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**FOLLOWING THE BALL: AFRICAN SOCCER PLAYERS,  
LABOR STRATEGIES AND EMIGRATION ACROSS  
THE PORTUGUESE COLONIAL EMPIRE, 1949-1975**

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## **Following the ball: African soccer players, labor strategies and emigration across the Portuguese colonial empire, 1949-1975**

*This article examines the experiences of African soccer players who relocated to Portugal from 1949 to the end of the colonial era in 1975, attempted to negotiate this politically-charged environment and strove to consolidate their post-athletic futures. I argue that despite the otherwise extraordinary nature of these individuals' lives, their experiences suggest strong continuities with, and affinities to, well-established African labor strategies, including seeking occupational advice from more senior employees (i.e., fellow players) and engaging in secondary migration in order to improve working and living conditions. The article also contends that the process of cultural assimilation that helped players adjust to their new surroundings commenced in the urban, "colonized spaces" of Africa and, thus, well before they arrived in Portugal.*

**Keywords:** soccer, sport, immigration, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique

## **Seguindo a bola: Jogadores africanos de futebol, estratégias de mão de obra e emigração através do império colonial português, 1949-1975**

*Este artigo examina as experiências, negociações e a consolidação de carreiras desportivas de jogadores africanos de futebol que se transferiram entre 1949 a 1975 para uma metrópole sitiada politicamente. Apesar das vivências particulares e de certa forma extraordinárias destes indivíduos, uma análise detalhada às suas carreiras indicia a existência de continuidades e similaridades com as estratégias laborais africanas clássicas. Nomeadamente constatou-se o recurso ao aconselhamento profissional de colegas mais experientes (i.e., outros jogadores) e o facto de estas migrações secundárias terem como objetivo a procura de melhores condições de vida e de trabalho. Neste artigo demonstra-se ainda que o processo de assimilação cultural se iniciava nos "espaços coloniais" urbanos africanos, e que tal contribuiu para minorar o processo de adaptação em Portugal.*

**Palavras-chave:** futebol, desporto, imigração, Portugal, Angola, Moçambique

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When superstar soccer player Eusébio left the field following Portugal's 2-1 defeat to England in the 1966 World Cup semifinals, he was awash in tears, fiercely clutching his red and green jersey – the national colors of Portugal (Figure 1). Yet, Eusébio was neither born nor grew up in the Iberian nation; instead, a Mozambican, he was one of the many Africans who made their way from Portugal's colonial territories to the metropole to ply their athletic skills from the late 1940s to the end of the colonial era in 1975.<sup>1</sup> Like Eusébio, many of these African players performed spectacularly on the field, significantly elevating the play of their respective club teams and vaulting the Portuguese national team to unprecedented levels.



Figure 1: Eusébio leaving the pitch following the loss to England

While both Eusébio and Portuguese everywhere grieved following the squad's exit from the 1966 World Cup, known as "Game of Tears," the country was simultaneously engaged in far graver matters. Since the early 1960s, Portugal had been actively attempting to suppress armed insurgencies in three of its five African colonies: Angola (1961), Guiné (1963) and Mozambique (1964); the other two, Cape Verde and São Tomé, were relatively quiet. Unlike other

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, I have been unable to determine exactly how many players made this journey, though I would estimate that the figure is somewhere in the vicinity of 200.

European colonizing nations, Portugal's dictatorial regime intransigently resisted international pressure to decolonize, locking itself in a struggle to retain its African possessions. The government's insistence on the territorial – and, thus, racial – integration of the metropole and Portugal's African colonies was central to its public relations campaign intended to legitimize, and thereby maintain, the empire. As such, the inclusion of African players, such as Eusébio, on Portugal's national soccer team afforded the regime an opportunity to highlight the supposed unity of the metropole and the colonies, the opportunities for social mobility that its African colonial subjects allegedly enjoyed, and the attendant racial harmony that this integration purportedly fostered.

Drawing upon colonial archival sources, popular media, and interviews with former players and coaches, this article examines the experiences of these African athletes as they relocated to Portugal from 1949 to the end of the colonial era in 1975, attempted to negotiate this politically-charged environment and strove to consolidate their post-soccer futures.<sup>2</sup> Through an historical reconstruction of this process, I highlight the host of social challenges and legal restrictions that these players were forced to negotiate upon arrival in Europe. In response to these metropolitan trials, I contend that despite the otherwise extraordinary nature of these individuals' lives, their (re)actions suggest strong continuities with, and affinities to, well-established African labor strategies, including seeking occupational advice from more senior employees (i.e. fellow players) and engaging in secondary migration in order to improve working and living conditions. The article also argues that the multi-faceted process of cultural assimilation that helped players adjust to their new surroundings commenced in the urban, "colonized spaces" of Africa and, thus, well before they ever set foot in Portugal. Most players' overt, unflinching apoliticism – a corollary of their long-term social improvement objectives – suggests that they actively and strategically sought to assimilate and, thus, integrate socially, or at least to cultivate this perception.

Scholars have increasingly been engaging with topics related to soccer and Africa, generating a nascent, yet growing, body of literature – a process that the recently-concluded World Cup in South Africa has accelerated. This trend is also evident in the Lusophone context, with this article poised to make an important

<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on those players who remained in Portugal following the conclusion of their athletic careers, though consideration of those Africans who returned to the continent is also included. Further research will determine whether these two groups of players had analytically divergent experiences as they relate to the article's central arguments. White players who were born and raised in the colonies, but who similarly came to the metropole to play, also remain outside of the scope of this article. Although they, too, faced challenges in migrating to Portugal to showcase their skills, the absence of racism in their experiences renders them analytically distinct.

contribution to this emerging corpus.<sup>3</sup> Although the on-the-field accomplishments of African players who migrated to Portugal during the colonial era have previously appeared in a number of homages – virtual hagiographies – this study is the first to consider these athletes’ daily experiences beyond the stadium walls, far from the droves of cheering spectators and laudatory biographers.<sup>4</sup> In fact, this article constitutes the initial academic engagement with this otherwise renowned stream of migrant athletes.<sup>5</sup> This belated endeavor stands in sharp contrast to the considerable scholarly attention that Africans who played in France during the colonial period and, in particular, their radical political activity, have heretofore received.<sup>6</sup> While my study is informed by this scholarship, it carves out novel analytical space by linking these (generally apolitical) migrants’ destination and place(s) of origin not through revolutionary politics, but via durable labor strategies and the extended process of cultural assimilation. Ultimately, I am to utilize these players’ experiences to illuminate the largely cosmetic and limited nature of Portugal’s labor and social reforms – even as they were applied to, arguably, the nation’s highest-profile wage-earners – and also some of the ways that Africans could creatively exploit opportunities generated by shifts in the social, occupational and political landscapes in the waning decades of the Portuguese empire.

## The origins of soccer in Portugal’s colonial empire in Africa

As in other imperial settings, soccer was introduced into Portugal’s African empire by the “standard agents” of colonialism: missionaries, administrators, merchants, corporate officials, soldiers and settlers. The game spread from port cities, such as Luanda, in Angola, and Lourenço Marques (Maputo), in Mozambique, to the hinterlands, often along roads and railway lines, but also through missionary schools. Africans throughout the empire embraced the game, though it remains unclear whether Portugal’s colonial regime deliberately intended soccer to “civilize” the indigenous populations. However, the sport did – inadvertently or otherwise – at various moments subdue, discipline, inculcate and even demean local populations. As Stoddart (1988) has argued, the games themselves

<sup>3</sup> For example, see works by Nuno Domingos, Nina Clara Tiesler and Marcelo Bettencourt. Conversations I had in Portugal with Lisbon-based scholars Rahul Kumar and Augusto Nascimento also inform this study.

<sup>4</sup> For complementary accounts of these players’ sporting accomplishments, see, for example: Aguiar (1968); Silva (1992); Correia (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Two shorter pieces consider African players in Portugal’s colonial empire, however Domingos’ article focuses on the Mozambican appropriation of the game, while Darby is more concerned about the underdevelopment of African soccer as a result of players’ migrations to Europe. See: Domingos (2007) and Darby (2007).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: Lanfranchi & Wahl (1996).

were “instruments of socialization, infusing discipline... respect for hierarchies and rituals” (p. 480). As such, soccer came to play an important role in Portugal’s campaign of cultural imperialism, a key pillar in the broader process of empire. If Europeans colonized Africa, as the maxim goes, with a gun in one hand and a bible in the other, perhaps they were also kicking along a soccer ball, a third hegemonic tool.

### **The introduction and embracement of soccer in the colonies**

Soccer appears to have initially been introduced into Portugal’s African colonies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sport had gained significant traction. In Mozambique, for example, by 1904 games were already being organized, while local groups were apparently challenging the crews of ships docked at Lourenço Marques, the colonial capital (Domingos, 2007, p. 41). From these promising beginnings, leagues were formed and increasing numbers of Africans were exposed to and subsequently embraced the sport. It was in these rudimentary leagues and in a variety of less formal, or even impromptu, matches that the African players who would one day showcase their skills in the metropole first learned the game.

### **The growing allure of metropolitan soccer**

While the distance between the dusty pitches in Africa and the manicured fields in the metropole was both literally and figuratively immense, radio and newspapers brought Portuguese soccer to the continent. Initially, these accounts were primarily consumed by the European settlers. However, after African players began relocating to the metropole, news about Portugal’s *Primeira Divisão* was of increasing interest to all. Via this process, African players and fans developed allegiances to the major metropolitan clubs, including Sporting, Benfica and Belenenses. Over time, affiliate clubs bearing the same, or very similar, names and virtually identical uniforms were established in the colonies, providing African players and fans a tangible means of connecting with their more famous parent teams.

In order to further increase the popularity of metropolitan football, Portuguese clubs began touring the colonies, playing exhibition matches during the off-season against local squads to large, adoring audiences. Lanfranchi and Taylor have referred to these trips as “propaganda tours,” while Darby has interpreted them as “having resonance beyond football... as part of the broader drive to promote colonial hegemony” (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001, p. 178; Darby, 2007, p. 502). Yet, the metropolitan clubs occasionally failed to play their part, as the supposedly

culturally and athletically inferior teams from the colonies periodically won, at times by wide margins. Regardless of the final scores, these tours both enhanced the Portuguese clubs' popularity in the colonies and provided African hopefuls an opportunity to showcase their skills in the hopes of making a lasting impression on a prospective employer.

### **No accident: the discovery of African talent**

If matches between African and metropolitan clubs constituted one way that players could hope to be "discovered," or to "get fished" (the local idiom), the limited number of these competitions militated against this method of ascension. Instead, an alternative system evolved in which metropolitan clubs established informal, and then formal, scouting networks in the colonies to identify future stars. Even the top-tier colonial clubs began searching for African talent, hoping to sign and then sell these players to Portuguese squads. Players hoped to attract the attention of these observers by excelling at the local level, working their way up the hierarchy of domestic leagues and, thereby, increasing their exposure. Thanks to the keen eyes of these scouts and, more importantly, the formidable skills of the players they were tracking, Africans increasingly featured – and succeeded – at the very highest levels of both the Portuguese and international soccer world.

## **The revised rules and strategies of an established game**

For all of the latent talent in Portugal's colonies, it took a particular set of historical factors, circumstances and events to prompt African players' relocations to the metropole. One of these contributing factors was, as outlined above, the embarrassment that Portuguese clubs experienced when they lost to local squads during their tours to the continent. Meanwhile, between May of 1949 and May of 1955, the Portuguese national team, or *selecção*, won only three times in twenty matches and, moreover, failed to win a single game in the seven matches it played from June 1957 to 1959. In the wake of these humiliations, individuals within Portuguese soccer circles began to consider the utilization of skilled Africans as a means to boost not only the prospects of metropolitan clubs, but also the national team. Yet, for all of the concerns about competitiveness on the pitch, global political pressures were to prove even more influential in prompting the Portuguese government to alter both labor and migration policy as it related to these talented Africans.



By the 1950s, the “winds of change” had begun to blow across the continent, with England granting its Gold Coast colony (Ghana) independence in 1957. By the 1960s, these breezes had turned to gusts, with a succession of colonies transitioning to independent states. Yet, while the British, French and Belgians all abandoned their colonial projects, the Portuguese regime clung ever tighter to its empire. In a bid to stress the indivisibility of the colonies and the metropole, in 1951 the regime recast these possessions as “overseas provinces,” suggesting that they were as integral to Portugal as were areas of the metropole. This obstinacy and artifice did not, however, come without political cost. With much of the globe entering the post-colonial era, Portugal’s stance was becoming increasingly anachronistic. Moreover, the global left, led by the Soviet Union, and, by the 1960s, inclusive of the large number of newly independent, left-leaning African states, was openly condemning Portugal’s perpetuation of empire and, more specifically, the racist policies in its colonies. Even staunch allies, such as the United States, were privately imploring Lisbon to relax statutory controls in the empire. This mounting pressure, and attendant growing international isolation, ultimately impacted the regime’s regulatory ethos, especially after the outbreak of wars of independence in Angola, Mozambique and Guiné in the early 1960s.

From 1949, and then more earnestly in the 1950s and 60s, Portugal began to disregard the existing travel restrictions that applied to indigenous populations in order to facilitate the employment and relocation of African soccer players to the metropole.<sup>7</sup> These racially integrative adjustments dovetailed with its broader efforts to mollify international critics of all ideological persuasions, as well as Portugal’s increasingly discontented colonial subjects. Yet, while the regime incessantly stressed unity with the “overseas provinces,” it never loosened its grip on the empire. Regardless, via these measures, Portugal could now showcase a national soccer squad that allegedly evinced a genuinely multi-racial nation, or at least racial tolerance and acceptance, replicating France’s earlier efforts to racially integrate its club and national teams. The alleged “benefits of colonialism” were now fully on display. Irrespective of the specific motivations for Portugal’s shift in policy, African players were newly able to pursue remunerative opportunities that would have previously been unimaginable due to the institutionalized racism that characterized Portugal’s colonial project. This shifting attitude towards African labor was manifested in the high levels of responsibility that

<sup>7</sup> Guilherme Espírito Santo, of Angolan descent, played for Benfica from 1936-1944 and again from 1943-1950, but remains outside the scope of this study because he was born in Lisbon and, thus, had a significantly different experience than did the subjects of this article. Documents currently housed at the Ministry of Education in Lisbon capture the regime’s gradual willingness to permit players to emigrate from the African colonies to the metropole.

these individuals assumed for both club and national teams (Figure 2). Indeed, many African-born players captained these squads well before the end of the Portuguese colonial era – a belated acknowledgement that nationality could be defined by culture rather than race or provenance.



Figure 2: Portugal's starting eleven at the 1966 World Cup, which featured four African players: Hilário and Vicente Lucas (standing, 4th and 5th from the left) and Eusébio and Coluna (kneeling, 3rd and 4th from the left)

## Geographic and social mobility?

By relaxing this aspect of its colonial policy, the regime was now positioned to trumpet “rags to riches” narratives in which Africans rose to the highest levels of Portuguese society via their athletic acumen. However, the social mobility that Eusébio and other players embodied is somewhat misleading. In practice, many of the emigrating soccer players were members of an extremely small, semi-privileged minority in Portugal's colonies, known as *assimilados*, or “assimilated.” Until 1961, when the regime abandoned this classification, individuals who were deemed sufficiently Portuguese in regards to language, culture, religion, etc. could apply for this designation, which, in turn, afforded them a special, intermediate legal status. These individuals typically benefited from otherwise rare educational opportunities and were, often times, the offspring of Portuguese fathers and African mothers, known as *mestiços*. In 1950, although less than one percent of Africans in Portugal's empire were officially “assimilated,” almost ninety per-

cent of *mestiços* were (Bender, 1978, p. 151). It's no coincidence that many of the players who relocated to Portugal derived from the mixed race population.<sup>8</sup>

Given these players' social backgrounds, many of them aspired not for athletic glory, but for careers as engineers, doctors, or other "respected" professions. From a young age, these players' parents, many of whom were employed as functionaries in the colonial government or in private business, had stressed education as the route to success. And, simply put: soccer threatened to derail these ambitions. The case of Miguel Arcanjo, who was born in Angola in 1932 to an Indian father and African mother, is illustrative of this scenario. His father worked as a civil servant in the treasury department and even as the family moved around the colony, Arcanjo was continually enrolled in school, hoping to one day become an engineer. Even as soccer steadily seduced the young Miguel, his father refused to sanction this career path, though he was, himself, an ardent Benfica fan. Only after the director of the treasury department, who also happened to be the president of Sporting, intervened, did Arcanjo's father finally relent. In 1950, Arcanjo joined FC Porto, the club for which he would go on to be a star. The experience of Mário Torres, who was also born in Angola, resembles Arcanjo's. Having a Portuguese father and Angolan mother enabled this future Académica de Coimbra legend to hone his soccer skills in a series of schools in the colony. Testimony from Torres underscores his elevated social status in colonial Angola:

Most didn't live through the colonial period in Angola like I did. It was a different world... There were restrictions, but those restrictions disappeared if you had money, status, and a house, but if you didn't have any of these it was a bad situation. I was blessed to have a father who never let me miss out on anything. I had access to schooling and other great things; however there were a lot of people that were in terrible situations. Going to secondary school wasn't something common; it was uncommon to be able to even start high school. At that time there were only two places in Angola one could go for secondary school (M. Torres, individual statement, June 23, 2011).

Domingos' work (2007) confirms that many of the Mozambican players who made it to Portugal had similar social origins and he has compellingly argued that "The ones who benefited most from the opportunities granted by (local) football clubs... were the ones who already had some resources, namely in terms of education, to give them access to the European world" (p. 239). Testimony from Hilário, a former player originally from Mozambique, confirmed that many

<sup>8</sup> Based upon team photos and my interviews with former players, I would estimate that as many as half of the players were *mestiço*, though that figure may be somewhat high.

players enjoyed a (relatively) privileged social status, even if he, himself, had very humble origins. “There were many players who lived well in Lourenço Marques and only came to Portugal because they wanted to play for a club ‘that mattered’ and for the recognition” (Hilário, individual statement, October 19, 2010).

If many of these players didn’t lack financial resources, many other practitioners who weren’t as fortunate missed out on the opportunity to realize their athletic dreams. Often times, the inability to afford shorts, socks and shoes, mandatory accessories when playing in the elite colonial leagues, blocked talented players’ ascensions. Moreover, in 1956, a colonial law newly required minimum schooling for players to participate in advanced leagues, which severely prejudiced individuals from less privileged backgrounds (though the law was flouted when the talent on display was sufficiently prodigious). Given these restrictions, many potential soccer greats never had the chance to showcase their skills at the highest levels. While not all players came from relatively privileged backgrounds, nor did being an *assimilado* or *mestiço* in the colonies preclude significant social and economic challenges, many African players’ migration to Portugal constituted a form of geographical, rather than social, mobility, as they were moving from one advantaged environment to another.

## **From the colonies to the metropole: arrival and life in Portugal**

Irrespective of an individual player’s socio-economic background, these athletic migrants all faced a uniform challenge: the journey to the far-removed metropole. Most players traveled via boat, which took weeks, causing many of them to languish during this extended trip, fretting about what lay ahead, seasick, or simply bored/restless. Upon arrival, players received a variety of welcomes. For highly-touted signings, Portuguese media were typically on hand to chronicle the proceedings and quiz the prospective star; in other cases, players arrived without any fanfare whatsoever. The sponsoring clubs assumed the role of surrogate parents for these new arrivals, making all of the necessary arrangements for their African signings in order to help mitigate the transition. Most players settled in well, focusing on improving their soccer skills, even if many had to wait before they broke into the first team, often initially spending time with their clubs’ reserve teams. Other players, however, struggled due to injuries, homesickness, inadequate skills, or some combination thereof. In every case, though, the players remained grateful and gracious and sought companionship with their new teammates as they negotiated life in Portugal.

In order to safeguard their investments, the various metropolitan clubs that facilitated these players' migration to Portugal strove to reduce opportunities for conflict, confrontation and culturally-based confusion. Upon arrival, often following small press conferences, club officials typically whisked players away to "team houses," at which the athletes would reside during their tenure with the club. As Eusébio explained:

When I arrived in Portugal in 1960, Benfica already had a house called the "Benfica House." If you played for Benfica and were single, you went there. When I arrived at the airport, I went straight to the Benfica house and I had my own room there, and there was always someone who took care of the domestic work. We had television and other games, and it felt like our home. If we had a game on Sunday, we would all stay in the house, married players too, starting on Friday, so we would all be together... The close contact with all of your teammates created a sense of union. Everyone knew each other, talked to each other every day, went to practice together every day, went to the movies together, had dinner together and then watched some television. At 11:00 p.m., someone would turn off the lights and we would all go to bed (Eusébio, individual statement, October 28, 2010).

The situation for Hilário, who played for Sporting, was much the same, although his club didn't initially have a facility similar to the one that Benfica provided.

I left Mozambique in 1958... and when I arrived in Portugal there were vacant rooms for us in the homes of old ladies (presumably widows) for any unmarried players, so Sporting would pay for us to stay in those rooms and those old ladies would also cook and clean for us. Later, Sporting built a Sport Center, and then all the single players would stay and eat there, while the married players would come on Thursdays to sleep during the "concentration time" leading up to the games (Hilário, individual statement, October 19, 2010).

Once the players settled in to their respective accommodations, they found life off the pitch to be alternately rewarding and trying. Their salaries afforded them pleasant lifestyles and the very best of them, including Eusébio and Matateu, among others, achieved legitimate celebrity status. Most of the players embraced recreational activities such as going to the cinema or the theater, reading or going to the beach. Listing his "likes" and "dislikes" in 1960, Benfica star Santana, for example, appreciated Ava Gardner, blondes and dressing well, but didn't care for Elvis Presley, films that made him cry and *fado*, a traditional Portuguese music genre (Santana, 1960)<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Matateu cited his love for the cinema

<sup>9</sup> None of the *Ídolos do Desporto* pamphlets are paginated.



and, in particular, film stars Fred Astaire and Elizabeth Taylor, though he also professed admiration for Amália Rodrigues, the most celebrated *fado* singer in history (Matateu, 1961).

But, life away from the pitch was not all movies and music. Most players missed home and generally disliked the weather, which was comparatively quite cold during the winter. José Maria, who arrived in December of 1962 from Luanda to play for Vitória de Setúbal underscored this climatic challenge:

It was cold in Lisbon! Of course, I knew it was going to be colder here, but I never imagined it would be this much colder. I was clenching my jaw like someone who was facing an armed man. That negatively affected my career when I first got here. I wanted to run the field but I couldn't because I could feel the cold wind touching my skin like razor blades... Little by little, I began to acclimate, but in December of '62 I thought I was going to die (José Maria, 1969).

Even more than tropical climates, players missed their friends and families. For most of these athletes, travel home was really only feasible when their new clubs toured the African colonies. As such, longings for home colored these players' lives in the metropole. For example, when asked during a 1968 interview what the happiest moment of his life was, Calado, who starred for Benfica, responded "To return to Lourenço Marques, after four years away. Four years that seemed like centuries. The hugs of my parents and friends made me cry" (Calado, 1968).

African players generally meshed well with their Portuguese teammates, but primarily relied on each other for day-to-day camaraderie. Outings took them to cinemas, theaters, the beach, or out for coffee or a meal. Eusébio explained that, in Lisbon,

I had Hilário, Mascarenhas, Pérides, Matateu and Vicente (Matateu's brother). We used to get together in a café, and people began calling it the "players' café." We used to meet there to talk, have a coffee... and then went to see a movie. It was one of our pastimes (Eusébio, individual statement, October 28, 2010).

Although these players all hailed from Africa, it is important to note that they played for different teams in and around the city, suggesting that they considered it important to seek each other out to socialize, despite their diverse club affiliations. Testimony from Mário Torres, who played in the city of Coimbra, in central Portugal, indicates that this phenomenon was neither exclusive to Lisbon nor limited to soccer players.

We all helped each other, if I left my place I knew I could go grab coffee at Montanha with the other Africans... At that coffee shop, all of us from Africa would get together either to just have lunch, or if anyone needed anything or needed to solve any problems that's where you would go (M. Torres, individual statement, June 23, 2011).

In Coimbra, as in Lisbon, a handful of African students who had been permitted to come to the metropole for higher education were also present and, when time permitted, the athletes openly mixed with their fellow countrymen.

Although players predictably missed their relatives and other facets of their now distant homelands, the combination of: their comfortable living and working arrangements; the paucity of Africans residing in Portugal during this period; and their appreciation of the material benefits that their scenarios offered them and, by extension, their families, often engendered a genuine adoption of their new environment. In fact, many players married Portuguese women and, after their playing days concluded, opted to remain in Portugal.

## Pre-adjustment: cultural assimilation in colonized spaces

While Portuguese wives/girlfriends, teammates and club officials helped African players adjust to their new surroundings, this process of cultural acculturation and assimilation had actually begun prior to their arrival in the metropole. Virtually all of the African clubs with which these players had been affiliated featured Portuguese coaches, and were also all invariably located in urban areas, the loci of European colonization. Consequently, every one of these future migrants – irrespective of their individual social backgrounds – spent time in “colonized spaces” and were, therefore, exposed to Portuguese customs and values prior to leaving the continent. For *mestiço* players with a Portuguese father present, the process of assimilation had begun even earlier and was inherently deeper. Testimony from Mário Wilson, a *mestiço* soccer star-cum-coach from Mozambique, highlights how his upbringing aided his transition. “I didn’t have any difficulty with the weather or food, I sort of already belonged here, having the father I had and everything” (M. Wilson, individual statement, October 29, 2010). Regardless of how, or how early, players’ familiarity with Portuguese culture commenced, this exposure helped them in the transition upon reaching the metropole and, thereby, continue the process of assimilation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For an analogous, though rare, case in which the process of assimilation similarly commenced prior to immigration, see: Choy (2000).

The game itself also contributed to this process. With Portuguese coaches increasingly serving as the teachers/transmitters, it is easy to understand how Portuguese conventions, protocols, values and beliefs were transmitted through the sport. As Magode (2005) has contended, within the soccer clubs and associations in colonial Lourenço Marques, “Command of Portuguese... (and) the adoption of a European lifestyle... were valued qualities” (p. 119). As African players ascended the ladder of colonial clubs, their entrance into the core of colonial space required reverence, patience and, to a certain extent, humility – traits that had not been as essential in their previous athletic experiences.

The Portuguese coaches also demanded that players become more tactical, more calculated and, thus, less spontaneous and creative on the pitch. They also demanded a more professional approach to the game, in general, stressing practice, fitness, game plans and strategies, and preparatory routines. Some observers lamented these developments, averring that it stifled the creativity that Africans had brought to the game. However, testimony from former players suggests that they appreciated the benefits of this athletic regime. According to Hilário,

On almost all of the teams the coaches were Portuguese... we had a good “school” system for soccer. When I left Mozambique at the age of 19, I was already able to play for Sporting and the (Portuguese) national team... In the colonial time, the soccer formation was better, the Portuguese coaches maximized our skills. When we got to Portugal, we could play for Porto, Benfica, Sporting, and now if the best player from Mozambique comes here he would have to play in the second or third division (Hilário, individual statement, October 19, 2010).

The athletic discipline that these players experienced in the colonies was vital, as soccer was to become even more demanding upon reaching the metropole. As Jacinto João expressed, and many other players echoed: “In Portugal, *practice was every day and very hard... there’s no doubt that professionalism is not a joke*” (Jacinto João, 1969). Notwithstanding the arguable suppression of a uniquely African playing style, the new approach to the game served the players well when they arrived in the metropole. The new stress on discipline and professionalism fed the process of occupational and cultural acculturation that commenced prior to their departure and, thereby, helped facilitate their athletic and social success in Portugal.



## Metropolitan limits and challenges

Although these African players could proceed to the highest levels of the Portuguese soccer universe, this universe was, in practice, highly circumscribed. For example, although the Portuguese government had condoned the signing and relocation of African players, these athletes were, almost always, not permitted to seek subsequent employment beyond Portugal's borders. In other instances, African players received lower salaries than they merited, suggesting an element of racism or, at the very least, exploitation, within Portuguese soccer-dom. Finally, as in France, Portuguese clubs, coaches and fans widely perceived African players to be "instinctive" and "reactionary," and thus ill-suited to play positions that required careful, strategic thought and calculation – a supposed preserve of white players (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001, p. 176). Only with time and African players' demonstration of their positional versatility, did these racially derived notions dissipate. Although most African players reported an absence of overt racial discrimination in colonial-era Portugal, racially based challenges, such as those listed above, profoundly shaped the experiences of these emigrants. In practice, although the intra-empire upward labor mobility that the Portuguese regime was touting featured a very high or, arguably, no ceiling, its metaphorical walls were rather narrow and, in practice, strictly delimited.

Having secured the services of players who were taking their new clubs and the Portuguese national team to new heights, both the regime and these clubs were determined to keep them in the country. Perhaps no case illustrates this resolve better than that of Eusébio. As a result of his success at the 1966 World Cup, he had attracted suitors from across Europe, only to discover that, António Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, had classified him as a "national treasure," which precluded employment abroad. When other African players flirted with foreign clubs, they often found themselves under surveillance by the PIDE, Portugal's vaunted secret police force, promptly assigned to military duty, or otherwise constrained. Often times, the Portuguese clubs themselves simply refused to let players transfer or requested astronomical fees to dissuade interested foreign teams, though it's unclear how much pressure the regime may have applied to encourage this type of obstruction.

Salaries also appear to have favored white, Portuguese players rather than their African teammates, even if exceptions existed. For example, although Eusébio's transfer fee was the highest ever for an African player at the time, in 1961 he was Benfica's least expensive player (Dias & Pinhão, 1990, p. 19). A decade later, Eusébio had become the club's highest-paid player, though during an

ugly, public contract dispute in 1969 – after he had established himself as one of the greatest players in the history of the game – he continued to be outearned by some of his white teammates. Less sensationally, former Sporting player António Joaquim Dinis, who hailed from Luanda, revealed the hidden, racial compensation bias that existed within Portuguese soccer:

The majority of the Angolan players who emigrated to Portugal never felt a sense of satisfaction. Not because they lacked the public's acceptance, but because of the attitudes and actions of the patrons of Portuguese football. Angolans and Mozambicans have continually suffered shameful exploitation on the part of the "big clubs." I signed a very inexpensive contract with Sporting. I won the National Championship and the Portuguese Cup; I am a member of the Portuguese national team and, in spite of all this, I had wages that were inferior to the team's reservists... First, these clubs make promises... that are never fulfilled. And once you sign, you are "a prisoner." You have to choose between unemployment and a shameful return trip home (Coelho & Pinheiro, 2002, p. 516).

Of course, in the political environment of the time, with the colonial wars raging, sentiments of this nature were not openly utterable, forcing African players to accept these unfavorable conditions. To be sure, not all African players felt as exploited as Dinis, or even at all. Regardless, players with remuneration grievances could only safely invoke race as an explanation after the Portuguese dictatorship fell in 1974. In the meantime, club officials were well aware that the terms on offer in the metropole were far superior to those available from African clubs, leaving these players little room to maneuver.

## **New environment, familiar labor strategies**

Although the space in which players operated may have been confining, they still managed to pursue a range of occupational strategies to improve their lives and, by extension, those of their family members. If African players largely adapted culturally and integrated socially with only minor difficulties, a series of familiar labor strategies helped them capitalize, to the fullest extent possible, on their new opportunities. In some ways, the superstar status that many of these players enjoyed helps to obscure their reliance on strategies reminiscent of those that Africans in Portugal's colonies had been employing for decades, if not longer. For example, prior to leaving Africa, many soccer prospects sought advice from players who had already migrated to Portugal, typically inquiring about what wages they should seek and which clubs offered the best working and liv-

ing conditions. Armed with this information, many followed in the footsteps of athletes who had preceded them, analogous to Africans, e.g. Mozambicans and Angolans, informing themselves and then targeting and traveling to specific mines in South Africa to seek employment. Once established in the metropole, players also sought advice from more experienced teammates when it came time to re-negotiate their contracts. Many players also engaged in secondary migration, subsequently affiliating with a series of different Portuguese clubs, just as migrant mineworkers might switch employers in an effort to improve their lives. Thus, even as these players navigated this drastically different terrain, they fell back on well-established tactics. Despite the drastically different contexts, indigenous laborers throughout Portugal's African empire would not find these soccer players' basic occupational or migratory strategies wholly unfamiliar.

### **Seeking occupational advice**

As African players began to attract attention in the colonies, they consulted with friends, family members and, whenever possible, athletes who had already made the journey to Portugal. Established players offered these prospective recruits advice on which clubs offered the best conditions, what salaries to seek and insights into metropolitan life. At times, this type of guidance even crossed racial lines. Courted by Sporting, the club with which he would eventually sign, Armando António Manhiça initially sought advice from Octávio de Sá, a (white) goalkeeper who had previously starred for Sporting before returning to Lourenço Marques. According to a 1964 account,

Armando first approached Octávio de Sá for advice, since he already knew football in the big city (Lisbon) so well. He then spoke to his parents. They thought for some minutes, and there was no doubt that separation from their son would be a huge blow, but it was certain that he would begin a better life, which naturally excited them (Armando, 1967).

If players were already affiliated with clubs in the colonies that had a parent team in Portugal, they often signed with the metropolitan team. However, this was not always the case. As Eusébio, who played for Sporting de Lourenço Marques, but who signed, somewhat scandalously, with rival Benfica, explained,

A player will go to the club that pays more and offers a better contract; it has nothing to do with tradition. For example... Coluna played for Desportivo Mozambique and came to Benfica... It all depended on the terms and conditions offered by the clubs in Portugal (Armstrong, 2004, p. 257).

Once in the metropole, African players continued to rely on co-workers (teammates) to help them navigate the new environment and improve their living and working conditions. Although in Eusébio's case, these interactions went on at the highest levels, his case is illustrative of the support that African teammates could provide:

Coluna and I would speak in dialect (when meeting with Salazar, the Portuguese dictator) so he wouldn't understand us. I would say: "I don't know him. He is not my father or family." And, Coluna would tell me not to say anything, so I didn't, and waited until we returned home... When we arrived there, Coluna explained to me that Salazar was the boss of everything (Eusébio, individual statement, October 28, 2010).

In less weighty situations, African players regularly talked with each other, sharing advice about salaries and learning about the conditions at their countrymen's clubs in order to better understand the relative nature of their own arrangements and, perhaps, to change jerseys.

### **Strategy in the metropole: soccer and studies**

Just as African laborers throughout the colonial period strategically relocated, and subsequently engaged in secondary migration to improve their lives, so too did many of these soccer players. In practice, however, the secondary migration paths that these athletes traversed did not always mean simply swapping one team for another. Instead, many parlayed their ability to travel to Portugal to continue their studies in the hopes of receiving an education that would, in turn, serve them well long after their athleticism faded. The pursuit of a degree in higher education was primarily accomplished by playing for Académica, in the city of Coimbra. The club was associated with the Universidade de Coimbra, the country's premier university, and during the colonial era the squad was comprised solely of matriculating students.

While Coimbra rarely recruited in Africa, leaving this somewhat expensive endeavor to the major Portuguese clubs: Benfica, Sporting, Porto and Belenenses, Académica became a target for many African soccer players after they arrived in the metropole. In order to reach Coimbra, they requested transfers or loans (common practices in soccer) to Académica from their original clubs. Although the clubs who lost players to Coimbra in this manner understandably disdained this practice, the enrollment of Africans at Portugal's best university constituted valuable propaganda material for the embattled state and therefore it almost always sanctioned these players' requests. In fact, it was the regime's Minister

of Education, Pires Lima, a former Académica student-athlete, who first created this provision for players wishing to relocate to Coimbra to pursue a degree (M. Wilson, individual statement, October 29, 2010).

One of the first African players to benefit from this new policy was Mário Wilson, who initially signed with Sporting in 1949, but who, by 1951, had transferred to Académica. According to Wilson,

Sporting didn't want me leaving the club, so only after the Minister of Education created the law was I able to leave Sporting to go to Coimbra... With just soccer, you could live well for 5-6 years and then fall off the map... It was a huge risk. Therefore, many players would choose Académica so they could achieve more in their life (M. Wilson, individual statement, October 29, 2010).

Although Coimbra offered lower remuneration, paying out "subsidies" rather than salaries, many other Africans relocated to Coimbra pursue their educational dreams, while never abandoning their passion for soccer. Augusto Araújo, for example, an Angolan who first arrived in Portugal in 1956 to play for Benfica, made his way to Académica just two seasons later, loaned out by the Lisbon club. In a 1960 interview, he explained his motivations.

Benfica is a great club. And, I am its player... but Académica offers me more possibilities to rise socially, and by studying, a secure future. My ambition has always been to become an engineer. I came to Lisbon with this intention, ready to fight for it and I haven't relented. I know that through this achievement I will give my parents and brother great happiness (Araújo, 1960).

Much less commonly, players came directly from the colonies to Académica. Mário Torres, for example, had attended a high school in Angola at which Coimbra graduates predominated among the faculty. Lacking the type of scouting networks that the "big" clubs had cultivated, Académica was forced to rely on alumni in the colonies to promote their club, namely to athletes who were equally as concerned with their studies. According to Torres:

I was playing for the Student Youth team of Villa (high school), which had ties with Académica. It was practically... "Académica in Africa." The club had the support of the teachers... and they prioritized the academic side... they all used to talk about how great Académica was, and Académica "this and that." So we... used to hear about Académica as much as people who lived in Coimbra. The dean used to keep telling me that I was going to play for Académica... There was no formal affiliation between the school in Angola and Académica; the only connection between the two institutions was the teachers, because most of them graduated from

Académica and they used to tell all of the talented kids that they should play for Académica (M. Torres, individual statement, June 23, 2011).

By heeding the advice of his teachers and administrators and opting to play for, and study at, Coimbra, Torres, and the other African players who similarly made their way to Académica, strategically strove to safeguard their futures well beyond the end of their playing days (Figure 3). In Torres' case, he enjoyed both a brilliant career on the pitch and, afterwards, a long and successful career as a medical doctor.



Figure 3: Académica's starting eleven in 1956, which featured three African players: Mário Wilson (far left, standing), Mário Torres (third from left, standing) and Pérides (second from right, kneeling). Both Torres and Pérides came directly from Angola to Académica, in 1949 and 1953, respectively<sup>11</sup>

### Strategy in the metropole: soccer and employment

Other African players sought post-soccer security by securing long-term employment, rather than diplomas. This strategy had a long history in the colonies, as local soccer clubs often attracted talented players by offering them salaried jobs, or otherwise helping to arrange employment. Elsewhere, migrant players from Anglophone and Francophone Africa often traveled to England and France, respectively, only after being offered remunerated employment to complement

<sup>11</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Imageteca Municipal de Coimbra.



their soccer endeavors. In Portugal, this route took players to Grupo Desportivo da C.U.F. (Companhia União Fabril), an industrial conglomerate located near Lisbon, which required the players on the team that it sponsored to be company employees, and also guaranteed them jobs following their playing days. Unlike Académica, C.U.F. paid salaries that were comparable to those on offer from other teams in Portugal's top league and was slightly more competitive on the pitch than was the "Team of the Students." Testimony from Manuel de Oliveira, a Portuguese who both played for and coached C.U.F., explains the appeal of the club/company:

(In 1957), I had to find a job (new team) because at that time the (soccer) salaries were small. So I ended up... at C.U.F. and to my understanding it was the fourth strongest club in the country and they employed around 10,000 people. I played until 1962... and I was the captain... Players did like coming to C.U.F. because of the job they were offered also. The job and opportunity to play soccer was a good combination (Manuel de Oliveira, individual statement, October 26, 2010).

Consequently, a number of African players made their way to C.U.F., including Angolan midfielder Ferreira Pinto. After joining Sporting in 1957, he took classes in his spare time, still aspiring to become an engineer following the end of his playing days. Conscious of his long-term future, at one point he considered Académica, but Sporting, although willing to part ways with the discontented player, steered him instead to C.U.F. Pinto excelled at his new club, propelling them to a third place finish in the league in 1964-65, and concomitantly earning a place on the Portuguese national team. While playing for C.U.F. he worked as an office employee and was even offered a contract to assume a management position within the soccer club following his playing days, though he ultimately declined, confident that he now possessed the necessary skills to succeed in the private sector.

Although many African players attempted to secure their post-soccer futures by earning as much as possible with their Portuguese clubs, this strategy was risky owing to the relatively small salaries on offer during the colonial period – wages that pale in comparison to the money available today for soccer stars. Many players acknowledged this reality, and consequently sought post-soccer security in classrooms or corporate offices. Although neither Académica nor C.U.F. were consistently competitive on the field, the secondary migration strategies that players employed in order to secure academic and employment opportunities represented foresighted thinking that sacrificed (potential) short-term athletic glory in exchange for long-term financial security.

## Negotiating politically-charged environments

Just as African players strategically exploited educational and remunerative opportunities in Portugal, they also deftly navigated the politically-charged environments in both the metropole and the colonies that the wars for independence were fueling. Consequently, these athletes were viewed neither as subversives by the Portuguese population nor as political stooges or collaborators by their African brothers who were fighting – and dying – for independence. African players were even able to maintain an air of impartiality despite the fact that many of them donned both Portuguese national team jerseys and military uniforms. Although often internally conflicted, these athletes' professionalism and determination to improve their lives and the lives of their families underpinned their conspicuous apoliticism throughout this contentious period. There were exceptions, with some players returning to Africa to fight for independence, as was the case in the better-known Francophone context. However, these athletes-*cum*-freedom fighters were few in number. Instead, even if many players harbored sympathies for the African independence movements, they remained outwardly detached. As Eusébio once famously declared, "I don't get involved in politics. I don't like politics. My only politics is football" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 262). As such, despite these players' allure as potential nationalist symbols for both the Portuguese regime and the various African independence movements, the vast majority of them failed to serve either the insurgencies or counterinsurgency well, while remaining widely respected and admired in both the metropole and the colonies.

As soon as these athletes arrived in the metropole, their public statements suggested a disengagement from the continent and a commitment to soccer and family, nothing else. These comments disarmed potentially suspicious Portuguese and also endeared the players to the supporters of their new clubs. Opening remarks made by Matateu, who arrived from Mozambique to play for Belenenses in 1951, were typical: "I want to say with much pleasure that in spite of having come from African lands, I feel very 'belenense' and that I will do for 'Os Belenenses' the best that I can and know how to do" (Rosa, 1961, p. 565). Open admiration for their new country continued as they settled in, often heavily flavored with gratitude, respect, even obsequiousness. For example, three years after arriving to play for Académica, Torres effusively declared in an interview:

I was blessed at that time (1956) when destiny wrote in my life's book the beautiful chapter that I have been living in the beautiful city of the Mondego (Coimbra). Here, I have lived the most beautiful moments of my existence; here I encountered a future, glory, and happiness (Torres, 1959).



Apparent sincerity aside, the Portuguese regime could hardly have crafted a more rapturous statement for Torres to recite.

Although the regime stopped short of putting words into the players' mouths, it never missed an opportunity to emphasize the "Portugueseness" of these African athletes. This rhetoric was primarily intended for international consumption, as the regime utilized these players to tailor its image abroad. For example, following the return of Portugal's squad from the 1966 World Cup, the team was given a parade and honored for their achievements, with each member receiving the silver medal of the Order of the Infante Dom Henrique, a state bestowment designed to distinguish those who bring honor to the name of Portugal abroad. On the occasion, the President of the Portuguese Federation declared, "The World Championship passes, but your effort and sportsmanship endure, making men speak of Portugal in the highest terms during those days when you were able to honor the country" (Ferreira, 1967, p. 158). Meanwhile, the regime had long cast soccer (football) as one of the three pillars of the Portuguese nation, alongside *fado* and Fátima (Catholicism) – the three "f's." (Santos, 2004, p. 93).<sup>12</sup> To this end, state propaganda linked Amália Rodrigues with Eusébio: the greatest Portuguese singer with the greatest "Portuguese" soccer player.

Yet, not all of these African athletes played their assigned roles. For example, Mário Wilson, the Académica legend, indicated that he regularly discussed African independence with teammates, classmates and others, including Agostinho Neto, Angola's first president.

We (Neto and I) used to meet (in Lisbon, where Neto was studying)... we came many times... to send correspondence to Angola and Mozambique. I began to perceive things that I previously had not, coming to see Mozambique with a new set of eyes (Wilson, 2011, p. 512).

In fact, once the colonial wars commenced, Coimbra increasingly became a site for oppositional politics, which certain African players fueled, and no one could completely avoid. Among the dissident athletes at Académica were Daniel Chipenda, Augusto Araújo and França, all of whom would eventually flee Coimbra to return to their native Angola in order to serve in different capacities with the MPLA nationalist movement (Figure 4).

<sup>12</sup> Fátima is the site in central Portugal in which, in 1917, apparitions allegedly sent from the heavens appeared. Afterwards, a sanctuary was constructed to commemorate the events and Fátima remains a popular pilgrimage destination and, thus, was used by the regime as a symbol for the country's religious devotion. For further reading about the "three f's", see, for example: Coelho & Pinheiro, 2002, p. 482-483.



Figure 4: Street scene in Coimbra, 1958, with Araújo in front, Wilson on the right and Chipenda next to him, in the middle<sup>13</sup>

If Chipenda, Araújo and França abandoned their academic and sporting careers in favor of armed struggle, the vast majority of African players focused on their trade and even completed their mandatory military service without incident. This professional approach, however, should not be understood as complicity with the regime. Rather, these players remained committed to their primary life objectives, which revolved around personal and familial security and well-being, rather than emerging notions of nationhood on the now-distant continent. A passage by Alegi (2004) in reference to a soccer league in apartheid South Africa offers an additional explanation for these players' focus on soccer, rather than politics. "For many participants... the human desire to compete at the highest level trumped political considerations... Personal development and professional success were immediate motivations" (p. 122). Despite their allur-

<sup>13</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Imagoteca Municipal de Coimbra.

ing political utility, Eusébio's declaration that "I have nothing to do with politics. I am football," characterized many African players' approach during the late colonial period (Armstrong, 2004, p. 253).

## Conclusion

By shifting the focus away from the "exploitative colonial or neo-colonial state," or "predatory soccer clubs" – recurrent themes in recent African soccer scholarship – to the players themselves, this article has attempted to dispel notions of these athletes as victims. By listening to their motivations and objectives, by considering their social origins and by examining their actions it is clear that they not only reflected, but also actively shaped colonial relationships and policies. Their relationship with the regime was functional for both entities, rather than purely exploitative for either, while even its political dimension remained largely undeveloped. By considering these players as laborers, strategically offering their services to employers that provided the most favorable working conditions, both in the colonies and, subsequently, upon arriving in the metropole, these athletes exhibited both highly pragmatic and calculated behavior. As Eusébio's mother candidly proclaimed after being asked why her son chose Benfica, over other clubs: "Benfica gave 'big money'." Thus, studies that sound the alarm regarding the exodus of African soccer players risk ignoring these migrants' aspirations to compete against the best and, more importantly, to improve their lives and, by extension, those of family members, just as millions of Africans did throughout the colonial era, and continue to do so today.

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