

# Issues of belonging in a globalized world of football

*A multiple case study of dual nationality footballers  
perceived belonging to the Danish national football  
team*



## **Introduction**

The migration of elite athletes across continents as well as between and within nations is a still growing phenomenon (Maguire & Falcoux, 2010; Poli, Ravanel, & Besson, 2011). Already by 1994, it was noted that the migration of elite athletes was increasing and occurred over a widespread geographical area and within several different branches of sports (Bale & Joseph, 1994).

Several national football teams consist of footballers with dual nationality<sup>1</sup>. The France national football team (mainly footballers with French/Algerian, French/French Guiana, French/Ghanaian or French/Senegalese origin) and the German national football team (mainly footballers with German/Polish or German/Turkish origin) are examples of this tendency. This is not a phenomenon only attached to football but also to other branches of sports (e.g. athletics, handball and basketball). Thus in various sports, athletes have chosen to change their “sporting nationality” and represent a nation where they are not born and raised, despite their only affiliation with the nation apparently is rooted in the athletes’ family origin or a rapid change of citizenship (see Spiro, 2016).

The literature concerning migration of elite footballers is plentiful (Maquire & Pearton, 2000; Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001; Darby, 2007; Molnar & Maguire, 2008; Elliasson, 2009). However, this literature focuses on migration on club level, whereas the literature about the change between national teams to the best of the authors’ knowledge is sparse. The sparse knowledge may be ascribed to the idea that football are a more nationally oriented phenomenon (Poli, 2007) and thus the change of nation seems more difficult compared to other sports. The preserving of the integrity of competitions including national teams and the duality between club level and national team level seems to be substantially for FIFA which is reflected in former FIFA president Sepp Blatter’s statement: *“If we don't stop this farce, if we don't take care about the invaders from Brazil towards Europe, Asia and Africa then, in the 2014 or the 2018 World Cup, out of the 32 teams you will have 16 full of Brazilian players”* (BBC Sport, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup>Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) defines dual nationality on the basis of the following four criterion: “a) The footballer was born on the territory of the relevant Association; b) The footballer’s biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant Association; c) The footballer’s grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant Association; d) The footballer has lived continuously on the territory of the relevant Association for at least two years” (FIFA, 2015, p.63)

However, footballers with dual nationality is allowed to represent another nation at adult level, even though the footballer has played youth international matches for another nation's youth teams (see appendix 3). The Boateng brothers – both born in Berlin with a German mother and a Ghanaian father – serve as an example on this particular occasion. In the 2010 World Cup Jerome Boateng and Kevin-Prince Boateng competed for Germany and Ghana respectively. Even though Kevin-Prince Boateng was raised in Germany and had played 45 youth international matches for Germany, his Ghanaian origin and his lack of appearances for the German national team permitted him to play for Ghana.

Recently in Denmark similar situations have occurred. As a current example, Agon Muccoli and Arbnor Muccoli can be mentioned. The Danish/Albanian brothers have been fostered in the Danish talent development system (see appendix 4 for a description), but chose to play for Albania instead of Denmark in November 2017 (for more examples see appendix 1).

For many years the Danish football national team did not consist of many footballers with dual nationality (Gregersen, 2011), but in recent years a greater number of footballers with dual nationality have represented the national team (e.g. talented footballers like Riza Durmisi, Jannik Vestergaard, Pione Sisto and Yussuf Yurary Poulsen (DBU, 2018)). However, several prominent and talented footballers with dual nationality deselect the Danish football national team and choose to play for their country of family origin (see appendix 1). This may be due to different established factors: 1) Dual nationality footballers seem to be navigating in a universe of unwritten rules and tacit knowledge, which can be hard to interpret and obtain (Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009). 2) They do not get any extra support from coaches but are treated on equal terms as all other footballers, not taken into consideration of their dual nationality (Gregersen, 2011). 3) Dual nationality footballers seem to have different football characteristics, which may not fit in the Danish understanding of how football ought to be played (Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009). Furthermore it is speculated in Danish sport media that: a) The Danish Football Association (Danish FA, in Danish: DBU) is only a possible alternative for some footballers with dual nationality. b) The footballers have a bigger connection to their country of family origin. c) The individual footballer's in-field position at the national team is characterized by strong competition and thus a change of nation increases the possibility to play on the international stage.

d) Or it is even suggested that the political climate in Denmark in regard to migrants is pushing dual nationality footballers away.

When talented footballers with dual nationality change nation rather than Denmark, Danish soccer experts often consider it as a great loss.

### **Project purpose**

The purpose of this project is to investigate what underlies the reasoning of choosing one national football team rather than another. Based on interviews with dual nationality footballers this project desires to generate and qualify knowledge about what underpin footballers' (eg. Emre Mor (Turkey) or the Muccoli brothers (Albania)) decision to represent another football nation than Denmark. This leads to the following research question: *How and on what basis do Danish elite footballers with dual nationality consider their choice of national team representation?*

### **Globalization and migration**

Scholars continue to debate on how to define globalization, but appear to agree that globalization can be understood as an increasing and global connectedness both in imaginary and geographical terms (Palmer, 2013). Following Arjan Appadurai's (Appadurai) perspective on globalization processes, globalization is caused by multi-dimensional and interconnected flows, each of which implies the movement of a particular entity: more specifically people for *ethnoscapes*, money for *financescapes*, information and images for *mediascapes*, materials for *technoscapes* and ideas and ideologies for *ideoscapes* (Appadurai, 1996). In complex ways, these flows contribute to *transnational imaginations* about individuals being a part of a global world (Appadurai, 1996). Ethnoscapes are particularly interesting because the scope of this project exclusively focuses on the international mobility of elite footballers with dual nationality in the context of national teams. In this regard, the increased migrations flows have blurred national identity (see for example Bocketti (2008) or Hess (2014)). This may be explained with the debate of the relationship between the *global* and the *local* – often expressed in the term *glocalization*. This encompasses the conceivable dynamic tension between the *global* and the *local*, which results in distinctive outcomes in different geographic areas (Palmer, 2013). Thus, the interpenetration of the *global* and the *local* entails that the global flows change or adapt to local conditions (Robertson, 1995). Similarly, this constitutive inter-relationship may be a factor that influences how dual nationality footballers perceive their affiliation to nations, which

they in some way or the other are connected to. In this regard, globalization can be perceived as a complex interaction between homogeneity and heterogeneity. On a national level the respective FA's attempt to produce homogeneity to enhance their national teams (e.g. consistency in playing style) whereas local clubs seek to be heterogenic to separate from other clubs (e.g. to have more tactical options). Thus, the footballers become a "hybrid" between the tensions of the *global* and the *local*.

### **Design**

According to (Yin, 2014) the case project is best described as: '(...) *an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*' (Yin 2014: 14). Thus in this project we apply what is to be understood as a multiple embedded case study with selected responds acting as independent cases. Each case will be analysed separately followed by a cross-case analysis of all cases (Creswell, 2014). Although case studies are widely used in sport sciences and other fields, the potential of case studies is a question of debate and to some degree misunderstood (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Usually generalisation is the most widely debated topic concerning case studies (Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2014). Much of the overall discussion stems from difference in opinion about epistemology, which makes it in the authors' opinion, impossible to reach an agreement. Thus, working with case studies demands that the authors present which generalisation idea that defines the study (as well as the overall aim). This project recognizes Steiner Kvale's (1996) idea of analytic generalisation, which emphasizes a well-considered evaluation of the results of a given case study and how these results may apply as guidelines in other similar situations. Hence, qualitative data are interpreted and related to theoretical assumptions to pursue the research question of this project. In the design of this case study, multiple cases are chosen to apply more depth to our analytic generalisation. Furthermore, multiple cases are generally perceived to enhance the strength of results (Yin 2014). Through 8-12 different cases of dual nationality footballers, we elaborate on the practice of negotiating national identity in professional football. Our aim is to investigate such cases and thereby the footballers' choices and actions due to talent development system, globalization, national identity, chance and possibilities. The selected cases represent footballers that have openly discussed their national affiliation, thus making them comparable.

## **Method**

Two methods are used in this project. First, a desk research approach was used in which potential cases have been investigated. Newspapers, databases, web media and social media, were examined to investigate for potential cases. A total number of 61 current and retired elite footballers were found. The appendix attached (appendix 1) to this application shows the result of the desk research.

Of the total number of potential cases, 8-12 footballers will be selected to serve as independent cases. Each case will be presented as the example of the Younes Namli case attached as appendix 2. Selection criteria for cases are the footballers level of competition (this project includes footballers with an actual chance of playing at the Danish national team seen in relation to their competitive level of their current club and league) and if they openly have communicated willingness to play for another national football team than the Danish national team.

The second method used to investigate each separate case is qualitative interviewing. All selected cases will be interviewed about their perception of the Danish football system, their overall career and the choice to represent another nation in national football. Semi-structured interviews will be used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) to grasp the participants' lived experience and their opinions regarding the final choice to represent a specific national football team. Language barriers are taken into consideration by using clear language and short questions, especially if the footballer has been playing outside of Danish football for a long period. To avoid brief replies, avoidance and/or non-reflective answers, the questions will be formed as open questions followed by in-depth questions to ensure thick descriptions (see Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The final transcript combined with the desk research will each represent an individual case.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) inspired by Smith & colleagues (2009) and Sparkes & Smith (2014) will be used to analyse the data. A thorough guideline throughout the analysis will be followed, including the following steps:

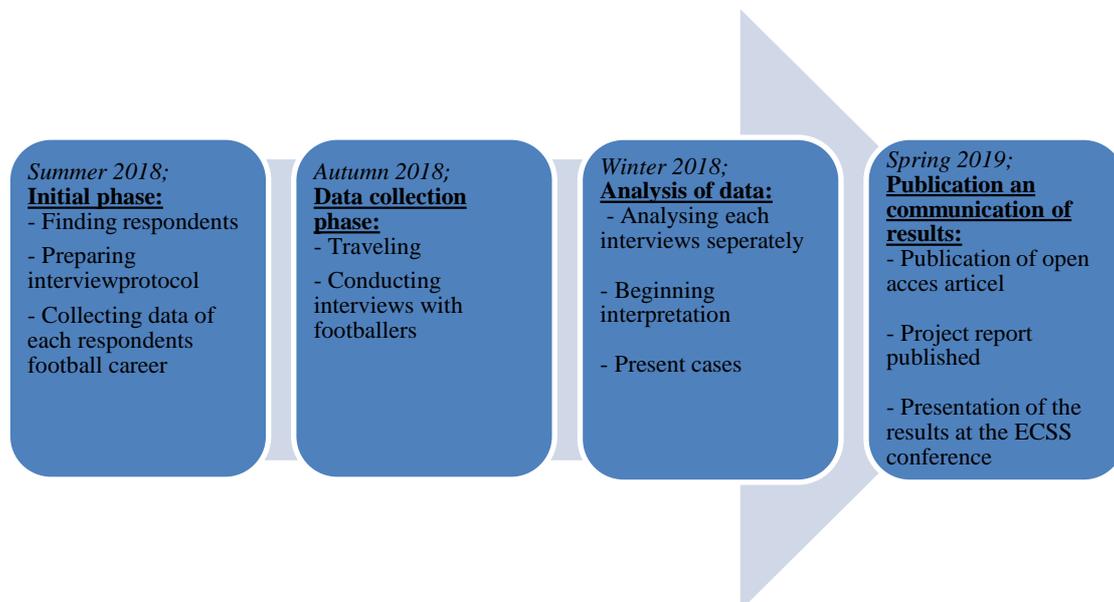
- Transcription
- Rereading of transcripts until a strong sense of the material are created
- Explorative coding and meaning condensation
- Selected coding based on specific theoretical constructs (theory-driven, e.g., globalization)

- Restructuring of central themes to represent the uniqueness of each particular individual
- Cross-case analysis to unfold central topics that are important for all participants and to investigate similarities and shared expressions

### **Ethics**

In general, this project adheres to the Danish Code of Integrity in Research as a benchmark for good ethics and solid research (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014). Furthermore, informed consent, critical assessment of the project and dependency are vital ethical concerns in this project (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015). This means that informed consent is obtained from all participants, and that they are given the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time if desired. It must also be continuously ensured that external audiences can critically assess the project's implementation through transparency of the process. The project also contemplates possible dependencies between users and researchers and/or collaborators that may affect the project and its anchoring. Furthermore, the project is carried out in accordance with Brinkman's (2015) four ethical rules of thumb; a) informed consent, b) confidentiality, c) consequences and d) the role of the researcher.

### **Project time frame**



### **Organization**

The project will be organized by a steering committee with representatives from three major Danish universities; Aarhus University, Aalborg University and Universi-

ty of Southern Denmark. The steering group is responsible for the overall development of the project. The steering committee is responsible for the progress and making any major changes to the project. The steering committee meets twice (in the beginning of the project and after the analysis of the data), unless an urgent need arises.

In addition to a steering committee, a workgroup has been set up. This workgroup is responsible for the practical progress of the project. The work group is responsible for the practical completion of the project in particularly the data collection. The workgroup reports the status of the project directly to the steering committee quarterly. Knud Ryom (postdoc) carries out the daily project management with the support of Nikolai Toft. Knud has previously carried out a large Ph.D. project and are now carrying out another full time research project as the daily project manager.

### **Steering committee**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Aarhus University	Postdoc, Knud Ryom
Aalborg University	Professor MSO, Sine Agergaard
University of Southern Denmark	Professor MSO, Peter Krustrup

### **Workgroup**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Aarhus University	Post doc and PhD, Knud Ryom (project leader)
Aarhus University	Cand. Scient. Nikolai Toft

### **Expected results**

Short-term:

- Knowledge of national and global negotiation of citizenship and belonging
  - In an increasingly globalized world and in a Europe with a large influx of migrants, the perspective of national identity becomes increasingly complex. Especially countries without a long migration history such as Denmark (and other smaller European nations) find themselves in an increasingly complex situation concerning national identity and citizenship. The knowledge of footballer's perceived belonging, can prove as important knowledge to the new immigration countries reducing the gap to the large immigration countries such as France, Germany and England.

- Strengthen the understanding of dual-nationality footballers on an elite and recreational level.
  - This may ultimately strengthen diversity in the Danish football system.

Long-term:

- Knowledge will spread to other nations in EU similar to Denmark (e.g. Holland, Austria, Belgium, Sweden and Norway)

**Communications strategy:**

**a. The public**

- Reader friendly article (2-4 pages), targeting coaches, organisations and other stakeholders. The article will be freely available on the three involved universities webpages (published in Danish).
- Priority is also given to popular dissemination in news media, the aim is to have the project mentioned in national media.
- Social media such as; LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter is used to create attention about the project.

**b. The scientific environment**

- Based on the project, an international research articles (open access) are published;

Tentative title and journal: *Issues of belonging in a globalized world of football* – Soccer and Society.

- The project results will be presented at a scientific international conference: ECSS – European Conference of Sport Sciences 2019.

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