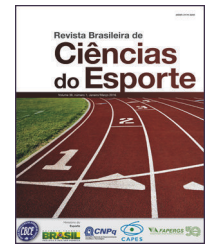




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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Three types of transnational players: differing women's football mobility projects in core and developing countries



Nina Clara Tiesler<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Institute of Sociology, Leibniz University of Hannover, Hannover, Germany*

<sup>b</sup> *Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal*

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### KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** Mobile players in men's football are highly skilled professionals who move to a country other than the one where they grew up and started their careers. They are commonly described as migrants or expatriate players. Due to a much less advanced stage of professionalism and production of the game in women's football mobility projects are different. At describing the cases of Brazil, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Colombia and Portugal, the aim of this paper is to conceptualise an umbrella category for mobile players that can include current realities in the women's game, namely the transnational player who has gained and displays transnational football experience in different countries and socio-culturally contexts. Furthermore, analyses allow introducing two new subcategories besides the 'expatriate', namely diaspora players and new citizens.

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### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Futebol;  
 Migração;  
 Jogadoras  
 Transnacionais;  
 Mulheres no Esporte

**Três tipos de jogadoras transnacionais: diferenciando projetos de mobilidade de futebolistas mulheres em países centrais e em desenvolvimento**

**Resumo** A mobilidade internacional de jogadores de futebol se caracteriza, geralmente, pelo deslocamento de profissionais de alto nível para países diferentes daquele em que cresceram e iniciaram carreira. São descritos, comumente, como migrantes ou expatriados. Em estágio muito menos avançado de profissionalização, a mobilidade entre jogadoras acontece diferentemente. Ao descrever casos do Brasil, na Guiné Equatorial, no México, na Colômbia e em Portugal,

E-mails: [ninaclara.tiesler@ics.ulisboa.pt](mailto:ninaclara.tiesler@ics.ulisboa.pt), [n.tiesler@ish.uni-hannover.de](mailto:n.tiesler@ish.uni-hannover.de)

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o artigo procura desenvolver uma categoria conceitual capaz de abarcar o deslocamento que configura uma jogadora transnacional, cuja experiência se dá diferentes países e contextos socioeconômicos. Introduce ainda duas novas subcategorias, para além da "expatriada": jogadoras em diáspora e novas cidadãs.

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Fútbol;  
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transnacionales;  
Mujeres deportistas

## Tres tipos de jugadoras transnacionales: diferenciar proyectos de movilidad de futbolistas mujeres en países centrales y en desarrollo

**Resumen** La movilidad internacional de jugadores de fútbol se caracteriza con frecuencia por el desplazamiento de profesionales de alto nivel a países distintos de aquellos en que crecieron y comenzaron sus carreras. Aparecen en general como jugadores migrantes o expatriados. En un grado mucho más bajo de profesionalización, la movilidad de jugadoras se presenta de otra manera. Al describir los casos de Brasil, Guinea Ecuatorial, México, Colombia y Portugal, el artículo procura desarrollar una categoría conceptual que pueda incluir las realidades actuales en el juego femenino, es decir, la jugadora transnacional, que ha alcanzado y disfruta de una experiencia transnacional en distintos países y contextos socioculturales. Introduce, además, dos nuevas subcategorías, más allá de la situación de «expatriada»: jugadoras de la diáspora y nuevas ciudadanas.

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As with young males all over the world, a growing number of young women equally dream of becoming professional footballers and pursuing their dreams by intensively investing into their skills over years. The number of registered players has, in fact, more than doubled since 2000, with over 30 million females playing the game (FIFA, 2007). That said, however, 'making a living' as a football player in the women's game is only possible in around twenty-two out of 147 FIFA-listed countries.<sup>1</sup> This implies that in more than 85

per cent of the countries highly talented women footballers have to leave their home in order to play professionally. The percentage of top players who leave the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries of women's football, among them European countries such as Portugal, Ireland, and the Ukraine is at times at 80 per cent (Tiesler, 2010, p. 4; Tiesler, 2011). In 2013, the Top Three emigration countries had been Canada (88.9 per cent), Mexico (77.8 per cent) and Wales (75 per cent) (Agergaard and Tiesler, 2014a, p. 38). While the first professional soccer league for women in the USA (WUSA) and its follow-up WPS (Women's Professional Soccer League), leagues in the biggest receiving country, had accounted for up to 30 per cent of migrant players, the percentages of foreigners in the preferred countries of further destinations, while such as Sweden, Germany, England, Russia and Spain in 2009 (Tiesler, 2010, p. 5), respectively in the order Germany, Sweden, Russia, England and Norway in 2013 (Agergaard and Tiesler, 2014a, p. 40) make up on average around 19 per cent. In single premier league clubs in the European core countries,<sup>2</sup> such as Germany and Sweden

<sup>1</sup> The FIFA women's ranking of September 2015 listed 147 active countries. This number varies and has been higher (up to 168) or lower (down to 123) in previous years. National squads which remain inactive for a number of years drop out. Based on the interviews with players and staff, as well as formal statements (UEFA and FIFA) and press information, twelve leagues could be determined for the 2011/2012 season where 50–75 percent of players received a salary and thus were enabled to concentrate exclusively on soccer: USA, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Japan, (probably North Korea, ), South Korea, China, Netherlands (since 2007), Mexico (since 2009), Cyprus (2009) and England (since 2011). Yet the WPS in the USA was the only fully professional league until its closure in January 2012, and neither North Korea nor Mexico had expatriate players. If we trace the players' routes, we can determine another eleven possible destination countries so far: France, Canada, Australia (since 2010), Italy, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, Austria, Switzerland and Finland. Here local players received only a small salary or an allowance, while semi-professional or professional contracts were mainly offered to migrants or returnees. For part of the players, the remuneration enabled the exclusive concentration on soccer,

since it was combined with free accommodation, and in some cases unlimited access to a car was included in the package – or else the contract guaranteed paid part-time employment (as a coach, physiotherapist or in a factory) besides small salary, accommodation and vehicle use.

<sup>2</sup> I consider as core countries of women's soccer those that (a) run well-organised, partly (semi-) professional leagues and feature

(coming first), migrants can constitute anywhere between 36 and 50 per cent of league players (team rosters 2010/11<sup>3</sup>; Pfister et al., 2014, p. 151–153).

In the growing body of literature on sports migration, in general, and on the mobility of football talent and labour, in particular, athletes who are crossing borders for professional reasons and for career purposes are commonly described as migrants (Bale and Maguire, 1994; Tiesler and Coelho, 2008; Maguire and Falcous, 2010; Agergaard and Tiesler, 2014b) or sojourners (Maguire and Stead, 1996), as mobility projects in football are often circulative and/or based on only short term contracts and stays abroad (Rial, 2008, 2014). In order to grasp the experiences and activities of migrants who do not necessarily settle permanently – and/or where assimilation to the host society is not the ultimate or only outcome – the concept of transnationalism was developed in migration studies (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Portes, 1997; Vertovec, 2004). What was considered as new and characteristic of these types of migrants is that their networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both home and host societies (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p. 1); characteristics which match with the vast majority of migrants in the social field of football (Maguire, 1999; Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001; Magee and Sugden, 2002; Trumper and Wong, 2010).

Sojourners and migrants in men's football are highly skilled professionals who move to, settle, live and work – at least for a brief period of residence – in a country other than the one where they grew up and started their careers. A step away from the difficulties to distinguish migrants from sojourners and vice versa (for mainstream migration studies

one of the twenty best per capita indices (either in comparison to other nations or to the men's per capita index), (b) whose national teams have succeeded in qualifying for the finals of World Cups or the Olympic games and who have kept among the FIFA ranking's top 20 for at least three years as well as (c) those countries in a position to afford the legal and financial prerequisites for the employment of football migrants – and who then actually implement them. This holds true for USA, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Denmark, Japan, China, South Korea, Finland, France, Italy, England, Netherlands, Canada, Australia and Russia. As semi-peripheral countries in women's football are considered those which rank between 16th and 30th in the FIFA list and regularly attain successes at continental tournaments such as the Asian Cup or Africa Cup (Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, Mexico) and which are either able to offer semi-professional conditions in at least a few clubs (e.g. Iceland, Finland, Spain) and/or their mobile talents are recruited by the top league clubs of the core countries (e.g. New Zealand, Switzerland, Scotland, Columbia, to some degree Nigeria and Ghana). At any rate the criterion for those semi-peripheral climbers is that they provide sufficient quality to play any role at all in the international circulation and market of players. All other countries are considered peripheral countries of women's football, since they lack a minimum of structural conditions such as a league system for all age groups of girls, and hence they feature a relatively weak participation of actives. For endeavour to determine core, semi-peripheral and peripheral countries of the game along the lines of structural, supra-structural (here: gender systems) and socio-cultural (here: stigma vs. recognition) conditions see Tiesler (2012b). For a different approach on power relations and dependencies between the core, semi-peripheral and peripheral states in male sports migration see Maguire (2004, p. 487).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.zerozero.pt/edicao.php?id\\_edicao=6226&op=dados](http://www.zerozero.pt/edicao.php?id_edicao=6226&op=dados).

see Reyes, 2001 and Tannenbaum, 2007, for athlete migration see Agergaard et al., 2014) and with regards to the particularities of the football labour market, Poli and Besson have coined a concept which includes both: the "expatriate player" (Poli and Besson, 2010; Besson et al., 2011). Their definition reads:

"An expatriate player is a footballer playing outside of the country in which he grew up and from which he departed following recruitment by a foreign club" (Besson et al., 2011: 1).

The concept certainly grasps biographical and recruitment realities behind the dominant mobility pattern in men's football. Due to a much less advanced stage of professionalism and production of the game (organisation of leagues and competition for all age groups, coaching and training facilities, legal frameworks for recruitment, reasonable wages and health insurance) mobility projects in women's football are different. Not all mobile women players, however, are migrants or expatriates, respectively. For example, of the one-quarter of national squad players at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2011 (WWC 2011) who held contracts in clubs abroad, the concept of the expatriate player cannot be applied. The percentage of cases which drop out of this even most inclusive concept developed for men's football migration increases when specifically looking at the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries of women's football, such as Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Colombia or Portugal.

The aim of this paper is to conceptualise an umbrella category for mobile players that can include current realities in the women's game, namely the *transnational player* who has gained and displays transnational football experience in (at least) two countries and socio-culturally different contexts. Due to the integration of what we coin *diaspora players* and *new citizens* into the national squads of ambitious new comers in women's football, we find mobility projects (aspirations, experiences, and outcomes) of transnationally experienced top players which differ from the expatriate, the ideal type of the mobile male player.<sup>4</sup>

Conceptualisation is based on insights derived from a case study amongst the Portuguese national squad (based on *expatriate* and *diaspora players*), analyses of original quantitative data on international fluxes, and of secondary qualitative material (press articles, online and FIFA sources) on biographies of players who represented Brazil (high number of *expatriates*), Mexico (*diaspora players*), Colombia (*college players*) and Equatorial Guinea (*new citizens*) at the WWC 2011. Fieldwork has mainly taken place in Portugal from December, 2009 up to March 2013, including research periods during the Algarve Cups of 2010, 2012 and 2013<sup>5</sup> which allowed interviewing mobile players of diverse

<sup>4</sup> In their revision of common typologies of athlete migrants, in 2014 Agergaard, Botelho and Tiesler proposed different types of transnational players, namely "settlers, sojourners and mobiles" (Agergaard et al., 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The Algarve Cup is a global invitational tournament for national teams, organised by the Portuguese Football Federation, recognised by FIFA, and held annually in the Algarve region since 1994. Called the 'Women's Mini World Cup' (*Mundialito do Futebol Feminino*). It

nationalities.<sup>6</sup> The data material allows pointing out some main trends and features which shape Women's Football Migration (WFM), and consequent impact on the development of the game. Who goes where and why in women's football migration? How far do the mobility projects of expatriates, diaspora players and new citizens differ from each other?

### Encompassing both home and host societies: expatriates as transnational players

Over the past years, Brazilian expatriate players were present in nearly all of the 22 receiving leagues, from the highest ranking such as the USA, Sweden and Japan over South Korea, Italy, Spain, in the financially strong Russian league, and even in low ranking countries such as Austria, Cyprus, Poland and Serbia where only single clubs provide rather modest allowances to migrant players.<sup>7</sup> Many of them are/were national squad players and some of them regularly spent parts of the (off-) season on loan in Brazilian clubs. Before leaving to Austria in 2004 Rosana dos Santos Augusto had already been on the move inside Brazil and has meanwhile lived in four different countries. As with other expatriate players, her football mobility projects involve an

is one of the most prestigious women's football events, alongside the Women's World Cup and Women's Olympic Football.

<sup>6</sup> Based on long-term contact (since 2009 via Skype, Facebook and email) to coaches and players, 31 one-on-one interviews with mobile women footballers, eight brief interviews with players without intentions of migration (control group), as well as ten background talks with coaches, staff and parents. The 31 mobile players who volunteered for semi-structured interviews, who were born and grew up in Portugal (14), Norway (5), Sweden (5), USA (2), Japan (2), Brazil (2) and Germany (1). They spoke of their experience as professionals and semi-professionals 'abroad leading first division clubs in the following countries: Germany, Spain, France, Iceland, Italy, Sweden, Russia, China, Canada, and the USA. The staff and coaches originated from Norway, Sweden, Portugal and the USA, the parents from Portugal and the USA and the players without intention or experience of migration from Portugal and Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Accordingly to conversations among migrant players during the year 2012, exceptional top wages in Brazil for national squad players normally do not exceed some 800 Euro (2000 Real) per month. In the German *Frauenbundesliga*, which appears to be the wealthiest women's leagues worldwide the wages of only three top players were estimated as numbering over 100.000 Euro per year. Another eight best paid German players receive at average 62.500 Euro per year. For the English semi-professional Women's Super League (WSL), set up in summer 2011, the clubs have all signed up to a salary cap, stipulating that no club can pay more than four of its players over £20.000 (24.000 Euro in January 2012). While we lack reliable updated information on wages in Sweden, sources from 2006 and 2008 indicated very low average wages for local players (5.500 Euro per year in 2006, 6.228 in 2008), while migrant players received more (bloggers assumed that Marta earned 11 times more than the average wage of local players). Sources: The Guardian 2008: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2008/oct/05/womensfoot-ball.ussp-ort>. Spiegel Online 2011: <http://www.spiegel.de/sport/0,1518,-770013,00.html>. Stockholm News 2008: <http://www.stockholmnews.com/-more.aspx?NID=1055>. The Guardian 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/blog/2011/apr/07/womens-super-league-launch>.

offer by a club abroad, migration decision making, settling in a foreign country and living away from home, adapting to different cultural codes on and beyond the pitch, identifying with her team in the host society, keeping contact to people and places left behind via information technologies, a few visits, as well as during training camps and matches of her national squad. As is also the case with other women migrant players from Latin America, African and Eastern European countries, the wages she earns in European (Champions League) and with the US American WPS clubs allow her to support her family at home.

By switching clubs and crossing borders she has enlarged and diversified her football experience provided both to the club level (currently playing at Houston Dash, USA) and with the Brazilian national squad. Her networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both home and host society' (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p. 1), as does her football experience which one can coin as being transnational in nature (compare: Agergaard et al., 2014).

A transnational player gains maturity and enlarges her/his football experience by having been trained and embedded in different societies and football systems. Sporting ambitions such as developing football experience were highlighted elsewhere as key motives among women football migrants from diverse countries (Agergaard and Botelho, 2010; Botelho and Agergaard, 2011; Tiesler, 2012a,b; Agergaard et al., 2014). Playing football abroad is seen as a means of transforming yourself into a more mature player and has been described as rites of passage (Stead and Maguire, 2000; Botelho and Agergaard, 2011, p. 814). What turns this (at least) bi-societal football experience into a transnational one is the players' engagement in both the club (and domestic league) of one country and in the national squad of another. In playing for her/his national squad and a club abroad, s/he displays this experience 'across national boundaries and brings (at least; nct) two societies into a single social field' (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p. 1) which, in this case, is that of football. This holds true for the majority of expatriate players in women's football as most of them are usually seeking contracts in more competitive championships which also provide better training facilities and the desired opportunity to dedicate themselves exclusively to football.

As such few leagues can provide at least semi-professional conditions, playing abroad means improving your skills. Consequently, it is perceived as overwhelmingly positive by the players themselves, as well as by coaches and staff responsible for the national squads of semi-peripheral and peripheral countries. The majority of interviewed players from such countries pointed out the aims of 'playing professionally', 'improving my skills', and 'improving my performance for the national squad' as the main motivation to pursue a career abroad (Tiesler, 2012a,b: 235). Head coaches and staff from the core countries, on the contrary, do not necessarily support their players emigration aspirations,<sup>8</sup> unless the destination league is clearly more

<sup>8</sup> The move of a Scandinavian national team player to the Russian first division, for example, was hotly debated not only amongst responsible staff but also in the press. The player herself reported to me that her teammates, friends and family were critical about

competitive and/or the club competes in the UEFA Champions League; the latter having been the impulse for a turn in the 'migration policy' e.g. of the Japanese head coach (Takahashi, 2014).

All migrant (or expatriate) players who, at the same time, are part of the national squad of their home country can be considered transnational players. But this experience is not an exclusive feature of expatriate players only. Not all transnational players are actual migrants, respectively expatriates, as their football mobility projects differ from the exemplary one represented in Rosana's case. This becomes apparent when looking at and behind the following figure, and especially in the case of Equatorial Guinea, Mexico and Colombia as sending countries, as well as Brazil, which here suddenly appears as a major receiving country while during all years prior the WWC 2011 it had been among the Top Ten emigration countries. The 'production' of the game in Brazil and consequently the conditions in the domestic league did not improve noteworthy between the time of the Olympics 2008 (when Brazil was among the main exporters) and the WWC 2011. So it comes as quite a surprise to find players from Equatorial Guinea with affiliations to Brazilian clubs in the following overview.

### Increased international mobility and diverse mobility projects

The Figure 1 is based on an overview of the club affiliation of 336 players who were capped for the sixteen national squads competing at the WWC 2011. 72 of them, which is 21.4 per cent, held contracts in countries other than the one they represented at the World Cup.

As usual, the People's Republic of North Korea neither attracted any foreign player, nor did any of its own players leave the country. All the other competing teams had been involved, in one way or another, in what has been introduced as a key feature of the globalisation process of women's football, namely in the international mobility of players. We have found three mere receiving countries, five that were both importing and exporting players, and seven mere emigration countries. A similarity to the survey of players' circulation among the (only 12) Olympic countries of 2008 is that the number of mere sending countries is always the highest (Tiesler, 2011, p. 7 of 16; Tiesler, 2010, p. 6 of 12). This is because only such few domestic leagues, even among countries, which qualify for the highest international tournaments, can provide at least semi-professional conditions.

In contrast to 2008, where only one country was at the same time sender and receiver of women's football labour, in 2011 this number even exceeded the one of mere receiving countries. This is interesting because in 2011 already more countries than in 2008 provided at least semi-professional

conditions (with England and Mexico having started running professional leagues), and still the number of mere receivers decreased. It points to the tendency that players are not only migrating out of pure necessity. More players from the core countries and others who find good athletic (partly professional) conditions in their domestic league are seeking contracts abroad before retiring from their own national squad and prominent positions at home; either because financial conditions are more attractive abroad, to gain transnational football experience, or both. This is shown by the cases of Sweden and Japan which still, in 2008, had been mere receiving countries. While the World Cup in Japan did not host any foreign World Cup player in its domestic league at that moment in time (June 2011), it was able to count on four transnationally experienced players who got prepared for the international tournament by playing for high ranking clubs in the USA (1), Germany (2) and France (1).

### College players as migrants

A total of 51 World Cup players got prepared for the tournament in the USA during the season, by playing in WPS or college teams: the 21 American players as well as 30 who are national squad players of other countries: seven players of the Mexican national squad, Canada, England and Colombia with five each, New Zealand, Sweden and Brazil with two each, and Japan and Australia with one each. Only 18 of them became migrants following the recruitment of a (professional WPS) club and, as such, match with the concept of the expatriate player. Five players from Colombia and one from New Zealand had moved to the USA on the basis of soccer scholarships which allow them combining an intense football activity with educational purposes.<sup>9</sup> They can be considered migrants, as their mobility projects involve basically the same features as exemplified by Rosana's experience (migration decision making, settling away from home, phases of adaptation on and beyond the pitch, etc.). They also move to a higher ranking country, but have not (yet) entered a national league nor are they signed as professional or semi-professional players. Therefore, they are not expatriates but college players, and still they embody and display transnational football experience when joining the national squad of their home country.

Besides Colombia which debuted with the youngest among of all WWC teams in 2011, a number of other national teams regularly count on the enforcement of college players who receive their football socialisation in the strong US American system which counted on 18 million active players in 2011, among them Canada, Portugal, Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago and Mexico. But not all college players in the USA who hold foreign nationalities are football migrants.

it as well. Another top player from a Scandinavian country told me about her rather career harming experience in a Champions League club. Her difficulties to adapt to a different playing and coaching style lead to her spending more time on the players bench during the season so that her prominent position in the starting eleven of her national squad was put at stake due to lack of practice.

<sup>9</sup> On the gravitational pull of the US American college soccer system, see Booth and Liston (2014). Regarding the ways how this pull impacts on national policies in the realm of women's football in (semi-) peripheral countries, see the example of Trinidad and Tobago by McCree (2014).

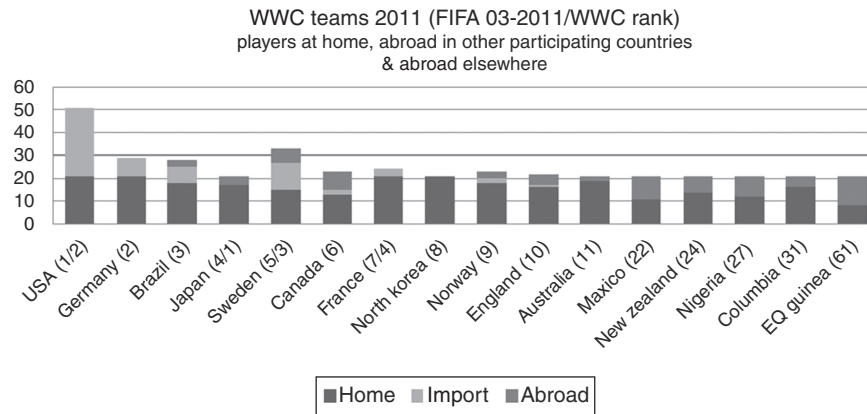


Figure 1 Mobility of FIFA Women's World Cup Players 2011. Original figure (by the author), based on FIFA players lists.

### Non-migrants who gain and display transnational football experience: diaspora players

Among the six Mexican national squad players who are affiliated to universities in California and Texas, only one actually moved to the USA after having been granted a respective scholarship. One had moved there with her family at the age of three and another four were born in the US to Mexican parents. They grew up in the USA, have never lived in Mexico, did not leave their country of birth and socialisation, nor did they settle abroad for football reasons. Their mobility projects do not involve migration decision-making and they do not follow the recruitment of a club abroad. They follow the invitation of a national football association to join the national team of their parents' home country of which they usually possess citizenship or are able to obtain it due to ancestry. Their mobility projects are not alike those of expatriate players or migrant college players, as they are only travelling (but not settling) abroad to join their national squad for training camps and matches. I suggest, following the concept introduced by the journalist and author Timothy Grainey (2008), coining them diaspora players. Other national teams who are known for integrating a significant number of diaspora players from countries that provide more advanced infrastructures for the women's game are lower ranking peripheral countries such as Greece, Turkey, Israel and Portugal. Since the year of 2005, the latter counted on the daughters of Portuguese migrants who were socialised in the USA, Canada, Brazil, France, Switzerland and Germany, some of them making the squad for a number of years. While continuing to play in the domestic championships of their country of births, they expand their football experience by integrating into the national squad of the country that their parents had left, and at international competitions where they compete with other national teams. They are supposed to improve the performance of the team and expected to adapt to a probable different football system and cultural codes (including language, interaction) on the pitch but hardly beyond.

Albeit, being part of a football team, which represents a given nation, in reality they are not embedded in this

society-at-large. The space of socio-cultural experience of the country they represent is fairly limited to the social field of football – which seems to be the reality of many fully professional women expatriate players as well, who do not so much enter countries but clubs, clustering with team mates and other migrant players and often living more virtual contacts beyond the borders than daily life interactions in their immediate environment beyond the club (Botelho and Agergaard, 2011; Tiesler, 2012b). And still, the mobility experience of diaspora players is different, for it does not involve migration, housing and daily life but, instead, travel, hotels and the interruption of daily routine. They travel to their parents' country of origin at average between three and six times per year for a few weeks or meet their squad for preparation camps and matches at the location of international competitions. For some of them, joining the national team had been the first occasion to visit this country, which, until then, was mainly introduced to them by the narratives and memories of their parents who had left decades ago. Still, others knew their ancestral homeland from more or less frequent holiday visits. Not all are fluent speakers of their parents' native language which is (supposed to be) the lingua franca in the national team environment. A Mexican player writes all kinds of Spanish football expressions on her hands and arms before matches, while Portuguese players motivate their parents to switch the house language to Portuguese during the days before joining their team.

Diaspora players develop a greater interest for their parents' home country, e.g. by accessing media more frequently, and they generally start keeping close contact with their national team colleagues via Facebook and Skype. As far as they or their parents are embedded in local ethnic communities, their participation in the national team of the 'home country' naturally brings attention and pride within the community. A few diaspora players had even been capped for the U-17 or U-19 national teams of their countries of birth, and still they took the (irreversible) decision to accept the invitation to the senior or A national team of a lower ranking country. Some prefer the coaching or playing styles of the other country, many stressed the more family-like atmosphere among the squad or 'to fulfil my fathers/parents' dream' as a motive. All diaspora

players I spoke with mentioned that the participation in the team, which often also includes giving interviews to the press at the locale (where their connection to the country is a popular question), motivated or enabled them 'to connect with my roots'. Alike expatriate players and migrant college players, their 'networks, activities and patterns of life encompass two societies' (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p. 1); they create linkages between institutions and subjectivities by being simultaneously engaged in two or more countries (Mazzucato, 2009), or, in other words, 'their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field' (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992).

### Travelling new citizens as transnational players

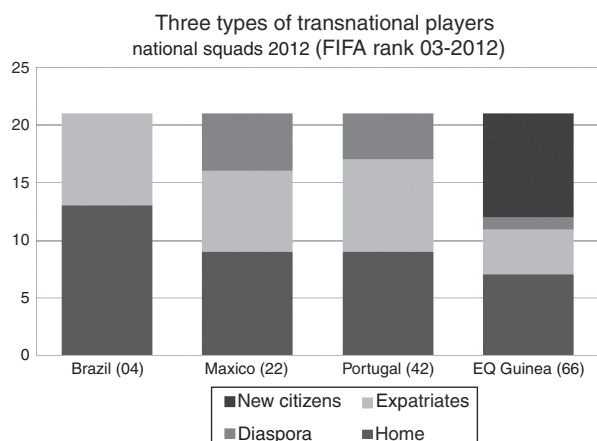
Two questions remain when looking at figures which illustrate the circulation of players who were a part of both the 2008 Olympic and the 2011 WWC teams. Among the Olympic teams of 2008, main receivers had been the USA, Sweden, and Germany. First of all, in 2011, Brazil, the former mere emigration country, appears as the fourth strongest receiver of WWC players. Who goes to Brazil and why can it attract foreign players despite critical infrastructures (Rial, 2014), issues in its championship and an already huge pool of highly skilled local talent the clubs can hardly accommodate? Secondly, Equatorial Guinea appears as the main sender, albeit it only qualified to be on the *global stage* at the WWC for the very first time in 2011. Global stages (including continental cups) are known as key hubs of player transfers, especially in the women's game which still lacks financial and human resources which would allow more systematic scouting at the international level. After the 2008 Olympics, six Brazilians made the jump to the USA, joining WPS teams. In the aftermath of the WWC 2011, when both the WPS and one of the few Brazilian clubs that was able to provide reasonable conditions to women players (FC Santos), folded, four key Brazilian national team players went to Russia, while others dispersed elsewhere.

The only Guinean-born player, who actually left her country, after being recruited by a foreign club, is the international star striker Genoveva Anonma. She had moved to Germany in 2008, playing for a small first division women's club for two seasons and was signed by the habitual Champions League participant Turbine Potsdam after the WWC 2011. Her national team counted on a European-born diaspora player for a couple of years, while another fifteen mobile players who represented Equatorial Guinea at international matches, since it debuted in 2002, were born in Cameroon, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and, most representatively, in Brazil. They were 'scouted' and invited to join the Guinean national team and naturalised. I suggest coining this type of mobile player as new citizens. Unlike diaspora players, they do not have ancestors in the country where they obtain citizenship and, generally, no previous connection to it. There are cases of naturalisation to be found regularly in men's football. But here, these former foreign players had normally lived for a certain period, sometimes for years, in the country where they start representing the national team after naturalisation. Thus they

departed as migrants, settled as expatriate players, and then turned into citizens. This pattern requires a stable and well organised domestic league which provides the legal and financial conditions to attract and contract foreign players, which is not the case of Equatorial Guinea in women's football.

On the official FIFA List of Players at the WWC 2011, five of the eight Brazilian born players were listed with 'no club affiliation', two with Guinean clubs and one held a contract in South Korea. Anonma played in Germany; the diaspora player played in her home country, that of Spain; one Guinean-based player born in Cameroon; and another originally from Nigeria playing in Nigeria, etc. Indeed it appears as if the new citizens usually continue playing in the domestic league of the country where they grew up, as their club affiliations – at least as documented shortly before and again after an international match – for example, there were seven Brazilian born players affiliated to Brazilian clubs. Some venture further after having garnished scouts' attention at international matches. Following Poli and Besson's (2010) definition of the expatriate player, it appears that only Anonma's mobility project matches with this concept. Players who first became new citizens and then expatriates in a third country can be conceptualised as mobile new citizens.

FIFA eligibility rules describe the criteria that are used to determine whether an association football player is allowed to represent a particular country in officially recognised international competitions and friendly matches. In the 20th century, FIFA allowed a player to represent any national team, as long as the player held citizenship of that country. In 2004, in reaction to the growing trend towards naturalisation of foreign players in some countries, FIFA implemented a significant new ruling that requires a player to demonstrate a 'clear connection' to any country they wish to represent. In January 2004, a new ruling came into effect that permitted a player to represent one country internationally at youth level and another at the senior level, provided that the player applied to do so before his/her 21st birthday (FIFA, 2009). That was the case of a number of diaspora players mentioned along the text, who had played for U-17 and U-19 national squads in their home countries before switching their FIFA nationality in favour of their parent's country of origin. In March 2004, FIFA amended its wider policy on international eligibility. This was reported to be in response to a growing trend in men's football in some countries, such as Qatar and Togo, to naturalise players born in Brazil (and elsewhere) that have no apparent ancestral links to their new country of citizenship. An emergency FIFA committee ruling judged that players must be able to demonstrate a 'clear connection' to a country that they had not been born in but wished to represent. This ruling explicitly stated that, in such scenarios, the player must have at least one parent or grandparent who was born in that country or the player must have been resident in that country for at least two years (BBC Sport, 2004; FIFA, 2008). As not all of the Equatorial Guinean new citizens fulfilled the latter condition, the originally suggested line-up of the squad needed amendments at the last minute. And still, the squad was able to count on more than one transnationally experienced player (Anonma) by having integrated players who were socialised in at least five different countries.



**Figure 2** Differing mobility types of national squad players. Original figure (by the author) based on FIFA players lists.

### Conclusion: three types of players who embody and display transnational football experience

The opportunity to develop football experience in a different (and usually more advanced football) context is one of the main motives of expatriate players in women's football, besides playing professionally. As stated by [Stead and Maguire \(2000, p. 36f\)](#), in relation to men's sport migration, and by [Botelho and Agergaard \(2011, p. 814\)](#) in relation to women's football migration, playing football abroad 'carries elements of rites of passage as it is perceived as a means to transform yourself into a more mature footballer' and opens up further mobility options. It is the (more or less successful) adaptation and embeddedness in a culturally different context which distinguishes this experience from the rather ephemeral international football experience also gained by "immobile" players via the representation of their club or national squad at international tournaments. I suggest coining it transnational football experience. What turns this (at least) bi-national football experience into a transnational one is the players' engagement in both the club and domestic league of one country and in the national squad of another.

In women's football, this experience is perceived as overwhelmingly positive and rewarding by the players themselves and most social agents involved in the process. As over 80 per cent of the countries which send their national squads into international competitions do not (yet) provide well-organised, sufficiently competitive domestic leagues which can prepare their players to confront the leading lady soccer nations, it comes as no surprise that in most lower ranking countries their expatriates are the key players of the squad. Because they are playing abroad, they are in better physical shape, have improved technical skills, and have gained broader knowledge and embodied experience of different tactics and systems of the game as such. Transnational football experience, however, is not only comprised of gaining bodily capital 'abroad', such as improved technical skills and physical shape derived from the rare privilege in the women's game of an exclusive dedication to football, from daily practice and regular high level competition in a better

organised league. Decisive are two more aspects: a greater maturity as a player and a broader knowledge of the game derived experience in a socio-culturally distinct context.

The recognition of these latter aspects and consequent request for transnational football experience is pointed out by the fact that even higher ranking core countries, which had competed at the 2008 Olympics, support the mobility of their key national squad players. The same holds true for the World Cup Champion of 2011, Japan. Albeit running a semi-professional league (the L. League) since 1989, where all actual and potential national squad players are contracted as professionals, the Japanese Federation has in recent years switched to a pro-emigration policy ([Labbert, 2011](#); [Takahashi, 2014](#)). Consequently, it was able to comprise its WWC squad with transnationally experienced players who held contracts with premier league clubs in other core countries, such as the USA, Germany and Sweden.

Once a mobile player gets capped for her/his national squad, s/he is acting in at least two culturally and socially different football contexts, at the same time, and is confronted with different types of expectations, behavioural codes and customs. The concept of the transnational player refers to her/his embodied knowledge of the game derived from geographical mobility and respective subjective experience. At least in women's football, and according to our interviews with players and coaches, it is regarded as a type of socio-sporting capital resource that the player brings into her team (club and national squad).

Transnationally experienced players in men's football are first and foremost expatriate players who leave the country where they grew up following the recruitment of a club abroad ([Poli and Besson, 2010](#)). Due to the far less advanced developmental stage, this is different in the women's game. Ambitious newcomers among the semi-peripheral and peripheral countries integrate migrant college players, new citizens and diaspora players in order to improve the performance of their national women's teams. If one compares the mobility projects of these players who are crossing borders it becomes clear that not all of them are actual migrants like the expatriate player ([Fig. 2](#)).

College players who gain a soccer scholarship in the USA do share the experience of migration with expatriates by moving and settling away from home and facing challenges of adaptation also beyond the social field of football. Unlike expatriate players they do not follow the recruitment of a club. They might become professionals, or not, just like young male players who leave home in order to join a football academy abroad – albeit the latter are facing a premature professionalism at an early age which is generally not the case of young women footballers in college. Amongst transnationally experienced footballers, I suggest the gathering of expatriate, migrant college and academy players into one group, namely the one with actual migration experience.

As the type of mobile player that I coin new citizen naturalises her/himself following the invitation of a federal football association abroad to join its national squad, s/he can hardly be regarded as an expatriate. As we still lack sufficient qualitative data, the question of whether or not they themselves consider their mobility project as including the experience of migration or rather the one of a traveller, remains open.



The question of if the migration experience is part of their football mobility project was clearly answered by interviewees from diverse countries which match with the concept of the diaspora player. These players who were born and socialised in advanced girls and women soccer systems, and provide their skills to the national squad of the country of origin of their parents cannot be considered migrants. Apart from visiting their ancestors' homeland in order to join their squad for training camps and international matches, they continue living and playing football in their country of birth. Their mobility projects do not involve migration, housing and daily life but travel, hotels and the interruption of daily routine.

What all these types of mobile women footballers have in common is that they gain and display transnational football experience in at least two differing social cultural contexts. As an umbrella category of mobile footballers which, in contrary to the male ideal type of expatriate player, can include current realities of the women's game, the concept of the transnational player appears useful. It grasps three subcategories: Firstly, because they are numerically most significant, indeed that of the expatriate player, including pre-professional youth, such as migrant academy and college players. New citizens and diaspora players then present the second and third subcategory. These might vanish in the future once the production of the women's game has further developed through commercialisation and the still young professionalisation process.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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