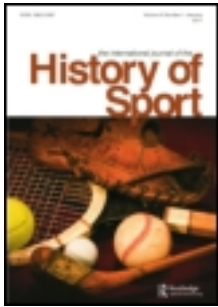


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The Migration of Professional Algerian Footballers to the French Championship, 1956–82: The ‘Desire for France’ and the Prevailing National Contexts

Stanislas Frenkiel and Nicolas Bancel

(Translated from the French by Mary Jones)

Using previously unpublished material to further socio-historic research into the migration of top footballers, this contribution studies changing national contexts in France and Algeria resulting in the dramatic fall in migration by Algerian footballers – the third largest ‘foreign’ population (since 1962) to play in the French Championship after professionalization. It also questions whether acculturation persisted in Algeria after independence. A quantitative analysis of 25 interviews carried out mainly in Algeria with ex-champions who had played for French clubs (colonial and postcolonial), shows that between 1956 and 1982 there did exist a ‘desire for France’. Despite changes to the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) sports policies nationalizing Algerian football, this desire for France remained founded on socio-economic advancement and a fascination for life in the ex-homeland.

When Algeria separated from France after a bitter seven-year conflict, many scars remained: so many that after Algeria gained independence in 1962, even its history seemed to have lost itself; leaving open an infinite number of outcomes: languorous colonial nostalgia, a squandered Atlantis, unspeakable shame, a morbid fascination with violence, intrusive images of its lost land and lost youth. . . . Historical work offers the possibility of a transition from a communitarianized memory to a communal memory . . . [and] also makes it possible to get away from competition between victims. [1]

Introduction

The history of Algerian immigration to France has been studied extensively over the last 30 years [2], often concentrating on economic migration – its main

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component – which has been sizeable since the beginning of the 1930s, increasing dramatically after the Second World War, especially after 1953. [3] However, other aspects of Algerian immigration, such as cultural immigration (students, artists, writers), political immigration or sports immigration remain largely undocumented even today. In this contribution we concentrate on one component of Algerian sports immigration, that of professional footballers. Working in a similar manner to Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor in *Moving with the Ball*, on ‘those who migrated with the intention of earning a living playing football’, [4] we endeavour to make the link between the ‘*variables of origin*’ [5] and the ‘*variables of outcome*’ [6] affecting Algerians playing in the top two French divisions. This analysis of socio-economic conditions is an attempt to understand the cultural elements that may have inspired a desire for France, which was significant in generating the wish to migrate. The assertion by John Bale and Mike Cronin that ‘from a macro-perspective we could argue that sport per se is an eminently post-colonial phenomenon’ [7] highlights this cultural dimension. We should remember that Algeria, as a French colony, was made up of three *départements* and was therefore part of France, even if the conditions of administration, governance and the legal separation of French and Muslim citizens likened Algeria to the Empire.

Unlike pioneering works on immigration in football [8] and on the history of Algerian football [9] which largely ignore this issue, our analysis follows the changes and developments in national historical contexts in France and Algeria which help shed light on specific trends in the emigration of Algerian footballers: who, after Yugoslavian and Argentinean footballers, make up the third largest group of ‘foreign’ [10] sportsmen playing in France. However, numbers began to decline dramatically even before Algerian independence. Such a sharp fall in this migration (see Figure 1) requires explanation.

The chronological framework of this study (1956–82) was decided by the following factors. Although Alfred Wahl claimed:

Because of its quality, North African football suffered a haemorrhage from 1944. French clubs who needed to rebuild their teams with players of merit, and lacking the finances for other markets, particularly those of central Europe, carried out such an active recruitment drive in North Africa that, in 1946, the French Football Federation had to prohibit all transfers for two years. [11]

The earlier date (1956) marks the decision by the FLN to ban Muslim footballers from playing in Algerian clubs, momentarily speeding up their recruitment by professional clubs in France. The later limit (1982) marked the end of a particular Algerian sports policy, which meant that for the first time officially some top players were allowed to go abroad under certain conditions. We will see that sport, as historian Pierre Arnaud stated, ‘became an issue of prestige between nations, a propaganda tool, a means of measuring the vitality of a people or the display case for a political regime’. [12]

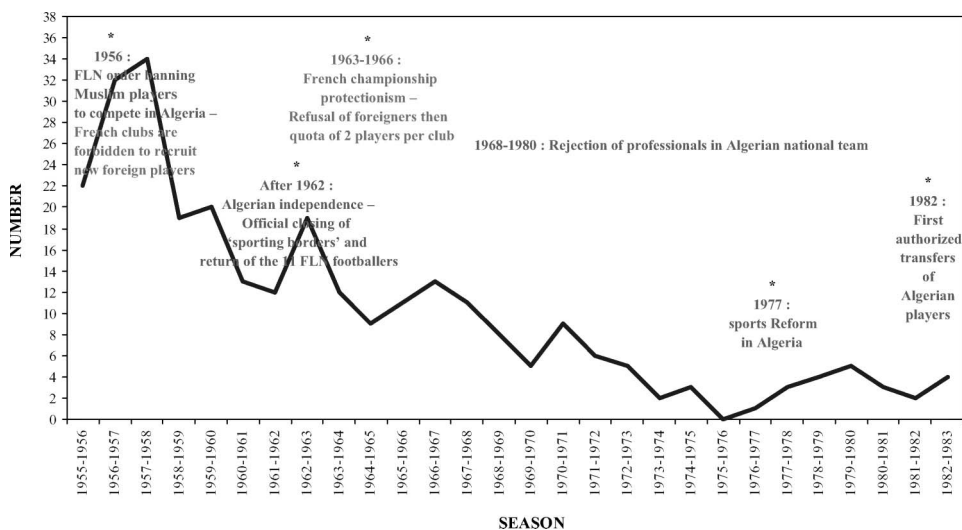


Figure 1 Algerian footballers from 1956 to 1982 in the French Championship (Divisions 1 and 2).

This article is based on previously unpublished material, which consists of 25 semi-direct interviews, lasting approximately two hours each, with players who had worked in France during the colonial and postcolonial periods. These interviews were mainly carried out in Algeria in 2006 (Algiers, Medea, Mohammadia, Mostaganem, Oran, Saïda, and Setif). It was decided that a ‘life-history’ approach – which calls for an assessment of the accuracy and sincerity of the interviewees’ words – was appropriate because it was impossible to find written records and regulations that related to this sports migration despite months of investigation in Algeria and France at the respective ministries of youth and sport and football federations. However, the main reason was because ‘by matching several testimonies about the lived experience of a same social situation for example, one can go beyond their singularities to reach, through progressive construction, a sociological representation of the situation’s (collective) social components’. [13] The sample group was divided into the champions who played in France before independence, whether they rejoined the FLN team or not, and those who after 1962 (despite the imposed ban) began or attempted to begin their careers in France. The first group was made up of Saïd Amara, Kaddour Bekhloufi, Smaïn Ibrir, Hamid Kermali, Abdelkrim Kerroum, Mohamed Maouche, Rachid Mekhloufi, Amokrane Oualiken, Abderrahmane Soukhane and Abdelhamid Zouba [14] and Ahmed Arab, Embarek Chenen, Abdallah Henni, Mohamed Lekkak and Kamel Lemoui, who did not rejoin the FLN team; those after 1962 included Hamid Bellabes, Djamel Tlemçani, Ali Bencheikh and Djamel Zidane, along with Salah Assad, Tedj Bensaoula, Rabah Djenadi, Nasser Guedioura, Mahmoud Guendouz and Rabah Madjer, who were recruited by French professional clubs after 1982. [15]

I. The Reasons for Migrating

As soon as the French Championship became professional in 1932, Ali Benouna instigated the migration of Algerian footballers by moving from US Orléansville (Chlef) to FC Sète. [16] From 1944 to 1962 the level of this migration remained constantly higher than that of Moroccans, Tunisians and Senegalese. [17] An established Algerian migration network had probably helped, as did the status of Algeria (consisting of three *départements*: Algiers, Oran and Constantine), which permitted free movement of Algerians to France until 1963. It should be noted that in France, ‘football never became an important element of the national character’. [18] However, two specific factors in Algerian emigration will be analysed here: the social and cultural conditions of exile, and the role of the FLN in the chronology of sports emigration.

Following Manuel Schotté’s pioneering research into the domination of Moroccan runners in French athletics, [19] it seems essential to study the double social construction that conditioned the emigration of Algerian footballers. There are two main factors. One is demand from the protectionist French Championship: ‘The ruling of 27 November 1955 ... banned all arrivals of new foreign players.’ [20] Algerians, considered as ‘French-Muslims’ or second-zone French citizens, gained from this ban. The other factor is work opportunities (increased in 1956), which shaped the migratory ambitions of young Algerian players. These were conditioned by socio-economic, political and cultural motives. Their arrival in ‘mainland’ France was universally reported as being ‘wonderful’ due to a real sense of good companionship. [21] However, it is equally important to understand how a desire to ‘uproot oneself’ was nurtured in Algeria.

These young footballers, having grown up in the poorer areas of Algiers, Batna, Chiffalo, Mostaganem, Oran, Saïda and Setif, nearly all wanted to come to France to achieve the level of social advancement that would have been extremely unlikely in Algeria. Among the interviewees, a similar description of semi-rural working class conditions in Algeria emerges: illiterate parents, practising Muslims largely unaware of French culture; a large family living in poor housing, very low incomes and the ability to afford basic necessities. ... This background was characterized by deprivations caused by the Second World War and was followed by the agrarian crisis suffered by post-war Algeria. Parents played an insignificant role in the sporting destiny of their offspring: fathers did not have a sporting background and mothers carried out traditional household chores. It was therefore predominately a feeling of parental scepticism, or even mistrust, that on rare occasions manifested itself in extreme violence. However, parental rejection of a son taking part in sport often disappeared as soon as it began to pay off. Abdelhamid Zouba remembers:

My father nearly beat me to death to forbid me from playing football. Because, for him, it kept me from the reality of earning a living. ... Instead of going out and looking for work, I played ball. ... Then, we got 300 francs a match. That was money back then. ... I gave it to my parents. Then there came a time when they gave me my own space, just for me, in the house, my status had improved. [22]

Sometimes, however, as in the case of Abderrahmane Soukhane (who played six times in the French squad between 1949 and 1950) and his younger brother Smain Ibrir, the elder brother was the ‘sporting role model’ of younger footballers and helped realize the dream of emigration as a means of reversing their social circumstances. Abdelhamid Zouba explained frankly: ‘It was this need to improve . . . living conditions which meant that . . . we managed it. It meant that we clung to this football career. We left our country to be of help.’ [23]

The social circumstances were all the more rigid in colonial Algeria because the ‘natives’ were subjected to legal and political inequality and colonial exploitation (almost all means of production were in the hands of the colonists). Hamid Kermali remembers Sétif, where he grew up: ‘The Rue de Constantine over there, and even here, you couldn’t go! You weren’t allowed. At that time, if you were Muslim, you went this way. And as for working, there was work cleaning the roads.’ [24] Social advancement in Algeria, outside the narrow promotional opportunities of a small elite who went to the *École Française*, [25] was extremely difficult. This factor also influenced the sharp increase in immigration after 1945. It was therefore primarily for socio-economic reasons that these footballers left Algeria for France. However, certain cultural and political factors need to be considered in order to understand why this migration was specifically towards France.

In Algeria, these young players experienced the penetration of Western cultural schemes into the psychic economy of the dominant country’s language, which happened in three stages. It was at school where the first contact with Western culture occurred. Unlike their parents, [26] some young Algerians learned to read, write and count in French – useful ‘emigration tools’. Although sitting in the same classrooms as the sons of colonials, they had little to do with them once the bell had gone and school was over for the day. However, like them, they did read the French newspapers: ‘*France-football* was our bedside book.’ [27] Kamel Lemoui remembers that they listened to French and American variety music on their radios and record-players. Almost half of them (seven out of the 15 footballers interviewed) joined the Scouts as children (admittedly the ‘Muslim’ Scouts) or went to the cinema and were fascinated by French films: ‘There was something which really struck us. When we were young, we went to the cinema; we saw the beautiful parts of France. . . . I said: “Wow, I have got to see France”.’ [28] Abdelkrim Kerroum recalled that taking part in Western pastimes furthered acculturation and strengthened this desire for France.

This fascination for the possibilities offered by France was heightened by the example of North-African sports figures who had achieved successful careers in France. The ‘black pearl’, Larbi Ben Barek, was admired by almost all the interviewees in their youth. After discovering football in the street – footballing confrontations, which spotlighted and generated intercommunal tensions, took off all over Algeria between the 254 Muslim and European clubs [29] – many young men were recruited by clubs in Algeria where they honed their skills. They embraced the principles of meritocracy, which offered the best players the possibility of escaping from their lives of social repetition, lineage, clan affiliations, ethnic group and/or religion. These were

strong influences in Algeria because they were supported by both native social structures and colonial hierarchies. [30]

Football could bypass such socio-political constraints because it was outside any sociological rationalization. It was a phenomenon that allowed these players, while still in Algeria, to progress rapidly, skipping the junior category to play directly with the seniors. This allowed them to develop an exceptional sense of adaptation and a high level of technical mastery, qualities essential to a future professional career. Moreover, this 'upgrading' in Algeria got them noticed by scouts from French clubs (at the age of 18, Rachid Mekhloufi left USM Setif to have a trial at Saint-Étienne in 1954). They were also noticed by the rich 'European' clubs in Algeria (Abdelhamid Zouba left Olympique Musulmane Saint-Eugene for the Association Sportive Saint-Eugène, where he joined Mohamed Maouche). In these 'European' clubs, the tactical and physical apprenticeships with experienced French coaches and ex-professional footballers such as Charles Cros and Paul Baron facilitated their next career step in France. During this initial experience they tasted stardom and the high life through a network of VIPs who managed and paid them and enabled them to travel in Europe, either for tourism or for sport.

With his young teammates, Mohamed Maouche spent each August from 1951 to 1954 in Switzerland and in France. The 18-year-old was also familiar with Geneva, Berne, Versailles, Saint-Jean de Luz and Paris, where in 1953 he won a title in the National Young Footballer competition. This comfortable lifestyle, albeit still modest by some standards, and their encounter with Europe, which for most of them matched its Eldorado status, would crystallize their desire for France. In colonial Algeria, becoming rich and escaping discrimination was still an unattainable dream. Now, mastering the European codes, these elite Algerian footballers increasingly focused on the possibility of joining a big French club.

The way in which this desire for France was formed remained unchanged between 1945 and 1962. However, the exceptional circumstances of the Algerian War, in which 500,000 men lost their life (the number varies according to the sources), changed the practical and political opportunities to achieve it. After the *Toussaint Rouge* attacks on 1 November 1954, political violence added a further reason to leave, as Abderrahmane Soukhane explains: 'Our departure for France. . . . The war between Algeria and France was starting and we had to get away from this war so we left in 56.' [31] In fact, in 1956, while Algeria was experiencing all-out war (with 350,000 soldiers from the metropolis posted to Algeria, 'special powers' given to the army, the first bomb attacks and curfews in Algiers), '[the] FLN ordered all Muslim clubs . . . [but also Muslim players in 'European' clubs] to stop all sporting activity imperatively. . . . The championship of the North African League was disrupted and the sporting machine seized up.' [32]

The fear that this order would put a stop to any opportunities to leave Algeria triggered an unprecedented wave of departures for France. From the 1956–7 season, 32 Algerians played in the top two divisions, especially in the south of France – ten more than the previous season. Mohamed Maouche went to Reims, the Soukhane

brothers with their uncle, Smaïn Ibrir, to Le Havre and Abdelhamid Zouba went to Niort. For them, as for Saïd Amara, who joined Strasbourg from RC Bellabes, it was unexpected:

My journey to France ... wasn't planned. ... All of a sudden, they said 'We're stopping'. 'So, you are stopping me. You are my boss. And what could I do?' Because I didn't have any others prospects. If there was nothing in football, what was I going to stay and do at the Town Hall? And it was from that moment that I was contacted by the coach Mr Rebibo. So he said to me: 'There are several clubs interested in you. Do you want to go?' I said to him: 'Yes.' [33]

There seemed to be an agreement from the FLN. Abderrahmane Soukhane confirms that 'at that time, we went but we paid to leave. "Right, you give us 2,500 dinars per person. ... To help the revolution". ... We paid with the bonus we got when we signed. ... The money was given to the FLN.' [34] There were various emigration channels already in place, which for some included sports with recruitment agents [35] and the networks of some 'European' clubs. In many cases family and friends already in France played an important part. [36] in the emigration of Algerian workers, with 212,000 Algerians already in France in 1954. [37] In addition, the geographic proximity, with numerous rail and air links between the two continents, meant that some managed to make the journey independently. Taking into account this 'local' order from the FLN, it is easy to understand the remarkable rise in the migration of Algerian footballers across the Mediterranean between 1956 and 1958.

In 1958, a major change occurred in FLN policy towards Algerian footballers. The FLN formed a 'freedom team', a symbolic ambassador in the fight for national liberation. It was used for propaganda purposes in the hope of winning international acknowledgement and played 91 matches around the world. From that moment on, the FLN organized visits to its base in Tunis of 29 Algerian footballers playing in the French Championship. [38] Thus there were almost three times fewer Algerian footballers in 1962 (12) than had been the case in 1958 (34).

Algerian footballers returned to North Africa because of political affiliations, although it is impossible to measure the part that political pressure played in this trend. The FLN had taken up a bloody and fratricidal struggle against the Mouvement National Algerien (MNA), which caused several thousand deaths in Algeria and in France. It also frequently employed violence against 'traitors' and waverers.

II. Towards the Nationalization of Algerian Football (1962–82)

On 3 July 1962, with more than 350,000 immigrants living in France, that country officially recognized Algeria's independence. The Algerian championship was being structured; the Algerian Federation was 'affiliated to the FIFA after having received ... a letter of proposal from Pierre Delaunay, general secretary of the French Football Federation'. [39] A text called the 'Sports Charter' – inspired by the one drawn up on

20 December 1940 by the Vichy regime – was used to regulate sport, although it carried no reference to the migration of top sportsmen. However, the migratory flow towards France became more intense until 1973, when sports migration was banned. [40] This was confirmed by all the ex-players interviewed for this study and by Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, [41] who found in the Algeria dossier in the FIFA archives a letter dated 24 November 1964 from the young Algerian Football Federation. The message to the international federation is very clear: ‘We regret to tell you that following the decision of our state secretary of Youth and Sport, the Federation has decided to take every step to terminate the departure of our young players abroad and therefore we will not give any clearance certificates.’ The footballers could not leave the country to work.

This ban allowed Algeria, like all the other African countries that gained independence, ‘to ensure ... [through sport] a hypothetical national cohesion, while being used as a tool of regional affirmation’. [42] Only rare international transfer certificates – indispensable for joining a foreign club – were issued. Hamid Bellabes, a forward from the Mouloudia Club Oran recollects:

As I was academic, I left to study a degree in economics, in Paris. I did a trial at Racing. ... It was conclusive on the ground but not with the administration. The Algerian Federation did not grant me an exit visa. Then ... I was selected for the national team for the first African Championship, which was held in Addis-Ababa in January '66. I saw the president of the federation. And I said to him “For goodness sake ... I am in France, I study in France, I am a university student. I am asking for permission to play on an amateur level, no more.” So he ended up championing my cause. I was the first to be freed, exceptionally because I was a university student. ... It was in '66–67. So I signed with Stade Français. [43]

Nevertheless, Hamid Bellabes was not the only Algerian footballer playing in the top French clubs. He was joined by others who had decided, once Algeria was independent, to settle in France, obtaining exceptional authorization from the FLN. Mohamed Lekak, for example, ended his professional career in 1972 at Caen (Division 2). Under the same conditions, the French Championship recorded the return of 11 footballers [44] from the FLN from 1962.

The youngest members of this ‘Freedom team’ returned to France from Algeria or even directly from Tunisia. Some of them, such as Saïd Amara and Abdelkrim Kerroum, corresponded with the clubs they had secretly left, but their reappearance seems to have been aided. Abderrahmane Soukhane confirms this: ‘When we came back, in '62 with my older brother, there were some managers who said: “We won’t take them back!” And President Robert said: “As it is me who pays, the two Soukhane brothers are coming back.” We were stars over there. They wouldn’t let us go.’ [45] Kaddour Bekhloufi, whose negotiations with his old club AS Monaco failed, likes to remember:

When we had done our national duty, we were independent, the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic got us together, they made proposals, they

said to us: ‘Do you want to go straight back to Algeria? Do you want to go back to your clubs?’ Half . . . went back to Algeria from Tunisia. In other words, those at the end of their careers. . . . Us, we said: ‘We want to continue our career.’ And then, they gave us authorization. . . . We were taken care of by officials in Europe until our situation was in order. [46]

Said Amara explains: ‘Like everyone else, we became attached to our clubs.’ [47] Therefore those footballers who were rarely in the FLN team, compensated for their sporting and financial sacrifice by returning to the top clubs: ‘In France, we were so comfortable and everything, we earned money, we had a car, at 20, 21 years old.’ [48] Abdelkrim Kerroum continues: ‘I was 24–25 years old, I said: “No, I can’t go back to Algeria.” It’s true; there was still chaos in Algeria. On the road, in Tunisia, people were killing each other.’ [49] The political situation in Algeria in the summer of 1962, which embraced a state of virtual civil war, executions of Harkis, kidnappings of colonials and the OAS, persuaded certain Algerian footballers to cross the Mediterranean to France, a country with which they were already familiar. Despite the exceptional arrangements that applied to these ‘ex-combatants’ from the FLN team, French clubs recruited fewer and fewer Algerian players. The restrictions placed by Algeria on the migration of top footballers does not in itself justify this remarkable decline.

On the French side, the professional football Championship was still in a state of crisis:

The management and climate in the clubs, the status of the player (tied to his club by contract until the age of 35), the insecurity which they faced, the competition from big amateur clubs, the question of the survival of a second division, the almost total disappearance of professional football in Paris, . . . the public’s loss of interest. [50]

This crisis had, from the second half of the 1950s, pushed French clubs towards the large-scale recruitment of players from French West Africa (AOF), most of whom were students in France: ‘47 “coloured players” became professionals between . . . 1955 and 1960 including 18 Cameroonians and 13 players from the Ivory Coast.’ [51] After 1962, the French Championship was therefore not ready to sign Algerian players. It was ‘saturated’ by the presence of players from West Africa (27 during the 1964–5 season) who had been around for less than a decade. Moreover, despite an interlude of two years (1961–3), the championship remained closed to foreign players until 1966. This affected new players wanting to leave Algeria rather than the footballers from the colonial period who were already there. The quota authorized from 1966 was to be two players per club.

From an Algerian perspective, it is necessary to consider the history of the young national Algerian team in order to understand the momentary decrease in the numbers hoping to leave. On 29 December 1968, the ‘Fennecs’ drew 0–0 against Tunisia in the elimination stages of the World Cup – not good enough to allow Algeria its first participation in this prestigious competition. The finger was pointed

at the Algerian selector, Frenchman Lucien Leduc, who had lost his gamble that the seven professional Algerians playing in France would help win a critical match. They failed in their mission. Leduc's decision to call in 'mercenary' players was fiercely criticized and consequently, until the 1980–1 season when Yugoslavian Zdravko Rajkov became manager, the national team made no further calls upon professional footballers [52] who were playing in the French Championship.

Local players understood that to excel in Algeria was their only chance to represent their country – the ultimate privilege. Paradoxically, the best way to go abroad (for training sessions and international matches) was to play for an Algerian club. In the future it will be interesting to interview 'local' players, who were no doubt subjected to emotional blackmail and pressured to stay in Algeria. Here we quote Mohamed Maouche who, with other ex-professionals, became a coach in Algeria after independence in the emerging Algerian Championship: 'At first it was the national coaches and even players, after 1970, who blocked some players. They said to them: "If you leave, you will never play for the national team again".' [53] The 'Green and Whites' had a few big wins – in Algiers winning the final of the Mediterranean games against France (3–2) in 1975 and the African Games in 1978. The team came second in the African Cup of Nations in Lagos in 1980 and played in one of the quarter-finals at the Olympic Games in Moscow in the same year. However, in 1977, the Algerian Championship was radically transformed.

On 23 October 1976 the new *Code de l'Éducation Physique et Sportive* came in, with the dissolution of civil clubs and their replacement by *Associations Sportives de Performance* (ASP). According to Youssef Fatès, 'These ASPs were under the responsibility of socialist companies, the only sector which has the means necessary (equipment, management, transport etc. for the athletes). ... This institutional integration of high-performance sports into the sector of production [was ultimately aimed at] producing performance.' [54] The reform allowed footballers to become 'unofficially' professional [55] in Algeria and the state had found a way to 'nationalize' its football. Nasser Guedioura, ex-midfielder of US Medina Algiers, explained:

Our job was sport, paid for by a company. The company was the state. We practically became professional players. ... In the morning, a driver arrived. He dropped us off at the stadium ... we trained. He picked us up, he took us to eat in a restaurant at lunchtime, he took us home, you put your bag down, you went to have a siesta, you got up and you did nothing! And at the end of the month, you had a salary. ... This means that our life had got a whole lot better. Everyday life, the luxury. [56]

Salaries, flats, cars, bonuses and presents were all part of everyday life for the best Algerian players. Their footballing skills were strengthened by the sports policy 'Reform' (the national team had its first qualification for the World Cup in 1982) as it permitted a full-time investment of time and energy in playing football while enjoying a comfortable life in Algeria. They were therefore no longer tempted to risk

uncertainty in France, especially as a new law stopped them from earning money by playing abroad before the age of 28. Written evidence of this law is impossible to find in Algeria, but its existence has been confirmed by everyone interviewed for this study.

The diminishing appeal of the professional French Championship and the restrictive policies on transfers, together with the professionalization of local players, goes some way to explaining the lack of Algerians at top French clubs after 1962. The aborted transfer of Ali Bencheikh from Mouloudia Club Algiers to Nantes during the spring of 1978 shows how the Algerian government controlled its players after 1962. The player in question was considered to be indispensable to the Algerian team:

In Paris, three blokes came up to me. ‘Mr Bencheikh?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Don’t be scared, we are from the Algerian Consulate.’ I immediately understood that they were from the security services. They asked me to get into the car. We went to the consulate. The national team was in training to prepare for the African Games, and I wasn’t there. They said to me: ‘The President of the Republic orders you to go back to Algeria.’ Well, at the time, I was young. And, at the time when Boumediene was in power, everyone was scared. . . . I packed my bags, they took me to the airport. [57]

This testimony shows that the Algerian state used the carrot – a life of privilege in postcolonial Algeria – along with the stick – the indistinct threat of repression. One can understand that in a police state, which was willingly bloody, the desire to leave could be very effectively inhibited.

Just as it was beginning to bear fruit, Algerian sports policy was to be turned on its head. It was after the exceptional performance of the national team at Gijón during the World Cup in 1982 and its 2–1 victory against the formidable West German team [58] that the sporting borders officially opened, but only under certain conditions. Young players who had benefited from the sports reform, Salah Assad at the forefront, wanted to make their careers in France before they reached the legally required age of 28. For political reasons, hoping to benefit from the ‘World Cup effect’, which had helped renew pride in the Algerian flag, Chadli Bendjedid, president of the republic, agreed to new transfers as a ‘thank you’ from the whole nation. [59] Clearly the growing fame of the top players was a determining factor (Salah Assad was voted best winger of the competition) and to have blocked their movement could have proved unpopular in Algeria. Moreover, these highly talented footballers were used both to showcase Algerian football and to strengthen it. From a financial point of view (the Algerian Football Federation illegally accepted transfer fees), it was a ‘return on its investment’ for training and support. From the sporting point of view, the ‘Fennecs’ definitely benefited from mixing with players who were strengthened by their experience in the demanding French championship. Under strict supervision by the federal authorities Salah Assad and Rabah Madjer signed for FC Mulhouse and for RC Paris (Division 2) respectively at the age of 24. They were followed into the second division by players who were in their 30s and at the end of their careers. Tedj Bensaoula went to Le Havre, Nasser Guedioura to La Roche sur

Yon, Mahmoud Guendouz to Martigues and Rabah Djenadi went to Istres. [60] In the French Championship they joined Rabah Gamouh and Djamel Tlemçani, who were at Nîmes. The latter of these two had left Chabab Belcourt in Algiers illegally in April 1979 to try his luck at Reims:

I got my release papers. . . . They let me go after six months . . . acquaintances of my father-in-law. . . . And then I knew someone at the federation, the general secretary, I can't remember his name, he was really nice, I knew him through a friend who played with me at Belcourt. He put a bit of pressure on him. [61]

Despite the attempts of successive sports policies of the Algerian state to curb it, the desire to emigrate had for the most part remained constant. As soon as the borders were opened, there were many who tried to rush through.

III. 'Leave' Come What May

Even if they stayed less time there – four years rather than the average five spent by those who had left French Algeria – top Algerian players still wanted to return to France following independence. At that time international competition was increasing and a quota was re-established from the 1981–2 season allowing only two foreign players per French club. All the players interviewed agreed that their French career was an unforgettable experience – a friendly welcome, comfortable lifestyle and good companionship in the clubs which helped overcome initial homesickness. However, to understand this 'desire for France', it is necessary to embrace two motivations. The first supposes that frustration caused by the ban between 1962 and 1982 simply fuelled the desire to emigrate, while the second is the notion of the 'sporting challenge' of improving oneself outside Algeria. Djamel Zidane [62] who left the club USMA of his own accord in 1976 at the age of 21, justifies his departure:

In Algeria, you got to a certain level where you couldn't progress anymore. There were two solutions, not 36. Either stay in the same level here, you play around for a few years and . . . then it's the end of your career . . . or you try your luck, you leave for Europe, you see new things and new working conditions. [63]

If their initial social class seemed higher than that of the previous generation with the exception of Salah Assad, these footballers all grew up in the poorer neighbourhoods of Algiers, Medea and Hammam-Bouhadjar in Oranie and came from large families. Their fathers (often illiterate) may have been shopkeepers, manual workers, farmers, taxi-drivers, dockers or possibly low-level civil servants. The possibility of climbing the social ladder through sport continued therefore to play an important role after 1962. Rabah Madjer remembers his three-room flat with 11 people living together: 'It wasn't very nice to see. We suffered. Me personally, with my brothers, we slept in the living room. There was no bed.' Rabah Djenadi continues: 'When you start growing up in front of your sister, in front of your brother . . . everyone should be entitled to

privacy. . . . And that is what made me leave, it was that. My freedom, I wanted to live my life and at the same time earn money.’ [64]

The French Championship was still seen as an ‘Eldorado’ by ambitious players who had already tasted the joys of semi-professionalism in Algeria. They were sure they could succeed in France given the constraints imposed on their daily footballing activities in the ASP and sought financial rewards that would allow them to achieve social advancement. Nasser Guedioura, who didn’t intend settling down in France, reasoned: ‘Two years and then go back, two years is nothing, it goes very quickly. Like that . . . we could put a bit of money aside to buy other things. . . . Clothes, buy a nice car.’ [65] In order to succeed in their French clubs, they were encouraged to integrate and accepted that. Tedj Bensaoula, newly arrived in Le Havre from MC Oran, explains: ‘I admit, it was difficult at first. Everything was completely different. We adapted and we were obliged to adapt. Anyway . . . we didn’t have the choice.’ [66]

For socio-economic reasons, Algerian footballers wanted to play in France. Long before attempting to play there professionally, they had been there regularly to work or on holiday, just like Djamel Zidane: ‘Paris, as a child . . . I was there, for around ten years. . . . Three months a year I would go there.’ [67] How did this desire for France build up in footballers who were born just before Algerian independence?

Mastering the French language was of vital importance. Despite the policy of Arabization spreading through the education system, the players still learned French. The emerging Algerian school system called for more than ‘11,000 French teachers’. [68] These French volunteers brought with them Western modernity, as had the colonials: ‘They had an educating role. And so in 66–67, my teachers were French’ (Rabah Djenadi). [69] Although in their eyes football came before schooling, they still stayed at school longer – almost all of them went to high school. Their attraction for French culture was quite marked: some of them, for example Tedj Bensaoula, frequently went to the French Cultural Centre in Algeria. After obtaining his *baccalaureate* (high school leaving exam) and following a specialized training, he worked teaching French for a year in Algerian lower secondary schools. [70] Aside from schooling, there was a continued admiration for Western culture, along with a fascination for popular culture from the other side of the Mediterranean. Rabah Medjer explains: ‘From a very early age, I liked all the old 70s songs: Claude François, Gerard Lenormand, Pierre Bachelet, Joe Dassin. We bought the records and cassettes since our childhood in Algeria. It was very popular.’ [71] Djamel Tlemçani admired the group Pink Floyd. [72]

Music, the media, especially the still widely read *France-Football*, but also films from France, all helped to build the migration dream. Access was more available than ever, as already in Algeria ‘we followed French football’ [73] The sole Algerian television channel, Radiodiffusion Television Algerienne [74] had been broadcasting European football competitions since 1970. Whether the family had a television set or not, all teenagers enjoyed the entertainment and identified with their idols, with Johann Cruyff at the forefront. Rabah Madjer remembers having seen ‘the 1974 World Cup, the European Champions Cup with Ajax Amsterdam and Barcelona

matches as well'. [75] They were all very enthusiastic, like Rabah Djenadi: 'Every Wednesday was the European Cup, we were definitely in front of the TV. It was great!' [76] Djamel Zidane recalled: 'At the age of 16 or 17, we only saw France through the television. I always wanted to leave for France. For us, it was a dream, especially at that time when there was nothing in Algeria.' [77]

The Algerian clubs formalized their interest in European culture, because, as Thierry Terret says, 'sporting practices and youth movements ... inventions of Western societies, are ... reflections of the societies in which they have been established' [78] and nearly all the players interviewed agreed that Algerian coaches who had played in the top French clubs had been a great influence. Following independence, experienced coaches became actively involved in developing Algerian football and the 'Fennecs', sharing with their young protégés their experiences of playing at a high level in France. The aspiring migrants were sometimes, as during the colonial period, supported and encouraged in Algeria by well-meaning French coaches such as Jean Snella, who left a mark on Rachid Mekhloufi at AS Saint-Étienne and at Servette de Genève from 1954 to 1958 and from 1962 to 1967. He also impressed Mahmoud Guendouz and Rabah Madjer 20 years later at NAHD of Algiers, from 1976 to 1978. The Algerians organized training courses abroad, [79] which also influenced the desire for better living standards. Rabah Djenadi remembers: 'I played in one of the best clubs in Algeria. I never thought about making my career in France. Well, as I saw we were going on a training course, seeing the professionalism and everything, I said one day "I would like to go there".' [80]

Ironically, the Algerian national team became an important element in reinforcing this desire for France. Selected for the juniors, cadets, university teams, army and senior club teams, these Algerian footballers had, since their youth, developed the habit of 'leaving' in order to take part in numerous international tournaments including those of Roubaix and Saint-Priest in France; Porto in Portugal; matches in Valence in Spain, Zurich in Switzerland and the Junior World Cup in Japan in 1979. Always 'blocked' in their Algerian clubs, they enjoyed playing football abroad while systematically comparing themselves to the footballers they encountered and sometimes beat on the football pitch. Persuaded that they had their place in Europe and deserved international recognition, they felt it was unfair to be restricted to playing on home ground. This strengthened their desire for France. According to Nasser Guedioura:

When we were kids, we dreamt of becoming professionals because when we were young, we already played in international tournaments. We saw that at football we beat everyone else. The next year, you turned on the TV, or picked up *France-Football*, and you saw all the players you had beaten. You said to yourself: 'It's not possible!' [81]

Excursions by the 'Green and Whites' were part of the construction of this desire for France but there were bigger things at stake. At 30, Mahmoud Guendouz, joined

Martigues from Algiers in 1984, because he wanted ‘at any cost to play in the 1986 World Cup. Coming to France was a way to reach that level.’ [82]

Conclusion

Between the seasons 1956–7 (32) and 1981–2 (2), there were 16 times fewer professional Algerian footballers in France. To understand the migratory trends of these top players and their decreasing numbers in France it is necessary to link the national contexts in both countries and to examine the colonial and postcolonial periods. Indeed, these migratory trends can be explained. From a French perspective it is clear that from 1956 the opportunity (geographic, linguistic and cultural) was given to Algerian players to join professional clubs followed by the subsequent and constraining influence of quotas. From an Algerian viewpoint, the desire for France is permanent, but has been blocked by changes to the sports policies of the FLN, then the Algerian state. Between 1956 and 1958, a window of opportunity was opened by the FLN and this policy ensured the rapid increase in football immigration and was prolonged marginally when 11 FLN footballers went back to France after independence. However, the progressive nationalization of Algerian football after 1962 – giving local players preference in the national selection process from 1968 to 1980, followed by the ‘Reform’ in 1977, which prevented footballers making money from their talents abroad before the age of 28, progressively stemmed the migratory flow towards France. The privileged lifestyle enjoyed by footballers in Algeria from 1977, together with the vague threat of repression from the totalitarian state, contributed enormously to this process.

However, migration diminished both before and after independence. The desire for France was based on socio-economic advancement and a fascination for life in the ex-homeland. This fascination was encouraged by everyday practices such as going to school, reading French newspapers, an interest in French films or the prestige of European consumer goods, and was further stimulated by a passion for the French and European football championships, which everyone followed on television. The end of the sports reform in 1989, [83] the retirement of those players affected by it and the beginning of the black decade in Algeria (which unsettled civil society and globally affected Algerian football) would once again slow the flow of players towards France. Between 1989 and 2007 only 13 Algerian players went to play in France, [84] whereas in the 2006–7 season there were 22 French players of Algerian extraction. A new elite is turning a page in the history of both countries and will undoubtedly make up the national Algerian team. [85]

Notes

[1] Stora, ‘L’Histoire de l’Algérie, sources, problèmes, écritures’.

[2] See Noiriél, *Le creuset français*; Assouline and Lallaoui, *Un siècle d’immigrations en France*; Guichard and Noiriél, *Construction des nationalités et immigration dans la France*

contemporaine; Stora and Temime, *Immigrances*. A series of local monographs is a useful source on colonial and postcolonial immigration: Blanchard *et al.*, *Le Paris arabe*; Blanchard and Boëtsch, *Marseille Porte Sud*; Bancel *et al.*, *Sud-Ouest, porte des outre-mers*; Bancel *et al.*, *Lyon, capitale des outre-mers*.

- [3] See Hifi, *L'immigration algérienne en France*; Noiriél, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France*; Simon, *L'immigration algérienne en France*.
- [4] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, 6.
- [5] ‘The characteristics which help appreciate the place that the immigrant held in his group of origin, whether geographical or social, social and economic characteristics of the group, their attitude and the individual to the phenomenon of migration as it is defined by the oral tradition emigration’: Sayad, ‘Les trois “âges” de l’émigration algérienne en France’.
- [6] ‘The differences which separate immigrants (in their living and working conditions) in France itself: *ibid.*
- [7] Bale and Cronin, *Sport and postcolonialism*, 4.
- [8] Beaud and Noiriél, ‘L’immigration dans le football’.
- [9] See: Fatès, ‘Sport et politique en Algérie’; Dine, ‘France, Algeria and sport’; Amara and Henry, ‘Between globalization and local “modernity”’.
- [10] According to Marc Barreaud, who counted 174 from 1932 to 2003. It is true that the writer was imprecise in considering Algeria (like all the French ex-colonies) as a ‘foreign’ territory, even before the wave of decolonization in the 1960s. Barreaud, ‘Les footballeurs étrangers’.
- [11] Wahl, ‘Football et jeux de ballon’.
- [12] Arnaud, ‘Le sport et les relations internationales’, 11.
- [13] Bertaux, *Les récits de vie*, 33.
- [14] From his debut in 1956 until 1958, when he left secretly for Tunisia, he played in the amateur club of Niort. He only played professionally in France from the 1963–4 season in Nîmes.
- [15] Personal archives (photographs, school reports, telegrams, professional cards and correspondences) were consulted as was the dossier on the case of Djamel Zidane, which is kept at FIFA headquarters. Moreover, in Algiers we interviewed Omar Kezzal, president of the Algerian Football Federation after the Spanish *Mundial* in 1982 and who was in charge of negotiating players’ transfers at the federation headquarters. All those interviewed gave their consent to having these resulted published; the interview transcripts are held by the authors.
- [16] In 1936, against Czechoslovakia, he also became the first Algerian footballer to be selected for the French team. Nine others joined him in the national team: Abdelkader Ben Bouali from Olympique de Marseille (1937), Abderrahmane Ibrir from FC Toulouse (1949), Kader Firoud and Abdelaziz Ben Tifour from OGC Nice (1951 and 1952), Ahmed Mihoubi from FC Toulouse (1953), Rachid Mekhloufi from AS Saint-Etienne (1956), Saïd Brahimi from FC Toulouse (1957), Mustapha Zitouni from AS Monaco (1957) and Khennane Mahi from Stade Rennais (1961).
- [17] For example, during the 1954–5 season, there were 19 Algerians compared to only 13 Moroccans, three Tunisians and one Senegalese playing in France in the first and second divisions. Barreaud, *Dictionnaire des footballeurs étrangers*, 319.
- [18] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, 171.
- [19] Schotté, ‘Destins singuliers’, 379.
- [20] Lanfranchi and Wahl, *Les footballeurs professionnels*, 137. This policy was to avoid a rise in the price of players while encouraging the quality of young professional players in France.
- [21] This seems to show that Algerian players partially avoided the rising anti-Arab feeling following the Algerian war and FLN action in France (see Gastaut, *L’immigration et l’opinion en France*).
- [22] Abdelhamid Zouba interviewed by Stanislas Frenkiel, 18 July 2006, Algiers.
- [23] *Ibid.*

- [24] H. Kermali interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 13 Nov. 2006, Setif.
- [25] Kadri, *Parcours d'intellectuels maghrébins*, 428.
- [26] 'It was only immediately after the Second World War ... [that the will was shown] for a massive education programme for natives who had become French Muslims and to decrease ethnic differentiation in schools. Different schemes for "Muslim children" were established until Algerian independence.' Kateb, 'Les séparations scolaires dans l'Algérie coloniale'.
- [27] K. Lemoui interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 16 Nov. 2006, Algiers.
- [28] A. Kerroum interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 11 Nov. 2006, Mohammadia.
- [29] Data from 1962, which according to Stéphane Mourlane refer to the request of the Algerian Football Federation to affiliate with FIFA. Mourlane, 'Algeria-Allemagne', 301.
- [30] On the subject of the AOF see Bancel, 'Entre acculturation et révolution'.
- [31] A. Soukhane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 22 July 2006, Algiers.
- [32] Fatès, 'Sport et politique en Algérie' 598.
- [33] S. Amara interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 8 July 2006, Saïda.
- [34] A. Soukhane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 22 July 2006, Algiers.
- [35] Rachid Mekhloufi remembers the contact he had with a 'minister of Setif who was in charge of AS Saint-Étienne for recruitment': R. Mekhloufi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 30 Oct. 2006, Paris.
- [36] Hamid Kermali confirms that he was welcomed to France by 'two inseparable Algerians. We were together all the time! I was reassured that they were there. I was taken care of by these friends who worked at the factory. ... I slept at their place, I ate at their place until I did a trial at Mulhouse': H. Kermali interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 13 Nov. 2006, Setif.
- [37] Stora and Temime, 'L'immigration algérienne'.
- [38] Where they were playing before they left (1958 and 1961): in Angers, Ali Benfadah, Dahmane Defnoun and Amar Rouai; in Avignon, (player/coach) Mokhtar Arribi; in Bordeaux, Saïd Amara and Abdallah Hedhoud; in Le Havre, Cherif and Hocine Bouchache, Smaïn Ibrir and Abderrahmane and Mohamed Soukhane; in Lens, Ahmed Oudjani; in Lyon, Hamid Kermali; in Monaco, Kaddour Bekhloufi, Abdelaziz Ben Tifour, Abderrahmane Boubekeur, Hassen Chabri and Mustapha Zitouni; in Nîmes, Mohamed Bouricha, Abdelkader Mazouz and Amokrane Oualiken; in Niort (at amateur level), Abdelhamid Zouba; in Reims, Mohamed Maouche; in Saint-Étienne, Rachid Mekhloufi; in Sète, Hassen Bourtal; in Toulon, Saïd Hadad; in Toulouse, Hamid Bouchouk and Saïd Brahimi; and in Troyes, Abdelkrim Kerroum.
- [39] Mourlane, 'Algérie-Allemagne'.
- [40] 'The Franco-Algerian accords of 25 December 1968 limited the freedom of movement stated in the Evian Accord. Border controls became stricter, more selective than in the past. On 20 September 1973, President Boumedienne suspended emigration to France': Stora, *Ils venaient d'Algérie*, 402.
- [41] Lanfranchi and Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, 174.
- [42] Dietschy, 'La migration des footballeurs', 92–101.
- [43] H. Bellabès interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 8 Aug. 2006, Oran.
- [44] In 1962, Saïd Amara (Bordeaux), Ali Ben Fadah (Toulon), Hocine Bouchache (Le Havre), Abdelkrim Kerroum (Troyes), Mohamed Medehbi (Limoges), Ahmed Oudjani (Lens), Amar Rouai (Angers) and Abderrahmane and Mohamed Soukhane (Le Havre). Later, Rachid Mekhloufi (Saint-Étienne, after a few months spent at Servette de Genève) and in 1963 Abdelhamid Zouba (Nîmes, after spending a year in Grange).
- [45] A. Soukhane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 22 July 2006, Algiers.
- [46] K. Bekhloufi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 15 July 2006, Oran.
- [47] S. Amara interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 8 July 2006, Saïda.
- [48] A. Kerroum interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 11 July 2006, Mohammadia.
- [49] Ibid.
- [50] Lanfranchi and Wahl, *Les footballeurs professionnels*, 165–8.

- [51] *Ibid.*, 138.
- [52] During this decade we should mention the exceptional selections of Mohamed Lekkak (Lyon), Rachid Natouri (Angoulême), Mustapha Dahleb (Paris) and Abdelghani Djaadaoui (Sochaux). The last two came to France as children when their families migrated.
- [53] M. Maouche interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 20 July 2006, Algiers.
- [54] Fatès, 'Sport et politique en Algérie', 672–3.
- [55] Chapter V, 'High-performance sport', from the Code de l'EPS states that 'National sport is based on amateurism'.
- [56] N. Guedioura interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 9 June 2006, Paris.
- [57] A. Bencheikh interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 1 Aug. 2006, Algiers.
- [58] Mourlane, 'Algérie-Allemagne', 305.
- [59] As confirmed by the footballers in question and Omar Kezzal.
- [60] Secretly leaving his club de la Jeunesse Electronique Tizi-Ouzou before the age of 28, he couldn't join any club for a year until allowed to by FIFA and signed his professional licence during the 1985–6 season.
- [61] D. Tlemcani interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 11 Nov. 2006, Medea.
- [62] Blocked by the Algerian Football Federation, who refused to issue the precious international transfer certificate, Djamel Zidane was given permission after a year by FIFA and after playing for Corbeil-Essonnes (Division 3) played for different Belgian clubs (Eeklo, Saint-Nicolas, Courtrai and Waterschei) until 1987. The FIFA archives ('Correspondence with national associations, 1962–1983, Algeria') confirmed his story.
- [63] D. Zidane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 25 July 2006, Algiers.
- [64] R. Djenadi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 29 July 2006, Algiers.
- [65] N. Guedioura interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 9 June 2006, Paris.
- [66] T. Bensaoula interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 18 Aug. 2006, Paris.
- [67] D. Zidane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 25 July 2006, Algiers.
- [68] Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie depuis l'indépendance*, 59.
- [69] R. Djenadi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 29 July 2006, Algiers.
- [70] T. Bensaoula interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 18 Aug. 2006, Paris.
- [71] R. Madjer interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 27 July 2006, Algiers.
- [72] D. Tlemcani interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 11 Nov. 2006, Medea.
- [73] A. Bencheikh interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 1 Aug. 2006, Algiers.
- [74] The regional station of French Radio (ORTF) during the colonial period; changed at independence into the RTA, it was extended and modernized from 1967.
- [75] R. Madjer interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 27 July 2006, Algiers.
- [76] R. Djenadi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 29 July 2006, Algiers.
- [77] D. Zidane interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 25 July 2006., Algiers.
- [78] Terret, 'Preface'.
- [79] Amokrane Oualiken often took his footballers (e.g. Rabah Djenadi) from the Direction Nationale de la Construction (DNC) club Algiers to Saint-Pierre des Corps, where he had played as an amateur 25 years earlier.
- [80] R. Djenadi interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 29 July 2006, Algiers.
- [81] N. Guedioura interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 9 June 2006, Paris.
- [82] M. Guendouz interviewed by S. Frenkiel, 25 July 2006, Algiers.
- [83] It ended with the adoption of the new law on sport of 14 February 1989.
- [84] Samir Abbar, Créteil (L 2); Lakhdar Adjali, Amiens (Division 2); Yacine Bezaz, Ajaccio, Dziri Bilal, Sedan, Nasser Bouiche, Red Star (Division 2); Kamel Kaci-Saïd, Cannes; Faris Khenniche, Créteil (L 2); Ali Meçabih, Martigues (Division 2); Fawzi Moussouni, Créteil (Division 2); Moussa Saïb, Auxerre; Rafik Saïfi, Troyes; Abdelhafid Tasfaout, Auxerre; and Abdelraouf Zarabi, Ajaccio.

- [85] Of the 116 international matches studied, the analysis of the place of birth of 'Fennecs' players shows that players in top French clubs born in France went from 3.04 per cent during 1997–8 to 60.6 per cent in nine years.

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