origin, Baha Güngör, summed this issue up in an interview for the Cologne Daily *Kölner Stadt-anzeiger*:

«This young man is currently suffering the fate of hundreds of thousands Germans with Turkish origins, who have entirely integrated into German society, but who, precisely because they also acknowledge their Turkish roots, find themselves permanently between the frontlines. This is something that each normal citizen of Turkish origin experiences, the fact that he is asked again and again to make a profession of loyalty for one of the two sides. Society does not grant him to be both at the same time: German and Turkish.» (Nägele, 2018: par. 14)

Clearly, Turkey, with its rather archaic understanding of nationality, does not have the monopoly of *the dogma of singular national identity*. Quite on the contrary: Football, with the highly emotional discourse it triggers, reveals that the dogma seems just as well and alive in

the mindset of large parts of one of the most open and multicultural societies in Western Europe. One might argue that Germany's acceptance of its undeniable character as mass immigration country and its introduction of a new citizenship law including the option of dual nationalities in 1999 are still very recent phenomena¹, and that the internalization of such massive cultural change simply needs time. But Germany is not alone in having trouble to come to terms with multiple loyalties in practice, while tolerating them in theory and principle. In a country like France, which looks back on 150 years of rather successful integration of massive successive waves of immigration (Noiriel, 1988), the question has been flaring up regularly over the last decades.

Episode 3. FRANCE, SUMMER 2018: AFRICAN WORLD CHAMPIONS?

On July 17, 2018, in his late-night show on American television, the South-African born entertainer Trevor Noah jokingly picked up a comment that had already been made on Twitter. To him, thanks to the visible presence of players of African origin in the French team, Africa had won the World Cup (Timsit, 2018).

This relatively cheap joke, which deliberately ignored the complexity of the nexus of family origins, citizenship and personal loyalties, set off a rather serious controversy. The French Ambassador to the United States, Gérard Araud, known to be a rather unconventional and open-minded man, addressed Noah an official letter in which he reminded him that 21 of the 23 French players had been born in France, pointing out the difference between the American and French concepts of ethnicity:

«Unlike the United States of America, France does not refer to their citizens based on their race, religion or origin. To us, there is no hyphenated identity, roots are an individual reality. By calling them an African team, it seems you are denying their Frenchness. This, even in jest, legitimizes the ideology which claims whiteness as the only definition of being French.» (Araud, 2018)

Needless to say, Trevor Noah had an easy time ridiculing the Ambassador's letter in his next show. And he enjoyed doing so with the applause of an audience that was all too willing to show its political correctness in supporting ethnic minorities against French neo-colonialist supremacy. Both Noah and his public were in sharp contrast to Barack Obama, himself a member of an ethnic minority, but staunch defender of integration through full citizenship without discrimination. Speaking at an event in South Africa to commemorate the 100th birthday of Nelson Mandela, he said: «The French Football Team just won the World Cup. Not all of these folks look like Gauls to me. But they're French. They're French» (France24, 2018: par. 3).

«Why can't they be both?» Noah asked, from his point of view (Timsit, 2018). While he was celebrating hyphenated difference, Obama was commending indifference to racial or religious characteristics, very much in the understanding of the French Republic. And rather in line with the French players with African migration background themselves. Not a single one of them seemed willing to be used as spokesperson or representative of an ethnic minority.

¹ For more details on this issue, see Sonntag (2015).

In the night of the final, when a Tweet attributed each of the squad's 23 names a national flag according to their presumed origins, left back Benjamin Mendy reproduced the same Tweet, but with a French *tricolore* in front of each name and the simple legend «fixed», accompanied by a smiling emoji.

At the end of the year, the Paris New Year's Eve party always uses the *Arc de Triomphe* as a giant projection screen for a spectacular light show. On December 31st, 2018, a tribute to the World Cup winners was of course inevitable. What the organisers did was simply project the 23 names together with the name of the city or village where they grew up. The glamorous capital taking a deep bow to places like Ménival, Lagny-sur-Marne, Jeumont, Bondy or Mâcon—it is difficult to imagine a more appropriate symbol of national cohesion.

What this episode about the «Frenchness» of the «African» World Cup winners highlights is, on the one hand, a long-standing lack of understanding between French and Anglo-American notions of citizenship, identity and community. On the other hand, it also shows an evolution in the discourse on national belonging and ethnical origins, both internationally and within France. In order to understand this evolution, it is revealing to go back 20 years in time to analyse the World Cup victory of another French multi-ethnic football team.

Episode 4. FLASHBACK, TWENTY YEARS EARLIER: FRENCH ASSIMILATION AND ITS LIMITS

The French Team to win the World Cup at home in 1998 was hailed, both domestically and abroad, as a highly symbolic collective for France's multicultural society. The three colours of the national flag —«*bleu-blanc-rouge*»— were transformed into the famous «*black-blanc-beur*» slogan, in allusion to the ethnic mix of the team, which included several black players (both French-born in overseas territories and of genuine migrant origin), white players from very different regions in France, as well as Zinedine Zidane, the icon of the North African community (colloquially referred to as «*beur*»), whose parents had immigrated from Algeria.

In the collective euphoria of the moment, the evident harmony within this remarkably homogeneous and sympathetic team was extrapolated—with media, politicians and major intellectuals in rare union—in an almost desperate manner as emblematic for the entire nation. The collective exhilaration responded to the national soul-searching on immigration that had been going on over a good part of the 1990s, especially following the emergence and consolidation of the extreme right-wing party *Front National* (today renamed *Rassemblement National*) and its aggressive anti-immigration rhetoric. Heated debates about successive incidents with veiled Muslim girls in public secondary education put growing pressure on the French model of strict secularism (*laïcité*), while a flurry of academic publications, which were widely discussed in mainstream media, attempted to take stock of the efficiency with which generations of migrants from very different origins had been integrated into French society (Noiriel, 1988; Schnapper, 1991; Todd, 1994; Tribalat, 1995, 1996; Weil, 1991²). The creation of what has now become the «National Museum for the History of Immigration» in Paris was

² For an excellent summary of the debate in mainstream media, see also Bernard (1995).

also launched at the end of the 1990s. Needless to say, the Museum flags a section on migration's contributions to French sporting successes.

Alas, the harmony of the Summer of 1998 could not possibly last. On October 6, 2001, the first ever friendly match between France and Algeria —almost forty years after the latter's independence— had to be called off after 76 minutes due to a pitch invasion by hundreds of youths of North African descent waving Algerian flags, emotionally overwhelmed by the event and the complexity of their own feelings. The very fact that they appeared lost between two loyalties perceived as conflicting, rather than aggressively protesting against discrimination or whatever perceived tort, was very lucidly analysed by an external observer like Herman Lebovics: «These young people felt an urgent need to establish a certain cultural identity in France, among the French. In French, unlike American English, compound ethnic labels like *Algerian-French* have no accepted meaning» (Lebovics, 2004: 142).

Events like this match —there has never been a second friendly between the two nations so far— highlight the limits of the long-standing French tradition of assimilation. Assimilation is a radical concept, based on the universalism of the French Revolution: the newly arrived Other is fully accepted, without any reserves or discrimination, but his cultural difference is categorically rejected, and it is expected he/she completely and very rapidly adopts the values and socio-cultural norms of the host nation (Bistolfi, 1994). Cultural traditions and especially religious habits from the culture of origin are of course perfectly tolerated, but must remain strictly limited to the private sphere and cannot possibly be the basis of a «minority community». It is worth noting that the term «*communautarisme*», translated from the Anglo-American philosophy of «communitarianism», has a very negative connotation and is deemed incompatible with Republican principles (Taguieff, 2005).

In December 2012, one of the authors of this paper conducted an interview with Raymond Kopa, then aged 81, the first superstar of French football, who had been a member of the *Real Madrid* Team of the 1950s and was awarded the «*Ballon d'Or*» for the best European player of the year in 1958. In his younger years, Kopa's family name was famously shortened from the original Kopaszewski, the name of his Polish grandfather, who had migrated to France in 1919 seeking work in the coalmines of the North. Note that «Raymond», the first name of this third-generation migrant, was already as French as could be. During the interview, Kopa agreed that football had been a formidable means of social mobility for him, but showed no understanding whatsoever for the researcher's insistent questions about the function of role model he must have had for the Polish community in Northern France. The very notion of «community» seemed to escape him entirely: «I was French, what else would you want me to be?» he shrugged the idea off. In other words, Raymond Kopa was an individual who had completely interiorised the principle of assimilation.

Today, even in France, this «one-way street» of integration is no longer the prevalent doctrine. Cultural origins of migrants are met with a higher degree of respect, even in the public space, especially with regards to demonstrations in favour of minorities. High-level politicians have begun to use the term «community» in reference to specific minorities (while, somewhat incoherently, still rejecting «*le communautarisme*»). None of them would openly advocate full assimilation, a concept that is now connotated to neo-colonialist attitudes.

However, the close observation of how the national football team is perceived by public opinion and the behaviour of the players, most of whom (unlike Mesut Özil in Germany) seem fully aware of their role of «ambassadors against their will», reveal a discrepancy between

the evolution of politically correct discourse and widely spread attitudes. While «integration» as a reciprocal adaptation process between host culture and migrant that ideally produces an «enrichment» of both has become the official doctrine, it may be argued that there remains a deep-seated longing for «assimilation» among large parts of French society. In other words, the «good» individual with migrant background is the one who repeatedly points out how French he/she is. But real and complete assimilation to one's adoptive culture is difficult, and football competitions provide numerous examples of it. We turn now to examine a clear case of how football is a perfect field to demonstrate dual, and even contradictory, identities and loyalties.

Episode 5. SWITZERLAND, SUMMER 2018: UNFORGETTABLE LOYALTIES

On June 22, 2018, Switzerland's late victory (2-1) over Serbia in a World Cup group stage match in Kaliningrad sparked a political controversy. An early goal by Alexander Mitrovic for the Serbians was cancelled out by Granit Xhaka seven minutes into the second half, and a ninetieth minute strike by Xherdan Shaqiri (Lowe, 2018a). Both players of Kosovar origin and Albanian descent celebrated their goals with a hand gesture representing a double-headed eagle, a recreation of the Albanian flag's black emblem. The dramatic last-minute winner, with Shaqiri taking his shirt off and doing the double-eagle gesture along the side of the pitch, followed a game on which local Russian fans joined Serbian supporters in chants of «Serbia-Russia, Serbia-Russia» (Lowe, 2018a).

Kosovo's struggle for independence against the backdrop of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and highly sensitive Albano-Serbian ethnic conflicts have transpired into sport, especially football, in recent years. The Kosovo Football Association was recognised by UEFA and FIFA in 2016 (UEFA, 2016), eight years after the country's self-proclaimed independence and almost immediately after its application for FIFA membership. Since then, the Kosovo National Team has been playing in international competitions, but it cannot call upon some of the most renowned professional footballers of Kosovar origin, for they fled the country with their families at a young age to escape the struggles of the war. Such is the case of Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri.

Prior to their first matches for the Swiss National Team in 2010 and 2011 respectively, Xhaka and Shaqiri had already played for the Junior National Teams, starting with the U-17 as of 2007. By the time of the 2018 World Cup in Russia, they were well-established international stars of the English Premier League. Their gestures in the match against Serbia were quickly denounced by the Serbian FA to FIFA as being political (Lowe, 2018b). The players avoided making any explicit political references, but let their feelings transpire after the match. «It was for my people, who always supported me. For those who did not neglect me, in my homeland, where my parents' roots are. These were purely emotions», said Xhaka, whose father was in jail for campaigning in favour of Kosovan independence and whose brother Taulant plays for Albania (Lowe, 2018b: par. 7). Similarly, Shaqiri referred to emotions rather than politics:

«I can't discuss the gesture I am afraid. We are footballers not politicians. All I can say is that I scored a goal I am proud of. We can't discuss anything else. Emotions

sometimes take over footballers and there was a lot of emotion out there. To score a goal like that... it is very difficult to keep your emotions under check.» (De Menezes, 2018: par. 10)

Whereas Shaqiri was coy in the aftermath of the game, it is useful to refer to his explanations of why he was planning to play the World Cup with a Kosovar flag stitched onto the heel of his right boot in addition to a Swiss one of the left (a display for which he received over 80,000 «likes» on his Instagram account):

«I never forget that I was born in Kosovo. In a very, very poor country, where there is not much work and not much money. My family did not have much. My uncle's house burned down and our house was left standing, but everything had been stolen or broken and the walls were sprayed. I am really glad that we found in Switzerland a safe country where we could live our lives in peace. I live the Swiss mentality, but the Kosovo mentality too because when I go home, I speak Albanian.» (Smith, 2018: par. 4)

These words for the local press in Stoke-on-Trent, in a less charged atmosphere than the World Cup and a game against Serbia, demonstrate clearly the player's keen awareness of his Kosovar and Albanian roots, and their importance for him. During the World Cup, however, Xhaka's and Shaqiri's celebrations were embroiled in a political debate about Russia, Serbia's past and present, and the new reality of the Balkans, rather than in a calm discussion about migration, multiple loyalties, and mutual acceptance. The Serbian FA requested the players to be charged with misconduct because they saw their gestures as unacceptable.

FIFA did indeed open an investigation following the game, but they did not just charge the players. They also included some members of the Serbian delegation and investigated the behaviour of Serbian fans during the game. In the end, several fines were handed down in a rather Solomonic decision: Xhaka and Shaqiri were fined 10,000 Swiss francs for «unsporting behaviour» for their hand gestures, the president of the Serbian FA and the team's Head Coach were fined 5,000 Swiss Francs for their comments to the press after the match and, finally, the Serbian FA received the heaviest sanction, a fine of 54,000 Swiss Francs for the display of discriminatory banners by the Serbian fans and the throwing of objects (Bloomberg, 2018).

The incident at the Serbia vs. Switzerland game confirms that football players with migrant backgrounds, like Xhaka and Shaqiri, feel the need to express a dual loyalty. They do it despite criticism from their host country, as expressed in editorials across the Swiss media. To quote a representative piece from the leading *Daily Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, «they have sensitive feet like hardly anybody else in this team. But their political sensitivity and awareness of their social responsibility are underdeveloped» (Clalüna, 2018: par. 2). As a matter of fact, as early as 2014, the players' council of the Swiss National Team had voted a resolution to forego any of these provocative dual-identity gesture. Still, neither Xhaka nor Shaqiri seemed to be able to respect a decision they had shared. Football, rather than mitigate, exacerbates loyalty pressure on players with multiple identities. This is not only due to the intense emotions the game itself regularly unleashes, but also to the divorce between professional Football Clubs and National Teams that has taken place since the 1990s. The paper now turns to examine the differences between player identity assimilation in clubs and national football teams, focusing especially on the impact of the famous Bosman ruling of 1995.

Episode 6. FLASHBACK, THE 1990S: DISCUSSING THE FOOTBALL DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

For very practical reasons, international football does not recognise dual citizenships. In order to maintain the integrity of international football competitions, players with migrant backgrounds who are eligible for more than one national team are effectively forced to choose a nationality, in accordance with the so-called «eligibility rules» included in the statutes of FIFA (2018: 70-72). This choice most often takes place at relatively young ages, when a talented young player, who most likely has already been selected for National Youth Teams, is wooed by two different national football associations for their senior National Team. In principle, the choice is irreversible once a player has appeared in an international competition, which explains why players like Xhaka and Shaqiri may no longer change for the newly created Kosovo national team (FIFA, 2018).

Until the 1960s, the rules were less strict. *Real Madrid's* Superstar of the 1950s, Alfredo di Stefano, famously played for three national teams: Argentina (6 matches), Colombia (4) and Spain (31 matches). His teammate in Madrid, Ferenc Puskás, ended up playing four matches for Spain after having earned 85 caps with Hungary in the prime of his career.

The practice of «naturalisations of convenience» ran particularly high in the 1930s, when mainly Italy (but also Spain) *repatriated* descendants of emigrants to Latin America, called «*rimpatriati*» (later often referred to as «*Oriundi*»). In their history of football migration, *Moving with the Ball*, Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor dedicate an entire chapter to «The South American Artists» that were thus welcomed back home (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001: 69-110). One of the first and most famous cases was the transfer of the Argentinian-born star of Italian origin Raimundo Orsi to Turin in 1928, following his brilliant performance for the Argentinian Team at the Stockholm Olympics. The quick naturalisation of Orsi, as early as 1929, triggered identity debates in the press on both sides of the Atlantic. It fitted well with the Fascist understanding of nationality based on «Latin blood» (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001: 76-77). Orsi was followed by a rather long list of other Latin American players seeking their fortune in Europe. Luis Monti, for instance, is until today the only player having disputed two World Cup finals (1930 and 1934) for two different national teams, Argentina and Italy respectively. A total of 118 players from Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil were recruited by Italian clubs between 1929 and 1943, fifteen of them made it into the National Team (ibidem: 83).

In reaction to this phenomenon, most of the European football leagues introduced quotas for foreign-born players after the war. At the same time, however, Franco's Spain introduced dual citizenship arrangements with South American countries, which increased the flow of third-generation *Oriundos* into the Spanish League. This brought FIFA to pass its first serious eligibility regulations in 1964, restricting the *Oriundi* phenomenon to second-generation migrants. The new rules had, of course, no impact at all on the practice of European Nation-States, which in the case of promising foreign-born talent, proved to be perfectly capable of showing remarkable bureaucratic speed and diligence in granting citizenship. To cite just one example: as late as the end of the 1990s, the German state accelerated citizenship procedures for a Brazilian player, Paulo Rink, whose great-grandfather had emigrated from Heidelberg to Brazil in 1904.

Today, however, such «naturalisations of convenience» are shunned in Western Europe. It is not only that they are no longer a necessity, since in most countries, several generations of

migrants and rather open citizenship laws have extended and, to a certain point, «internationalised» the pool of available talent. More importantly, they are condemned by a vast majority of national football associations because they are no longer compatible with the positioning of National Teams in the landscape of today's football and the expectations towards them that have emerged as a result of the significant mutations of international football since the 1990s.

The process of commodification and commercialisation of professional football that was kicked off in the early 1990s with the creation of the English Premier League, the UEFA Champions League and the separation of highly professionalised national football leagues from their not-for-profit home associations, has changed club football beyond recognition. Moreover, the Court of Justice of the European Union's Bosman ruling of 1995 paved the way for a virtually unrestricted mobility of players across European leagues. Today, European professional football squads are entirely multinational in character. As a result of this uninterrupted development, the perception of National Teams has changed considerably. When Bayern Munich won the European Cup in 1974, it fielded 10 German players, seven of whom were from Bavaria! The World Cup final of the same year, between Germany and the Netherlands, came close to an opposition between Bayern and Ajax, enriched by a handful of players from other major clubs in the two countries. In contrast, the victorious French team of 1998 only counted two players who still played for French clubs.

Today, the deepening opposition between Football Clubs and National Teams has resulted in an antithetical configuration. While Leagues and Clubs appear as giving priority to economic value and maximum commercialisation, National Teams represent cultural values and not-for-profit idealism. And while club football delivers premium quality entertainment for «smart consumers», National Teams stand for strong local roots and a kind of imaginary, untainted cultural «authenticity». Players move ever faster between Clubs, but they cannot change their nationality. Moreover, they do not even appear motivated by money when playing for the National Team, but tend to refer to their appearance in it in terms of «honour», «privilege», and «identification».

It is worth emphasising that, nowadays, the nostalgic need for «authenticity» is, in a large variety of Western European countries, dissociated from ethnic criteria. However, in nations that are deeply destabilised by the globalisation process and caught in a permanent soul-searching of their identity (fuelled by the percolation of extreme right-wing discourses into mainstream politics and media), expectations towards teams and players of representing national identity are higher than ever. The national anthems played before international matches are an excellent illustration of such expectations. Way until the 1980s, most players seemed to be more focused on their chewing gum than on the lyrics of their respective anthem, and hardly any of the crowds in a Western European stadium did actually sing to the tune played by the fanfare on the pitch. Today, not only have the anthems become a song contest between respective supporter groups, but players and staff are expected to provide evidence of their loyalty by singing along with them.

Some players with migrant background and dual loyalties, like Mesut Özil, refrain however from singing the anthem wholeheartedly. This passive, non-exclusive, attitude regularly triggers debates about the degree of identification of such players (even by former stars like Franz Beckenbauer, who had hardly ever sung the anthem himself during his long career as Captain of the German team...). The polemic of such pointless discussions is relatively easy

to dismiss, but it reveals the exacerbated sensitivity the issue has acquired over recent years and confirms the impression that players of migrant origin have to prove to their country, over and over again, how loyal they really are.

We have presented in this paper three cases of football players and National Teams with multiple identities, comparing the evolution of the situation over the last two decades. We have seen how globalisation of football and wider migratory trends have affected national policies, discourses and political debates; and how these have transpired in the actions of particular football players that need to reconcile multiple identities. Curiously, this is in stark contrast to what has happened in football clubs. In these case studies we can see how football is a perfect context to analyse socio-political dynamics. We now turn to finish this paper discussing the lessons than can be learned from these cases on the role of football in the expression of identity and, more widely, the consequences for European football and society in a complex and globalised world that is, however, dominated by a rise of the far-right in many European countries.

Conclusion. EUROPE, THE 2020S: A DIFFICULT APPRENTICESHIP AHEAD

The case studies that nourished the reflections in this paper suggest that international football, as a highly emotional symbolic confrontation of imagined national identities, has the capacity to reveal important truths about the multicultural societies most Western European Nation-States have become. The main focus of the paper was laid on the «loyalty pressure» exerted on players with dual identities, *i.e.* individuals who have no trouble identifying with the socio-cultural and political norms and values of the environment in which they were born and raised, but who also feel indebted to the migration history of their family and its cultural origins.

In the public debate on dual loyalties it becomes clear that even fully integrated third-generation migrants of all socio-economic categories are subject to doubts about the degree of their identification, and regularly face the implicit or explicit request to provide further evidence of their loyalty to the Nation-State they live in and hold citizenship of. Footballers are no exception to this, but due to their extreme visibility in the public space, they quickly become emblematic for such permanent re-negotiations of identity. As the case studies of this contribution show, this loyalty pressure is not always perceived with the same intensity. For the French players the tension was mostly resolved in laughter or shoulder-shrugging; in Mesut Özil's case, it resulted in bitterness and seemingly insurmountable feelings of hurt.

Our reflections suggest that Western Europe, at the eve of the 21st Century's third decade, finds itself in a very sensitive transition phase. In an increasingly complex world, the longing for simple patterns of belonging are understandable, and explain why unspoken expectations of assimilation continue to be implicitly held towards individuals with multiple loyalties. At the same time, there is growing awareness of the incompatibility of previous assimilation practices with contemporary ideas of successful integration. Again, football can highlight to what extent populations have already understood the need to adapt to the reality of hybrid or dual identities. The FREE («Football in an Enlarged Europe») survey in nine European countries revealed that two thirds (66.5%) of European citizens agree with the statement that «Players with a migrant background in National Teams make an important contribution to

social integration in the countries they play for» (FREE, 2014). In Mesut Özil's Germany, this figure even reaches 80% (in a survey conducted before the World Cup victory of 2014).

Figures like these seem to indicate that a large part of Western European societies have embarked on a difficult apprenticeship of postmodern fluidity. Managing to cope and live with the existence and gradual, inevitable increase of dual loyalties is part of the learning process. If football can make highly abstract concepts humanly accessible beyond and despite the hysteria triggered by identity anxiety, thanks to the massive engagement with these questions it is able to generate, it is well worth the attention it receives.

Epilogue. GERMANY, SPRING 2019

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier had yet another opportunity, at a so-called «German-Turkish coffee table», to insist that *Heimat* may well exist in the plural. He seems to have well interiorised the pedagogical imperative of repetition of key points. Of course, his message continues to receive, in a knee-jerk reflex, angry criticism from the extreme right, but appears to be taken as a simple truth by a vast majority of the population.

Reinhard Grindel, the President of the German Football Association continued to be heavily criticised for his failure to manage the Özil Affair, but also for statements from his previous career as member of the German Parliament, when he positioned himself against dual citizenship. On April 2nd, 2019, he was forced to resign from his Office, after having been convicted of accepting a luxury present from a Ukrainian official.

Mesut Özil still lives in London, where he plays for Arsenal FC. He never accepted one of the numerous phone calls by National Coach Joachim Löw, and even refused to meet with him in person when Löw had the opportunity to travel to London. He never gave any further comment on his Facebook posts. In March 2019 his name made the headlines again when it was reported in the press that he had invited President Erdoğan to be the witness to his forthcoming marriage.

Ilkay Gündoğan's apologies for his naiveté in honouring the photo opportunity with the Turkish president have been accepted by the German football community. His latest appearances with the National Team have been greeted with applause. On March 20, 2019, during a friendly against Serbia and in a wonderfully ironic twist of fate, he found himself Captain of the German team after Manuel Neuer had been replaced. An «honour» he said he accepted «with pride and full of respect».

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is no hyphenated identity, roots are an individual reality. By calling them an African team, it seems [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/franceintheus/status/1019691552384352257?s=21>

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