

THE HUGE PRESENCE OF AFRICAN MIGRANT PLAYERS IN 'LES BLEUS' OF FRANCE IN 2018 WORLD CUP: A COROLLARY TO THE POLICY OF ASSIMILATION AND ASSOCIATION

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Abstract

A corollary to the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference was the colonisation and partition of the African continent. Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Italy and Germany became beneficiaries following the partition, though Germany later lost her territories as sanctioned by the Versailles Treaty of 1919. The French introduced the policies of assimilation and association in colonies administered by them. This study links the huge presence of African players to the aforementioned colonial policies. There are some works averring the nexus between the French colonial policies and the presence of African migrant players in the the senior men's national French football team nicknamed 'Les Bleus.' These works do not bring to the fore the rate (percentage) of African players in the various matches played by France in the 2018 World Cup fiesta, hence this study. The sources of this study are mainly extracted from the internet combined with utilisation of textbooks. Findings reveal that as a result of French colonial policies of assimilation and association, a lot of Africans became French nationals. It is also observed that there was racial discrimination in France, but it seemed not to be so intense as French Football authorities didn't buy into the discrimination narrative and went for the best set of legs. 15 out of the 23 players of Les Bleus in the 2018 World Cup were Africans. This study recommends that African players should

be given a specific quota in Les Bleus to douse tension of physical xenophobic attack on Africans by the French natives.

Key words: African migrant players, *Les Bleus*, France, 2018 World Cup, Assimilation, Association

Introduction

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 organised by Otto Von Bismarck, the German Chancellor paved the way for European take over of Africa from Tripoli in North Africa off the Mediterranean coast down to the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa and across Cape Verde in the Atlantic Ocean to Mogadishu in the Horn of Africa down to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The only parts of Africa that were not colonised were Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Liberia. According to the resolutions reached at the end of the conference, Rivers Congo and Niger were to be free waterways; King Leopold of Belgium was recognised as the head of the Congo Free State as the country was seen as an ‘independent state’; slavery and slave trade were prohibited and for effective occupation of a territory the occupying nation must effectively control the coastal areas with the rest of the hinterland being its sphere of influence¹. France colonised the following territories: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire and Djibouti. Others are Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia.² Taking a look at the map of Africa, the size of French territory was wider in North Africa, West Africa and narrower in Central Africa. Out of the fifty-four countries, twenty were colonised by France giving France 37.04% of African territories and the highest among European powers. It was observed that the French occupied the Sahel part of Africa.

The French introduced the policy of assimilation and association in Africa which transformed Africa and Africans politically, economically and socially. Through this policy the French wanted

Africa to be tied to her. This was exemplified with the eleven agreements signed with fourteen of her former colonies after they became independent. The agreements include - African countries to pay back the money on infrastructure spent by the French in these countries; financial reserves of these countries to be deposited in the French Bank; France has the right of first refusal on any raw material discovered in these territories; French companies are given preference over bidding of tenders even if Africans can get lucrative deal elsewhere; only France can supply military hardware to the territories and train the military of the erstwhile colonies and France has the right to defend the territories militarily in case of any attack on her interest, hence, the establishment of a military base in these African territories. Other agreements were making French language the lingua franca and the language for education; the African countries to make use of the CFA (Communaute Financiere Africaine meaning African Financial Community) franc; directors of the central banks of these territories liaising with their ministers of finance to send a report on the state of their reserve to the Banque de France; no military collaboration with any country unless permitted by France and these former colonies must contribute soldiers to France in any conflict involving France³. It is the view of this paper that these agreements could be seen in the light of a preponderance of African players playing for Les Bleus. This implies that there is a tacit agreement that citizens of French former colonies are free to play for Les Bleus.

The French Football Federation (FFF) formed in 1904, co-ordinates activities of all the French football teams and it is a member of FIFA (International Federation Association Football) and UEFA (Union of European Football Association). Les Bleus (The Blues) is the popular nickname of the senior French national football team, derived from their blue top. The team puts on red shorts and white stockings in addition to the blue top during competitive tournaments during home matches. These colours are obtained from their national flag colours which are blue, white and red. Due to these

three colours, it is also known as l'équipe tricolore or les tricolores i.e the tricolor team⁴. In the 1980s, it was labelled as the 'Brazilians of Europe' due to the skills of players like Marius Trésor, Maxime Bossis, Dominique Rocheteau. Also were Michel Platini, Jean Amadou Tigana, Alain Giresse and Luis Ferdinand who together created the "carré magique" (magic square) which was nightmarish to defenders⁵. Its first official match with Belgium in 1904 ended in a 3-3 draw in Brussels. In 1906, it lost 0-15 to England and in 1908 the Team A of France lost to Denmark 1 – 17 in the Olympics⁶. It took part in the first world cup hosted in Uruguay in 1930 and has appeared in world cup fiesta sixteen times. Its biggest win was in 1995 when it thrashed Azerbaijan 10 – 0. It lifted the European Championship two times, 1984 and 2000; CONMEBOL-UEFA ((South American Football Federation-Union of European Football Association) Cup of Champions, 1985; the World Cup, 1998 and 2018; and the FIFA Confederation Cup, 2001 and 2003.

From 1964 to 1997, eleven managers were in charge of the national team which included Henri Guerin, Just Fontaine, Henri Michel, Michel Platini etc. From 1998 to 2018, six coaches were in charge. They included Aimé Jacquet, Roger Lemerre, Jacques Santini, Raymond Domenech, Laurent Blanc and Didier Deschamps. Some earlier African players that played for France were Raoul Diagne, Larbi Benbarek, Louis Fontaine, Rachid Mekhloufi and Jean Amadou Tigana. Later African players that had played/are still playing in the French team included/include Zinedine Zidane, Marcel Desailly, Patrick Viera, N'golo Kante, Kylian Mbappe etc. These African migrant players went to France and naturalised; were born in France by African parents; or were born by an African father and a non-African mother in France. These Africans are either dark skinned or fair skinned. Africans born by an African mother and a non-African father are not considered African migrants in this study. Also, this study does not regard these African players as French natives as the natives are considered here to be 'original' owners of France.



Related works to this study are analysed. Michael Crowder notes that Senegal experienced the policy of assimilation in full as he examines its impact. This policy was practised in Goree, Rufisque, Dakar in the former French colony.⁷ Christopher Thompson acknowledges the discussions going on about ‘Les Bleus’ in relation to post-colonial immigration, national identity and republican citizenship. These discussions started in the mid-1990s culminating in the issue of quota of 2010 - 2011.⁸ Arion Fontaine writes that Algerian and Moroccan migrants were recruited into the coal mines of Northern France after World War II. Ahmed Oudjani, an Algerian player though not a miner played from 1950s to the 1970s for Racing, a club owned by a mining company.⁹ Mudiga Aluya links the presence of African players to the policy of assimilation and association adopted by France in Africa during the colonial era.¹⁰ Gareth Austin observes that in running the assimilation policy a small number of Africans were assimilated into the French culture and citizenship.¹¹ According to IOM (International Organisation of Migration), population change was impacted by the growing rate of international migration and Europe was among the major destinations for international migrants. France in Europe became a destination for African migrants especially from former French colonies.¹² Ngozi Kamalu observes that the French did not want to cut off the nexus between them and their colonies as shown by their permanent association with the colonies.¹³ This must have made the French to include Africans in Les Bleus. Evelyn Combeau- Marie notes that the French introduced sports in their colonies at the end of the 19th century.¹⁴ Some of these works do not link the the French colonial policy to the heavy presence of African players. Those that do it do not look at the impact of African players on France and the African continent. They do not analyse the rate (percentage) of Africans who played for France in the various matches at the 2018 world cup matches.

This study is divided into four sections viz African Players in Les Bleus in 2018 World Cup, Reasons for the Presence of Africans in Les Bleus, Effects of the Presence of African Players on France and Africa and conclusion

Conceptual Clarification

To do justice to this study, the French policy of assimilation and association come in handy. Assimilation was the French colonial policy in West Africa that started in the 19th century. This was an upshot of the French Revolution of 1789 which had the slogan “liberty, equality and fraternity or death”. Death was later obliterated from the slogan. Prior to 1789, France was a monarchy and one of the leaders then King Louis XIV saw himself as the state (France) as pointed out by a writer, which has been refuted by French historians¹⁵. The French Kings had unlimited powers as they saw themselves as representatives of God. On 14th July, 1789, the Paris mob seized the Bastille (a royal fortress and prison) to acquire arms. The royal authority collapsed while the national assembly survived as it abolished feudalism. The abolition was confirmed in the declaration of rights of man as stated in the above slogan. Going by the content of the declaration, the natural rights of man and woman could never be jettisoned. Also, all men were free and equal and the king obtained his right to rule solely from the people. The legislative power lay with a new elected assembly, and the local government and legal system were totally re-organised. Religious toleration for Protestants and Jews terminated the privileges of the Catholic Church and expropriation and sale of Church lands settled the issue of the country’s debt. Louis XVI was forced to approve the new constitution, abrogating absolute monarchy and this changed the French society. A thousand anti-revolutionaries were killed in the Prisons of Paris in September 1792 and France became a republic in November 1792. In 1793 Louis XVI and his wife were tried for treasonable felony and guillotined.¹⁶

Assimilation was a policy that immersed Africans into French way of life as Africans imbibed French language and culture. The aim of this policy was to produce dark skinned Frenchmen (*e'volue's*) who were to be distinguished from the rest of the masses (*indig`enes*). *E'volue's* implies Africans that had evolved through the French way of life abandoning the African way of life and becoming Frenchmen. *Indig`enes* means indigens who were regarded as ordinary people who had not acquired French culture. Africans in the colonies were therefore grouped into two namely citizens (*e'volue's*) and subjects (*indig`enes*). The citizens went to school, spoke, read and wrote the French language. They dressed like the French, ate like them and thought like them. Succinctly put, they were regarded to be Frenchmen with the only difference being their skin colour. The subjects were the Africans that did not undergo the process of becoming dark-skinned Frenchmen. The French saw them as the hoipolloi that should not enjoy the same rights with the citizens. The citizens enjoyed more educational opportunities than the subjects who had fewer schools.

The thrust of the policy was hinged on the belief that humans are potentially equal and that education can erase any racial and cultural impurities. The French felt they were superior to Africans and there was need to civilise them as they were regarded as barbaric inhabitants of the dark continent.¹⁷ Conklin sees civilisation as to be free from tyranny of disease, instinct, ignorance and despotism.¹⁸ For Raoul Girardet, the early 19th century French colonial policy was to better the lives of those inhabiting Asia, Africa and the Pacific whom France regarded to be primitive.¹⁹ Jules Brevie, governor-general of French West Africa (1930-1936) stated that launching a cultural renaissance on Africa was a major task.²⁰ Leroy- Beaulieu points out that civilisation could be dispersed through commerce, trade and exchanges between people, instead of through war.²¹

The policy was practised in African territories colonised by France. Four communes were created in Senegal to run true assimilation. The communes were St Louis and Gore'e (1872), Rufisque (1880) and Dakar (1887). Each commune was made up of a council headed by a mayor and members of the council were elected by all male adults. The elected bodies with mayors oversaw governance of local and municipal council.²² A provincial government known as *Conseil de Senegal* was established which comprised of representatives of the four communes. These representatives formulated regulations such as taxes to be paid. Members of the communes were recognised as French citizens as French public laws were used in governing them. They voted for one member to the French Chamber of Deputies in Paris and a citizen could be assigned a position of authority in the colony or in France. Blaise Diagne (1914), Houghtet-Boigny and Leopold Senghor served in the French Chamber of Deputies which was the lower house of parliament in France. Members were also given the latitude to implement their own private laws for marriages and inheritance.²³ French settlers mingled with Africans in the colonies as marriages were common between the French and the Africans.²⁴ Africans in Paris were said to be comfortable as they were not discriminated against as they had equal rights and privileges with French citizens inasmuch as they had acquired French language and education.

Under the policy of assimilation the French ran a centralised administration over her West African colonies which she merged as Federation of West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Francaise) with headquarters in Dakar, Senegal. The colonies were Dahomey (Benin), Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire), Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger and Mauritania. The federation (1895 – 1960) was headed by a governor general while each of the colonies had a governor who reported to the governor-general who was answerable to the minister of colonies in Paris, France.²⁵

Another hallmark of assimilation policy was that the formation of political parties was discouraged. Also, forced labour known as *prestation* was introduced by the French for the subjects.²⁶ In East Cameroon the people were conscripted to construct major roads and railways. It was obligatory for adult males to work for the government without being remunerated for ten days every year. Those who stayed more than ten days on the job were paid peanuts based on the number of kilometres of road or track completed.²⁷ The French also introduced the indigenat policy that empowered French authorities to arrest Africans arbitrarily and they could be in detention for about two years without being tried. The African tradition and custom was discountenanced as African institutions were paid little or no attention to by the French. African chiefs could be sacked at any time. The prominent Sultan Njoya of Bamun in East Cameroon was dethroned and exiled in 1931 by the French after a lengthy and successful stint as a traditional ruler.²⁸

The policy of assimilation was replaced with that of association between 1946 and 1956 as a result of worldwide opposition to assimilation. The formation of RDA (*Reassemblement Democratique Africaine*) in 1946 aided partly in tackling assimilation as it promoted African culture and civilisation and saw itself as an “African organisation adapted for African conditions, led by Africans to serve Africa.”²⁹ RDA was formed in Bamako, Mali and the leader of the party was Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who subsequently became the first president of Ivory Coast. The objectives of RDA were as follows:

- To agitate and secure the interest of Africans in the French Assembly
- To act as a platform for Africans to synergise in the French Assembly
- To collaborate for the independence of Africa
- To achieve conducive atmosphere for African workers
- To enhance the interest of African farmers

- To establish a broad common front for every view and political groups

Radical parties were later formed such as the *Bloc Democratique Senegalais* led by Senghor, who later became the first president of Senegal joined the fray. By the mid-1950s the French were forced to grant concessions to Africans.

Grouping of Africans into citizens (upper class) and subjects (lower class) was abolished and in its place Africans were regarded to be of the same status. Forced labour and the harsh indigent policy were abrogated. There was restoration of the African traditional political institutions and Africans were free to form political associations.

It is the view of this paper that the presence of Africans in the French football national team was an extension of the policy of assimilation cum association since Africans were not hugely discriminated against as they were accepted as French nationals, inasmuch as they were born in France or their parents were French nationals. These players were seen to be ‘black Frenchmen’ or ‘Berber Frenchmen’ since they had acquired French education. Due to the poor treatment from their home country which was not as developed as France, they preferred to ply their trade in Europe and France. It was the effect of the colonial policy that made a good number of Africans to find their way to France.

African Players in Les Bleus in 2018 World Cup

Out of the 22 French players that played in 1998 World Cup, only 3 were core Africans making it 13.64% of the French team. In the group stage matches against South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Denmark, Marcel Desailly played all the matches without being substituted. Zinedine Zidane did not play only the last match while Patrick Vieira played only the last match without being substituted after being on the bench for the past two matches.³⁰ This implies that in each of the matches there were 2 African players out of the 11 players on the pitch of play making it 18.18% African presence .

In the round of 16 up to the final, Desailly played all the 4 matches and was given a red card in the final against Brazil in the 68th minute while Zidane played the last 3 matches against Italy, Croatia and Brazil without being substituted. Patrick Vieira was on the bench in the match against Paraguay, Italy and Croatia and came in as a substitute for Youri Djorkaeff 15 minutes to the end of the final against Brazil. There was 1 African in the matches against Paraguay and 2 Africans against Italy and Croatia. In the final against Brazil the number of Africans increased to 3 following the inclusion of Vieira.

But twenty years later precisely in 2018 World Cup held in Russia from 14th June to 15th July, the number increased to 15 out of the 23 players in the French team making 65.22% implying that 34.78% were non-Africans. 3 out of the 15 Africans were from countries not colonised by France implying 20% while 80% of the players were from former French colonies. The 3 players were Matuidi, Matanda and Kipembe. Each team came with 23 players. In the 2018 World Cup group stage, France played against Australia, Denmark and Peru. In the first match against Australia, out of the starting 11 there were 6 Africans who included Pogba, Umtiti, Dembele, Tolisso, Kante and Mbappe. Dembele and Tolisso were replaced close to the end of the match. Fekir and Matuidi also came in as substitutes. In total 14 players played the match.³¹ There were six Africans in the starting 11 making it 54.55% implying that non-Africans made up 45.45%. At the end of the day a total of 8 Africans out of 14 ended up playing producing 57.14% and 42.86% non- Africans. Against Peru on 21st June, there were Umtiti, Pogba, Kante, Mbappe and Matuidi. Dembele and N'zonzi replaced Mbappe and Pogba respectively. Fekir also came in late in the match. Five Africans were in the starting 11 translating to 45.45% and 54.55% for non- Africans. A total of 14 players played with 8 Africans translating to 57.14% and 42.86% for non- Africans. In the match against Denmark on 26th June Sidibe, Kimpembe, Kante, N'zonzi, Mandanda and Dembele played. Dembele was later

substituted by Mbappe. Fekir and Mendy also came in as substitutes. Also, 14 players in all played for France.³² 6 African players were in starting 11 producing 54.55% and 45.45% for non-Africans. A total of 14 players ended up playing with 9 Africans making it 64.29% and 35.71% for non-Africans. The average percentage of Africans in the starting eleven in the group stage was 51.52% and 48.48% for non-Africans. The average percentage of Africans that played both in the starting eleven and who came in from the bench was 59.52% and 40.48% for non-Africans.

In the knock out stage in the round of 16 against Argentina there were Umtiti, Kante, Pogba, Mbappe and Matuidi. Tolisso replaced Matuidi while Fekir as usual joined in the closing minutes of the match and Mbappe was replaced in the 89th minute. In the starting 11, there were 5 Africans making it 45.45% and 54.55% for non-Africans. 7 African players out of 14 ended up playing translating to 50% and 50% non-Africans. In the quarter finals against Uruguay Umtiti, Pogba, Kante, Mbappe and Tolisso. N'zonzi and Dembele replaced Tolisso and Mbappe respectively as Fekir joined very late in the second half. In the starting 11, there were 5 Africans making it 45.45% and 54.55% for non-Africans. 8 African players out of 14 ended up playing translating to 57.14% and 42.86% non-Africans. Against Belgium in the semifinals, Umtiti, Pogba, kante, Mbappe and Matuidi played. N'zonzi came in at the tail end of the match and Tolisso came in as replacement for Matuidi. In the starting 11, there were 5 Africans making it 45.45% and 54.55% for non-Africans. 7 African players out 13 ended up playing translating to 53.85% and 46.15% non-Africans. In the final against Croatia there were Umtiti, Pogba, Kante, Mbappe and Matuidi. N'zonzi and Tolisso replaced kante and Matuidi. Fekir came in the match late. In the starting 11, there were five Africans making it 45.45% and 54.55% for non-Africans. 8 African players out of 14 ended up playing translating to 57.14% and 43.86% non-Africans. The average percentage of Africans in the starting 11 in the knock out stage was 45.45% and 54.55% for non-Africans. The average

percentage of Africans that played both in the starting 11 and who came in from the bench was 54.53% and 45.47% for non-Africans.

Reasons for the Presence of Africans in Les Bleus

Colonialism: This point is captured in the introduction of this study. Majority of Africans that played for France in 2018 had their home countries colonised by France. Out of the 15 Africans in 2018 World Cup fiesta in Les Bleus, only three were from countries not colonised by France. During colonialism, the French saw the colonies as extension of France in the execution of the policy of assimilation and association. Blaise Diagne, Houghet-Boigny and Leopold Senghor served in the French Chamber of Deputies as parliamentarians. The colonial link between France and her ex-colonies is a centripetal force attracting citizens of its erstwhile colonies to France. Citizens of African countries colonised by France that had moved in their youth to France with footballing skills were welcomed with open arms to play for Les Bleus. Some of the African players were born in France automatically making them French citizens.

Corruption in Africa: Some of these African players would have loved to play for their home country, but the corruption going on in some football federations' act as a centrifugal force. Kyllian Mbappe's father revealed that his son wanted to play for indomitable Lions of Cameroon but he was asked to pay some money as bribe for that to be made possible. Since he could not pay, the son had to shift his allegiance to France.³³ Up till today, this present researcher is not aware of any rebuttal from the Cameroonian authorities on this allegation. There could be others that had suffered the same fate like Mbappe. Another form of corruption could be seen in the delay in the disbursement of match bonuses by some football federations to players which is prevalent with African teams. The money might have been kept in fixed deposit for some months in the account of an official of the football

federation to yield humongous interest. Such ugly development is unheard of with Les Bleus.

Policy of French Football Federation despite racial discrimination: Discrimination is a common phenomenon in Europe. There are cases where bananas are thrown into the field of play when a match is going on. Racist statements and gestures are directed at African players. A French player by name Karim Benzema said if he scored a goal he is French and if he didn't he is Arab.³⁴ Former leader of National Front Party, Jean Marie Le Pen accused Zidane of his inability to recite *La Marseillaise* (French national anthem). Mbappe had equally suffered racial abuse.³⁵ All these racial sentiments have never dissuaded the FFF to go for the best legs. Skillful young African players are given free entry into the cadet French national teams such as the Under-17 nicknamed *Les Bleuets* (The Little Blues). Some graduated through the Under-20 to the senior national team. The policy of going for the best legs may suffer a set back only if the National Front Party takes charge of the government and with a majority in the parliament.

Effects of the Presence of African Players on France and Africa

Lifting the 2018 World Cup trophy: In 2018, the number of African players increased from 3 in 1998 when Les Bleus won the World Cup for the first time to 15 in the team. Umtiti, Pogba, Kante and Mbappe were some notable names in the French team. Umtiti was a centre back, had 31 caps and scored 4 goals for France in his career. Pogba was a midfielder, had 91 caps for France and scored 11 goals while in Italian League he was known as Paul the Octopus and Pogboom. Kante, a defensive midfielder, played 57 matches, scored 2 goals for France as at August 2023. Mbappe is a forward, a good finisher, played 80 times for France, scored 47 goals as at August 2023 and scored 4 goals in the France 2018 World Cup.³⁶ The quality performance of these players contributed significantly to the triumph of France and show that Africans are not inferior as pointed out in the past by some European racists. This school of

thought might argue that if these players were in their original homeland, their skills would not have been harnessed. It would go further to aver that no African coach has won the Senior World Cup and again it would ask the question- Why do African countries go for European coaches to manage their teams?

Discordant tune in and outside France: The achievement of the African players has resulted in hate speech by some French natives as contained in the last point under reasons for the presence of Africans in Les Bleus which is policy of French Football Federation despite racial discrimination. There were other French natives who saw the victory of France in 2018 as a victory for the whole nation, not minding if there was inclusion of non-native French nationals. A lawmaker in the French parliament who was embroiled in an argument asked his African colleague to go back to Africa.³⁷ The present far right party in France is opposed to the migration policy of the government. The 2018 World Cup won by France is viewed as a trophy won by multiple countries because of the presence of players from different countries in Les Bleus. Some see Les Bleus as an African team because of preponderance of Africans in the team, especially in the 2018 World Cup held in Russia.

Depletion of Africa's best: It is being argued in some quarters that if not for these players playing for France, Africa would have lifted the World Cup. Jose Mourinho opined that Africans should be allowed to represent only their homeland as this will enable an African country to lift the World Cup. No African country has lifted the Senior World Cup since its commencement in 1930. The 8 winners of this coveted trophy have always been countries from Europe and South America, the two footballing super continents in the world. Africa has only succeeded in lifting age group competitions like Under 17 and Under 21 World Cup including the Olympic Games gold in football. A school of thought believes that why Africa was able to lift these trophies was because players did falsify their ages which may not be far from the truth. Africans that



had come close to winning the Senior World Cup were Cameroon, Senegal and Ghana that reached the quarter finals in the 1990, 2002 and 2010 World Cup held in Italy and Korea/Japan and South Africa respectively. The 2022 World Cup held in Qatar saw Morocco reached the semi-finals where she lost to France.³⁸

Reduction of the number of French natives playing for Les Bleus: It is true that not only Africans were part of Les Bleus in 2018 as there were players from other countries other than France and the African continent. In 1998 there were just three Africans out of 22 players while in 2018 there were 15 African players out of the 23 players. The 15 spaces occupied by Africans especially in the 2018 World Cup indicates that over half of French team was African. These were positions that would have been filled in by French natives as posited by some French nationals. These French natives see themselves as being marginalised by foreigners orchestrated by the French football authorities. If this scenario would have been in Africa, Africans would have equally complained of marginalisation just as African political landscape is dotted with cries of marginalisation by one ethnic group against the other.

Conclusion

This study has been able to link the policy of assimilation and association executed by France during the colonial era to the multitude of African players, especially players from erstwhile French colonies in Les Bleus. The Africans were earlier assimilated and later became ‘associates’ of the French people. Being assimilated connotes that the Africans were of far lower status than the French while being associates implies the African was of a little lower status than the French natives. This does not thegainsay the fact that the colonial policy made some Africans to become French citizens. Under assimilation, only Africans living in the four communes with certain qualifications were regarded as French citizens and under association the dichotomy between Africans was

erased. African players did not just start finding themselves in France in 1998 as this study shows that players of African descent played for France when African countries were under colonialism. Some of such players were Raoul Diagne from Senegal, Larbi Banbarek and Louis Fontaine from Morocco. Jean Amadou Tigana, a Malian was a household name in Les Bleus in the 1980s. In 1998 there were three Africans in the French World Cup squad out of 22 players and twenty years later the number increased to 15 players out of 23.

Apart from colonialism being one of the reasons for the preponderance of African players in the French team, others are corruption in Africa and policy of French Football Federation despite racial discrimination. The effects of African players are lifting 2018 World Cup trophies, depletion of Africa's best, discordant tunes in and outside France and reduction of French natives playing for Les Bleus. Findings revealed that as a result of French colonial policy of assimilation and association, a lot of Africans became French nationals. It was also observed that there was racial discrimination in France but seemed not to be so intense and French Football authorities didn't buy into the discrimination narrative and went for the best set of legs. Laurent Blanc, the gaffer of Les Bleus in 2011 suggested a 30% quota for African players, buttressing his point with the Spanish national team that didn't have any misunderstanding due to the lack of black players.³⁹ This study recommends that African players should be given a specific quota which could be between 20% and 30% in Les Bleus. This will give the French natives more opportunities to play. If this is not done in future there might be physical xenophobic attack on Africans .



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